

Dear council members and distinguished delegates:

Good afternoon,

My name is Ella Feng and I am a law and policy research intern at Helping Ourselves to Transform under Dr Carmen Johnson, after my graduation from Georgetown Law. Today, on behalf of my organization, I stand before you to strongly endorse SB 0036 and HB 565, legislation aimed at addressing the harrowing human rights crisis of deaths occurring in custody.

As someone deeply committed to criminal law and criminal justice, I was profoundly disturbed upon reviewing the *In Custody Deaths Report for 10 Counties in Maryland Jail/Prison*. This report revealed a disturbing trend: in-custody violence and death disproportionately affect people of color and those residing in low-income neighborhoods. Moreover, the existing data on such deaths is incomplete and inaccurate, raising significant questions about accountability and transparency in measuring the number and causes of deaths in custody. It is undoubted that improved reporting protocols are urgently needed.

On the other hand, access to vital information regarding these deaths is paramount for research institutions to conduct thorough investigations into their root causes and provide informed guidance for future policymaking.

However, the lack of reliable documentation and transparent reporting mechanisms silences the voices of those impacted by in-custody deaths within our legal system, further endangering the lives and safety of many Maryland residents.

Recognizing the transformative power of accurate and transparent reporting in shaping policy, fostering accountability, and advocating for systemic change, I am committed to advocating for immediate action on the recommendations addressed in this bill.

In conclusion, it is imperative for the council to take decisive action to address the longstanding crisis of deaths occurring in custody in Maryland. This issue requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort to reform our criminal justice system and safeguard the well-being of all individuals within the detention facilities.

Thank you for your attention. I earnestly implore your support for HB 565 and SB 0036.

Sincerely,
Ella Feng