



POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: Senate Bill 343 - State's Attorneys – Reconstitution of Task Force and Establishment of Case Management System Grant Fund

FROM: Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC)

POSITION: INFORMATIONAL (SUPPORT IN CONCEPT)

DATE: January 30, 2025

The Maryland Equitable Justice Coalition (MEJC) submits this testimony supporting Senate Bill 343 in concept and providing the following information regarding its alignment with our ongoing efforts to address systemic inequities in Maryland's criminal justice system.

About the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative

The Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC) was established by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) and the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) to address racial disparities in mass incarceration in Maryland. This initiative is the first of its kind. It was developed based on listening sessions the Attorney General and Public Defender held with impacted people, advocates, and other community members. Academic partners, including the Judge Alexander Williams Center for Education, Justice & Ethics at the University of Maryland at College Park and the Bowie State University Institute for Restorative Justice, were brought in to ensure the work is evidence-based and data-driven statewide.

The MEJC comprises over 40 representatives from state agencies, community groups, subject matter experts, and people directly impacted by the system. Its initiatives are organized into workgroups focusing on various factors influencing incarceration rates. Each workgroup is led by a staff member from the Office of the Attorney General, a staff member from the Office of the Public Defender, and a community advocate with relevant expertise. Community voices and public input have shaped the recommendations developed by the workgroups of the MEJC. In December 2024, the MEJC approved 18 recommendations for legislative and agency reforms, program development, data collection, and other measures designed to reduce the mass incarceration of Black men and women and other marginalized groups in Maryland prisons and jails. Recommendation No. 4 urges the Maryland General Assembly to require police, prosecutors, and courts to share detailed data at every decision point, including arrests, charges, plea deals, pretrial detention, sentencing, and parole decisions for the purpose of conducting a qualitative and quantitative analysis of each step in the criminal legal process to understand the impact of racial and geographic disparities in Maryland's adult prison population.

The Need for Enhanced Transparency

The criminal justice system in Maryland shows racial and jurisdictional disparities at every level, from arrests and charging decisions to sentencing and parole outcomes. Geographic differences also deepen these inequities, as practices related to arrests, charging, pretrial detention policies, and evidentiary procedures vary significantly among counties. These disparities underscore the urgent need for legislative reforms to foster equity and transparency.

Establishing the State's Attorney Case Management System Grant Fund and reconstituting the Task Force to Study Transparency Standards for State Attorneys are integral steps toward understanding the scope of the disparities that disrupt our goal of an equitable criminal legal system in Maryland.

Alignment with MEJC Recommendations

MEJC's recommendation to investigate the drivers of racial and geographic disparities in Maryland's adult prison population calls for a comprehensive analysis of the criminal legal process—from arrest to parole. This approach seeks to uncover systemic inequities and inform solutions, advancing the objectives of Senate Bill 343.

Identifying Systemic Inequities: Addressing inequities in Maryland's criminal legal system requires a foundation of transparency and detailed data tracking. SB 343's creation of a grant fund for electronic case management systems equips State Attorneys' offices with the resources and tools to collect and analyze data on arrests, charges, and case outcomes. These improvements can lay the groundwork for understanding the structural factors contributing to racial and geographic disparities in the criminal legal system.

Promoting Data-Driven Interventions: Senate Bill 343 also facilitates informed policymaking by emphasizing data-driven solutions. By enabling the systematic analysis of disparities in arrests, charging decisions, and sentencing, the bill supports the development of targeted interventions to uncover and address the disproportionate impact on communities of color. The reconstituted Task Force can ensure these efforts remain collaborative, evidence-based, and oriented toward achieving transparency in prosecutorial practices.

Conclusion

The Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative commends Senate Bill 343 as a critical step toward addressing long-standing inequities in Maryland's criminal justice system. The bill's provisions align with MEJC's recommendations for identifying and mitigating systemic disparities, thereby advancing justice for all Marylanders. We encourage the Committee to consider this legislation as an opportunity to foster transparency and accountability.

Submitted by: Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative

**Anthony Brown, Co-Chair
Maryland Attorney General**

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