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Maryland Deaths in Custody Oversight Board

I Jayden Lassiter write in support of Senate Bill 36 and House Bill 565. The number of in-custody deaths in Maryland. Looking at the statistics that were released by the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services was truly upsetting to me. From January 2009 to March 2023 there were approximately 885 people died while in state custody. After looking at an article from “Biocritical Studies Lab” published by Dr. Terence Keel his studies show:

- Most people over 80% were detained pretrial at the time of their deaths meaning they were not convicted of any crime.
- Almost half of the decedents (47.78%) died within 10 days of being in the detention center, and 16.67% died within one day.
- Most jails that have high numbers of in-custody deaths were black prisoners, now what this means is that when detained, black and low-income residents are more at risk of in-custody deaths.

In-custody deaths are a major crisis in Maryland which is raising questions about what we can do to provide safety to those awaiting trial. Along with the possibility of most of these deaths being caused by improper use of force and negligence within the legal system. These stats show the complicity in systematic injustice and disdain for human life. As outsiders, although we don't have much information when it comes to these deaths, we must stand up for the families of those who were lost and one of the first things we could do to start that is by passing this bill so

that families don't feel alone in these hard times. It is obvious that these stats show the major problem that is going on in these prisons and it saddens my heart to look at the number of deaths that have occurred inside prisons in Maryland.

These two bills allow the public access to information on in-custody deaths, addressing the root causes while protecting the well-being and dignity of those in custody. The legislation creates an impartial Oversight Board to investigate in-custody deaths in Maryland, provide recommendations for prevention, and oversee implementation. Maryland may set a national precedent by implementing legislation that prioritizes transparency and accountability, while also lowering in-custody deaths through better adherence to established procedures and standards. Maryland's in-custody fatality catastrophe requires prompt political involvement. State and local officials have a moral responsibility to safeguard the lives of those in custody. For many Maryland citizens, this is a life-or-death situation. For these reasons, we strongly encourage you to support Senate Bill 36 and House Bill 565. We appreciate your time.