

March 1, 2024
Testimony of Caitlin M. Fitzpatrick
Volunteer, Courtwatch PG
5613 31st Ave
Hyattsville, MD 20782

For Senate Bill 36 and House Bill 565

My name is Caitlin Fitzpatrick and I am writing to express my wholehearted support for Senate Bill 36 and House Bill 565, both of which aim to establish the Maryland Deaths in Custody Oversight Board.

As a volunteer with Courtwatch PG and having observed bond hearings in Prince George's County, I have seen firsthand the urgent need for improved conditions and oversight in our state's correctional facilities.

Every incarcerated individual deserves to be treated with dignity, respect, and humanity. Yet, far too often, our correctional facilities fail to uphold these fundamental principles. Inadequate food, poor living conditions, lack of access to medical care, and neglect of mental health services are just a few of the glaring issues that plague our jails and prisons.

The heartbreaking reality is that lives are being lost due to these systemic failures. From 2008 to 2019, at least 13 individuals died in the Prince George's County jail, the majority of whom were pretrial detainees. These deaths, occurring even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore the urgent need for reform.

Senate Bill 36 and House Bill 565 offer a beacon of hope in the fight for justice and accountability. By establishing the Maryland Deaths in Custody Oversight Board, these bills seek to shine a light on the dark corners of our correctional system and hold those responsible for negligence and misconduct accountable.

The proposed board will conduct thorough administrative and clinical mortality reviews for every death of an incarcerated individual in the state. It will assess the quality of correctional staff, emergency response protocols, medical care, and mental health services, among other critical factors. Furthermore, the board will provide independent reviews for deaths determined to be suicides or occurring in conjunction with mental health crises.

Passing this legislation is not just a matter of bureaucratic procedure; it is a moral imperative. We cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering and injustice endured by those behind bars. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that every individual in custody is treated with the humanity and compassion they deserve.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 36 and House Bill 565 and to stand on the side of justice and accountability. Together, let us work towards a future where every life is valued and every voice is heard.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Respectfully submitted,
Caitlin Fitzpatrick