



PREPARE
PREpare for PARole and REentry

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My lived experience and my current work as a parole and reentry advocate gives me a unique perspective on the importance of communication in the correctional system. In many ways, the Ombudsman's job is ultimately that of an advocate and communicator. Large systems are prone to miscommunications. Without someone outside that system who has the ability to look at the bigger picture, assess the problem, and coordinate the work of reaching a solution, these miscommunications frequently have significant consequences such as lost time, unused or misplaced resources, and hindered access to critical services. An Ombudsman is the fresh set of independent eyes Maryland needs to look at old, ingrained problems and create a collaborative space to develop solutions that promote efficiency and effectively utilize State resources. The current update, which removes the Ombudsman office from the Office of the Attorney General and creates an independent agency, makes sure the office can remain neutral and apolitical.

As I've worked to address one of the problems that faces our correctional system and our State, I've been pleasantly surprised by the number of dedicated, hardworking people I've met - workers at DPSCS, DLR, MDH, and community resource providers both large and small, to name a few. In spite of all the talent and desire to make things work, often individual employees are unable to get the high-level view necessary to design or the authority needed to deliver a solution. The current administrative remedy process is difficult for incarcerated people to navigate and engages State employees who do not have the scope or time to analyze issues and make changes at a policy level. It is unreasonable to expect a Custody Sergeant, or even a prison administrator, to investigate and challenge the statewide medical or mental health service contractor and devise or implement lasting and effective change. The current Texas two-step transition of Corizon, Maryland's former prison healthcare contractor, to Yes Care is a perfect example of actions beyond the reach or investigative power of an institution.¹ An

¹ The Marshall Project, Corizon Faced Lawsuits From Prisoners, Then It Went Bankrupt, 2023, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2023/09/19/corizon-yescare-private-prison-healthcare-bankruptcy>

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Ombudsman, with the access and authority to investigate problems, get to the root of them, and mediate a solution, could have identified the pattern in Corizon cases long before they reached this level and taken action to prevent harm to incarcerated individuals.

The benefits provided by a neutral party in problem solving are widely recognized. As the State of Maryland moves forward into a new Administration and a new era, it is my hope that we will promote communication, consensus building, and collaboration. There is no better way to start this process than to bring an Ombudsman into the difficult task of reexamining our current correctional system and making the changes necessary to deliver the positive outcomes that Maryland wants and return healthy, rehabilitated, and productive citizens to the community.