



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1423

Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System – Establishment

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Center for Criminal Justice Reform, University of Baltimore School of Law

DATE: March 4, 2025

The University of Baltimore School of Law’s Center for Criminal Justice Reform (“the Center”) is dedicated to supporting community-driven efforts to improve public safety and address the harm and inequities caused by the criminal legal system. The Center proudly serves on the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (“MEJC”), a historic initiative launched by the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Public Defender, to shape a comprehensive plan for addressing the urgent issue of mass incarceration, particularly as it impacts Black men and other marginalized groups within Maryland's prisons and jails.

Aligned with our Center’s mission and in support of the progress forged by the MEJC, we offer our strong support of House Bill 1423.

The existence of racial disparities throughout Maryland’s criminal justice system is well documented. For example, “[a]lthough Black people constitute only 30% of the State's population, they account for 51% of arrests, 59% of the jail population, 71% of the prison population, 71% of the parole population, and 53% of the probation population.”¹ The current lack of state-wide, detailed data collection and analysis in Maryland frustrates the state’s ability to make evidence-informed, targeted, and equitable decisions at multiple decision points in our criminal justice system.

House Bill 1423 will help develop a critical understanding of the extent and nature of racial disparities in our state’s criminal justice system and will help Maryland identify and implement research-informed policy changes to meaningfully address those disparities. It will also identify critical areas where quality, consistent data collection is lacking and where investments in the research infrastructure are needed to further these goals.

House Bill 1423 will establish a Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice (the “Commission”) to steward this work and ensure that it is action-oriented toward true reform. Comprised of a broad cross-section of perspectives, the

¹ Ann Carson, Prisoners in 2022, Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 2023. [DPSCS - DPP Annual Data Dashboard \(maryland.gov\)](#)

Commission will benefit from the perspectives of directly impacted individuals, legal services practitioners, and other key stakeholders. By passing House Bill 1423, Maryland will join growing list of states who have undertaken similar assessments, such as New Jersey and California, which have led to historic steps forward in addressing deeply entrenched racial disparities in these states.²

The Commission established by House Bill 1423 will study and make recommendations on a number of critical and evolving issues facing our state. The commission will build needed bridges across the research, policy and practice community, as well as across siloed issue areas in the criminal justice space. This includes needed examination of racial disparities related to mandatory minimum sentencing and firearm offenses; the possibility of modifying or abolishing Maryland's felony murder doctrine; and the design and expansion of programs including those designed to reduce prison populations, rehabilitate incarcerated individuals, and reduce prison sentences in a manner consistent with public safety.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 1423.

² California Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory Board. "2024 RIPA Board Report." State of California Department of Justice, 2024. New Jersey Courts. "Criminal Justice Reform: Annual Report to the Governor and the Legislature." 2021.