



NATASHA DARTIGUE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

KEITH LOTRIDGE
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

MELISSA ROTHSTEIN
CHIEF OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ELIZABETH HILLIARD
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

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

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: January 30, 2025

The Office of Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 343. Maryland’s criminal legal system suffers from 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.

We agree with the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaboration that “[a]ddressing inequities in Maryland’s criminal legal system requires a foundation of transparency and detailed data tracking. “ By passing this legislation, you will establish a grant fund for electronic case management systems that equips State Attorneys’ offices with modern tools to collect and analyze data on arrests, charges, and case outcomes. That data, in turn, can lay the foundation for better understanding of the structural factors contributing to racial and geographic disparities in our criminal legal system.

Senate Bill 343 also facilitates informed policymaking by emphasizing data-driven solutions. This bill enables the systematic analysis of disparities in arrests, charging decisions, and sentencing, the bill supports the development of targeted interventions to address the disproportionate impact on communities of color.

It is our hope that the reconstituted Task Force, with an OPD designee among its members, can ensure these efforts remain collaborative, evidence-based, and oriented toward achieving transparency in prosecutorial practices.

The Office of Public Defender urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 343. Passage would constitute one step toward addressing long-standing inequities in Maryland’s criminal legal system.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.
Authored by: Hannibal Kemerer (hannibal.kemerer1@maryland.gov).