



PREPARE
PREpare for PArole and REentry

March 4, 2024

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 0565
MD Deaths in Custody Oversight Board

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

As an individual who has served long-term incarceration and engages in criminal justice reform, I believe an 'Oversight Board' is needed to monitor deaths in Maryland's prisons, jails, and detention centers. The number of deaths of incarcerated people recorded in DOC Annual Reports over the last twenty years is alarming. However, it is even a greater concern that disclosure of the causes of these deaths are withheld from loved ones.

Unlike our neighbors -Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Washington D.C.-, statutory and regulatory provisions do not mandate investigation by MD's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for in custody deaths. Law enforcement personnel have the sole authority to determine which incidents of death are presented to the Medical Examiner.

When considering that, in some cases, investigations into these deaths are not conducted by facilities, the concern grows. How can an explanation not be provided when anyone dies in custody by suicide, murder, or drug overdose? Why wouldn't a loved one suspect foul play by the authorities?

The lives of men, women, and children detained in MD facilities matter. The reality that they may be detained awaiting trial or serving a sentence for a convicted crime does not decrease the value of human life. Mandatory investigation, transparency, reporting and accountability are necessary. Therefore, I urge this honorable committee to vote favorably for HB 0565.

Truly yours,

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