



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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Chairman Luke Clippinger
6 Bladen Street, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers strong favorable support for **House Bill 297 – Office of the Attorney General – Correctional Ombudsman Unit**, a bill that establishes the Correctional Ombudsman Unit under the Office of the Attorney General. The Unit will be tasked with conducting investigations, reviews, and administrative tasks/actions taken by the Department of Correctional Services and Public Safety (DCSPS). **This bill is on the 2024 legislative priority agenda of the Black Caucus.**

The United States has the largest concentration of incarcerated individuals in the world, at a rate of more than 2 million people. Black people make up a disproportionate share of incarcerated individuals at 39%, while only representing 14.2% of the general U.S. population.

Maryland is not only a domestic outlier, but an international one for incarceration. Our state holds an imprisonment rate of 531 people per 100,000, an excessive number when compared to NATO member countries such as the United Kingdom (129 per 100,000), Portugal (111 per 100,000) and Canada (104 per 100,000). It is only slightly lower than the U.S. average of 644 people per 100,000.

Maryland's prison system disproportionately targets Black people as well. Black people in this state are 5.3 times more likely to be incarcerated than white people. And in 2021 alone, Black people made up 71% and 59% of prison and jail populations in the state, despite representing only 29% of all residents in Maryland.

House Bill 297 will create the Correctional Ombudsman Unit and will be tasked with taking on investigations, reviews, and administrative tasks as per the guidance of the DCSPS. It will task the Ombudsman with referring matters to criminal or disciplinary proceedings. This bill will also establish the Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board, which will protect DCSPS employees that provide information to the Board. For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland supports **House Bill 297** and asks that you vote favorably on this bill.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland