

March 7, 2024 @ 1:00pm (House Hearing)

Maryland General Assembly
House Judiciary Committee
Room 101
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 0297 – Office of the Attorney General – Correctional Ombudsman Unit
SUPPORT

Please accept my written testimony in support of House Bill 0297 (SB 0134). I am testifying on behalf of Family Support Network (FSN) and from my personal experience.

FSN is a network of individuals with incarcerated loved ones, returning citizens and advocates that support one another and serve as a voice for those behind the wall. I have the lived experience and remain near to those that are dealing with the daily challenges of having an incarcerated loved one. Those challenges often include treatment within the facilities, conduct of DPSCS staff, medical services, and visitation.

I have personally encountered a situation that I would have elevated to a governing body outside of DPSCS if it existed. The metal detectors that must be cleared before being granted access for a visit are inconsistent and unreliable. This is specifically true for women who wear bras. The size, style and material in the bra can set off the metal detector. Correctional staff vary in their approach and handling of this issue. A few years ago, I attempted to visit my husband at WCI on Thanksgiving Day. On this day my bra set off the metal detector. Correctional staff told me if I set the metal detector off three times I would not be allowed to enter for the visit. I made a second attempt and the metal detector went off. I went to the bathroom and removed my bra when I returned for my third attempt, I was told I could not enter without a bra. I asked for the supervisor to which he also said I could not enter. My daughter was allowed to enter for the visit and I had to sit in the car for the duration. While some may think being denied for a visit is not a big issue but, for my husband and I it was heartbreaking. I drove two and half hours to Cumberland, Md on a holiday no less only to be told that because of my bra I would not be allowed to enter. The correctional officer was rude and condescending throughout this ordeal. In my many years of visiting multiple correctional facilities I have found the correctional staff are often unpleasant and make you feel unwanted. I truly believe their goal is to treat visitors as bad as they can so you will not want to come back. I visited my husband regularly and I have seen this bra incident happen numerous of times. I have seen women be allowed to remove their bra and be given the opportunity to put it back on in the restroom on the other side of the metal detector. I have seen the hand wand metal detector used on the woman's back to ensure the claps are the cause of the metal detector sounding. I have seen some correctional staff wave a woman through without any additional screening. I know for sure I was not treated fairly and was made to feel as if I had done something improper. Bras setting off the metal detectors is commonplace so my question has always been why hasn't DPSCS instituted alternate screening to resolve this issue. This situation I encountered should have been handled differently and there

should have been someone I could have elevated this issue to that would have evaluated the complaint objectively and independently.

I have many incidents that I could list about the wrongdoings of DPSCS and the improper handling of the incarcerated persons and their loved ones. A Correctional Ombudsman Unit is needed in Maryland. There absolutely should be an entity that exist outside of DPSCS to conduct investigations, reviews, and assessments of administrative acts.

On behalf of myself and FSN I hope that you will unequivocally support this bill and move it forward with a **favorable** vote.

Respectfully,

Martina Hazelton

Martina Hazelton
Co-Founder and Executive Director
Family Support Network (FSN)
3937 1/2 Minnesota Ave, NE
PO Box 64093
Washington, D.C. 20029
Website: thefamilysupportnetwork.org

