

Two years ago, I stood before the Senate to provide testimony on this commonsense bill. It took a lot for me to stand before elected officials and share my journey of incarceration, and the traumatic events that I experienced that are so personal to me. I was fearful that even after I share such horrific experiences, nothing would be done about it by those in the power to do something. That fear came true, evidenced by me testifying before you today on why the correctional ombudsman bill urgently needs to be passed.

The current process for an inmate to file a grievance is not working. An inmate who files a grievance goes through the process of an investigation, led by the correctional staff. Inmates aren't believed and are retaliated against usually by the Correctional Officer that they reported. The oppressed cannot address their grievances to their oppressor, nor should they be required to do so.

Family members should also not be required to assist them in filing grievances. Correctional officers have total control over when we can make phone calls to our loved ones. There is not always an opportunity to do this. Our families are working and taking care of the responsibilities in the home. Advocating for an inmate's grievance is a full-time job. Would you have time on top of all your responsibilities to advocate for your loved one if they had grievances while they were incarcerated? I have found that in Maryland incarceration can happen to anyone, even if they didn't commit a crime. It's possible that at some point you may be personally faced with such a situation.

When I shared my horrors of incarceration with my mom she stated, "At least you weren't raped." My mom is a retired Montgomery County Firefighter and has never been incarcerated. One grievance that I continue to hear from formerly incarcerated women is that women are being raped at MCIW by correctional staff. Who are they supposed to report that to? Women who are raped in the community have a hard time coming forward, how is a female inmate able to feel safe to report such a horrific experience to the correctional staff that is responsible for such horror?

This bill will alleviate correctional staff from having to be bombarded with inmate grievances and allow them to put their time and effort into successfully running the correctional institution.

Please support and pass the correctional ombudsman bill so that incarcerated people, citizens of Maryland, can properly hold correctional staff accountable and end the inhumane treatment they experience while in the custody of the state of Maryland.