



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

**Senate Bill 134, Office of the Attorney General - Correctional Ombudsman Unit
House Judiciary and Government Operations Committees, April 1, 2024
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)**, passage of SB 134, as amended. WDC submitted testimony in support of this legislation when the Committees considered it in the House as HB 297, and now asks for your support for the legislation as it has passed the Senate.

As we stated in our earlier testimony, the health and safety of our communities are intrinsically linked to our system of incarceration and how we treat people who are or were behind the walls of our prisons, jails and detention centers. The impetus for this bill is a history of unacceptable conditions. It recognizes that independent oversight could help pave the way for the transformative change that is in all of our interests. A functioning, noncorrosive and ideally rehabilitative system is important to the WDC membership.

Based on what we know about the culture and conditions in Maryland prisons and jails, we believe that having an *independent* ombudsman tasked with conducting investigations of prisoner complaints, making unannounced inspections of facilities, assessing services, programs and policies, making its findings public in annual reports, negotiating resolutions, and taking further action as needed would be instrumental in getting DPSCS on track to address the long-standing systemic problems in its custodial facilities. Including Juvenile Services in this independent office continues the oversight of the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit and allows for JJMU's tradition of juvenile detention oversight to inform and be enhanced by the new unit.

We urge your support for a favorable and timely Committee vote on SB 134 as amended, and we urge you to vote for its passage without further amendment on the Floor.

Tazeen Ahmad
WDC President

Carol Cichowski *and*
Margaret Martin Barry
WDC Advocacy Committee