



## Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee

March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### HB297 Office of the Attorney General—Correctional Ombudsman

#### FAVORABLE

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The ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB297, which would create a Correctional Ombudsman within the Office of the Attorney General. Maryland's correctional facilities are in need of an Ombudsman to increase accountability and transparency, remove access barriers in the grievance process, improve prisoner healthcare, and the overall upkeep and cleanliness of facilities.

This bill would increase accountability and transparency by allowing the Ombudsman to conduct unannounced inspections of facilities that have already been sent a letter of reprimand by the Corrections Commission. Unannounced inspections are vital to the effectiveness of the oversight of Corrections facilities. The audits currently conducted on Corrections facilities, including internal audits, have proved ineffective, as many of the same institutional issues such as lack of access to mental and physical healthcare, and grievance reporting issues persist.

#### **Complaint process**

Having an Ombudsman to submit complaints to is critical to the oversight of Corrections because it would give the incarcerated community an external entity to complain to. Often, inmates are not able to see their complaints addressed during the grievance process because those complaints do not even make their way up through the process. Relying on corrections officers and prison administration to adequately vet and address grievances made by inmates is one of the many reasons that the current process is ineffective. Black incarcerated people face the brunt of this problem as Black Marylanders make up 70% of Maryland's prison population. HB297 would make sure that the complaints of Maryland's incarcerated population, specifically its Black inmates, have a real opportunity for their concerns to be voiced to an external entity.

For these reasons we urge a favorable report on HB297.



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