



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 297: Office of the Attorney General - Correctional Ombudsman

TO: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee
FROM: Karen “Candy” Clark,
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland Criminal Justice Lead
DATE: March 7, 2024

The state-wide Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland strongly asks your support for HB 297 establishing a Correctional Ombudsman. Maryland’s Police Accountability Reforms recognized that **outside oversight** contributes to restoring trust and justice for the victims of **inappropriate use of power**. This bill will do likewise.

Stories of violence, neglect, demeaning treatment by correctional officers and others, seep out from behind the walls. An Ombudsman program benefits the prison environment and safety while bringing victims justice and holds those with power accountable. Under the previous administration, Ron Green was nominated as Secretary of Corrections. Within a short time he was faced with an on-going scandal involving a dozen employees and others. This was only one of five major scandals that occurred over the past twelve years!

MARYLAND CAN—AND MUST—DO BETTER THAN THIS!

By establishing **impartial independent oversight**, the knowledge about the conditions and situation behind the walls will be more reliable. The Ombudsman has the right for unannounced visits, including the right to talk with **anyone**. Our correctional institutions should be a positive environment in which offenders are offered an opportunity to learn and transform through rehabilitation to become healthy productive citizens who will *not need to resort to crime to survive* upon their release.

Currently our Juvenile System does have an Ombudsman Program. This helps to keep the system working as it is intended and reveals **situations** that need to be addressed. The same consideration needs to be extended to our adults.

We need a Correctional System that we can be proud of, that honors the inherent dignity and worth of our returning citizens while we help them to prepare for a successful reentry .

UULM–MD asks for a favorable vote on HB 297.

Respectfully submitted,
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