



TO: Chairman Luke Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee

Feb. 4, 2025

FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) opposes HB 374 which seeks to create longer, “tough-on-crime” sentences by removal of diminution (DIM) credits.

As noted in Maryland’s Justice Reinvestment Act (JRA) study with support of the Pew Institute, summarizing nationally-recognized scientific research, described important reasons that longer prison sentences, by themselves, do not end the cycle of criminal activity:

[D]ata and research demonstrat[e] that longer prison terms do not reduce recidivism.... [Also, r]esearch suggests that a high percentage of criminal justice- involved individuals suffer from substance abuse and mental health disorders requiring treatment and support....[Final JRCC Report of Dec. 2015, at pp. 28 and 13; emphasis added, footnotes omitted.]

In general, credits help a cooperative prisoner earn an earlier release date. Removing these credits would make the time served on Maryland prison sentences increase by a small percentage; it would increase Maryland prison populations and make the average inmate older. It is also significant to recognize:

- First, the existing DIM credit system already treats violent offenders more harshly than others. It drastically reduces the credits toward sentence reduction that violent offenders and drug dealers can earn in the first place. The current system also allows corrections authorities to cancel part or all of a Maryland prisoner’s “good conduct” or other special DIM credits for even a single incident of bad behavior.
- Second, as David Blumberg, long-serving chair of Maryland’s Parole Commission, has recognized, rewarding good behavior “lowers the threat of violence on our prison staff.” Only a few years ago, Maryland’s own examination of criminological principles found that “adding months and years onto prison stays has little or no impact on recidivism.” (See the 2015 final report of the Maryland Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council [JRCC], available online.) More importantly, the JRCC found that “[r]esearch demonstrates that providing incentives like earned time or diminution credits in prison can reduce recidivism and save taxpayer dollars.” Please note: This testimony is submitted for Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR), not for the Maryland Judiciary or any other unit of state government.

Maryland prison sentences cost taxpayers over \$40,000 per inmate per year. More effective drug treatment, mental health treatment, and job programs with intensive community supervision may yield better results in terms of stopping drug addiction and crime, as well as costing only a fraction of prisons’ cost. For all these reasons, MAJR encourages the committee to give an unfavorable report to SB 392.

NOTE: Phil Caroom offers this testimony for MAJR and not for the Md. Judiciary.