



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

April 1, 2024

SB 134

Office of the Correctional Ombudsman - Establishment and Funding

House Judiciary Committee

House Health & Government Operations Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 134. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 134 would establish the office of correctional ombudsman within the Maryland Office of Attorney General. This would allow Maryland correctional inmates and their families a vehicle for complaints to ensure proper treatment within the correction systems, complete with remedial enforcement procedures. Correctional ombudsman would each serve a five-year term.

The Conference supports this bill as a means for ensuring the rights and dignity of incarcerated persons are both advocated for and respected. Prisoners should be ensured basic rights such as access to healthcare, sanitation, healthy food sources, protection from violence, mail delivery, access to educational materials, and proper access to legal representation. The Ombudsman will ensure these rights are afforded.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated, "Punishment alone cannot address complex social problems in communities, or effectively help end cycles of crime and violence. A restorative justice approach is more comprehensive and addresses the needs of victims, the community and those responsible for causing harm through healing, prevention, education, rehabilitation and community support." (*Restorative Justice: Healing and Transformation of Persons, Families and Communities*, USCCB, 2015) Catholic doctrine provides that the criminal justice system should serve three principal purposes: (1) the preservation and protection of the common good of society, (2) the restoration of public order, and (3) the restoration or conversion of the offender. Inseparable from the third of these is ensuring that the prison environment is one that fosters such restoration. The Maryland Catholic Conference thus urges this committee to return a favorable report on Senate Bill 134.