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Written Testimony: HB0531

Dear Members of the House of Delegates Judiciary Committee,

My name is Hannah Milem, and I am a resident of Prince George's County, Maryland. I am a current law student at Georgetown University, and a regular volunteer with Courtwatch PG, a community-based program that observes bond hearings in Prince George's County. As a Maryland resident, a law student, and a Courtwatch volunteer, I write in strong support of House Bill 0531.

I believe that deaths in custody are a serious issue facing our communities, and that preventing these deaths is an urgent matter that lawmakers must address. In particular, I write in support of HB0531 because I believe additional oversight is necessary to accurately assess and prevent the myriad ways that incarceration can lead to injury or death. Even in the absence of physical assault or intentional homicide, a jail facility can inflict immense harm through unhealthy conditions and neglect. Because deaths resulting from negligence or neglect may be less conspicuous, these incidents—which have severe permanent effects on people's lives, families, and communities—are more likely to go uninvestigated and unreported. HB0531 would help to counter this reality.

As a student attorney in Georgetown's Civil Rights Clinic, I have researched numerous cases in which medical neglect in jails has led to an individual's permanent injury or death. I learned that jails routinely minimize and ignore medical complaints, which can lead to serious illnesses going untreated and fatal consequences for incarcerated people. Medical care in the jail is often inadequate, and detained individuals must make numerous requests to receive even the most basic services. It is no wonder that the average age for "natural" deaths in custody is [28 years younger](#) than the average life expectancy of Maryland's non-jailed population.

Similarly, as a volunteer for Courtwatch PG, I have encountered many dozens of instances where a community member's medical needs were overlooked or untreated in jail. Community members detained for nonviolent offenses have been forced to miss multiple doctor's appointments while in custody, have been forced to go without prescription medications, and have been sent to jail with serious injuries and no measures in place to receive treatment. Meanwhile, unhealthy conditions in the jail, including poor food, poor hygiene, violence, and stress, frequently exacerbate existing medical conditions. Lawmakers can undoubtedly point to various measures in Maryland's criminal legal system that are *supposed* to prevent such outcomes. The reality, however, is that this kind of neglect occurs daily across the state and causes unspeakable harm to Maryland residents.

It is essential for lawmakers to shine a light on the harmful conditions faced by those who have lost their health and their lives while in custody in Maryland jails. HB0531 would be an important source of light.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Hannah Milem

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