



March 28, 2024

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee,

**Quaker Voice of Maryland is submitting this testimony in FAVOR of SB134 – *Correctional Ombudsman Unit*.**

Quakers believe that all people can change and have historically been active in prison reform work to ensure that our incarcerated populations are provided with the resources they need to reach new potential and return to our communities as successful members. This bill stands out to our members as important legislation because it would support our state correctional institutions in becoming safer and healthier for member of our community who are being held in those institutions.

By creating the Office of Correctional Ombuds, an independent mechanism of oversight outside of the Maryland correctional system, we would be promoting positive change in corrections. This new Office would be responsible for, among other things, investigating complaints related to incarcerated persons' health, safety, welfare, and rights; something that currently is investigated internally by the Department of Corrections which causes conflicts of interest for investigation follow-through. This bill is supported by the Attorney General, who testified in support of the bill with a "friendly" amendment to make it an independent state agency. Additionally, amendments included in the Senate's unanimously-passed SB134 include housing the new office together with the existing Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit so the new unit can benefit from the experience of this existing state oversight entity.

Quaker Voice of Maryland chose this bill as one of its legislative priorities in 2021, 2022, 2023 and have chosen it again in 2024 because of the positive effect this bill will have on criminal justice reform in our State. We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this essential legislation.

Sincerely,

Molly Finch

*Working Group Member, on behalf of Quaker Voice of Maryland*

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