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OUT FOR JUSTICE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0305:

Qualifying Nonprofit Organizations - Incarcerated Individual Training and Reentry Grant Fund - Extension

TO: Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Out For Justice, Inc.

DATE: January 30, 2026

Members of the Committee,

Out for Justice, Inc. respectfully submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 305. Out for Justice is a Baltimore based grassroots organization founded and led by formerly incarcerated individuals, working to dismantle employment barriers and end perpetual punishment by advancing policies that support successful reentry.

Our mission is to engage, educate, and empower individuals impacted by the legal system to build collective power for dismantling systemic oppression and harmful policies. We strive to humanize marginalized communities, prevent criminalization, reduce recidivism and promote second chances and successful reintegration through advocacy, education and supportive programming..

Access to stable, skilled employment is central to our mission and one of the most effective tools for successful reentry, economic stability, and long term public safety. Our members consistently identify meaningful employment as the difference between stability and continued system involvement. SB0305 directly supports this goal by extending through fiscal year 2029 the Governor's authority to fund qualifying nonprofit organizations that provide automotive repair training and reentry assistance to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.

This legislation maintains clear accountability standards while ensuring continuity for programs that deliver measurable employment outcomes. At a time when Maryland faces workforce shortages and the ongoing impacts of mass incarceration, SB0305 represents a smart, targeted investment that benefits returning citizens, employers, and communities statewide.

For these reasons, Out for Justice respectfully urges a favorable report.

Out for Justice, Inc.

SB 0305- Maryland Legal Aid- FAVORABLE.pdf

Uploaded by: Meaghan McDermott

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 0305
Qualifying Nonprofit Organizations-Incarcerated Individual Training and Reentry Grant
Fund-Extension
In the Budget and Taxation Committee
Hearing on February 3, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid submits its written testimony on **SB0305** at the request of Senator Shelly Hettleman.

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is the state's largest provider of free civil legal services for low-income Marylanders. We regularly assist individuals transitioning from incarceration who face overwhelming barriers to employment, housing, and economic security. **SB 0305 directly addresses these barriers by funding nonprofit organizations to deliver job training, workforce readiness, and supportive reentry services.**

MLA supported Vehicles for Change (VFC) for many years through our workforce legal services program. VFC's automotive mechanic programming trains pre-release and recently incarcerated individuals, equipping them with critical job skills. VFC integrated legal services into its program to offer holistic support for its trainees. MLA provided advice and representation on expungement, housing, custody, and child support.

SB0305 supports justice-involved individuals by providing critical funding for workforce programs that benefit Maryland's economy.

MLA represents previously incarcerated individuals through our expungement practice. In our experience, stable employment is one of the strongest predictors of successful reentry and reduced recidivism. Returning citizens routinely encounter systemic barriers, including limited access to training, employer bias, credentialing restrictions, and insufficient transitional support. The Incarcerated Individual Training and Reentry Grant Fund helps close these gaps by enabling trusted community-based organizations to deliver targeted, skills-based programming that prepares individuals for sustainable employment. By extending this fund, SB0305 strengthens Maryland's workforce pipeline, benefiting not only returning citizens but also Maryland businesses and local economies.

SB0305 promotes community reintegration.

Continuing this grant fund ensures that formerly incarcerated individuals receive meaningful opportunities to rebuild their lives, support their families, and become

contributing members of their communities. Nonprofit service providers supported through this fund, like VFC, are uniquely positioned to offer culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and community-centered programming.

MLA urges the passage of SB0305 to affirm Maryland's commitment to an effective reentry program.

Granting an extension under SB0305 is sensible because it strengthens communities, promotes workforce development, and supports successful reintegration. **SB 0305 reaffirms Maryland's commitment to a smart, humane, and effective reentry policy.**

For these reasons, Maryland Legal Aid respectfully requests a **favorable report** on Senate Bill 305.

If you would like additional information on this bill or the underlying issues it addresses, please contact Meaghan McDermott, Advocacy Director for Community Lawyering and Development at mmcdermott@mdlabor.org or N. Renae Davis, Chief Attorney for Workers' Rights at ndavis@mdlabor.org.

SB305_FAV_Hettleman.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelly Hettleman

Position: FAV

SHELLY HETTLEMAN
Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Chair, Rules Committee
Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees
Capital Budget
Health and Human Services
Chair, Pensions

Joint Committees
Senate Chair, Audit and Evaluation
Senate Chair, Pensions



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 220
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3131
800-492-7122 Ext. 3131
Shelly.Hettleman@senate.state.md.us

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB 305 – QUALIFYING NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS – INCARCERATED
INDIVIDUAL TRAINING AND REENTRY GRANT FUND – EXTENSION

A 2024 report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce found that “[f]ormerly incarcerated individuals experience extreme rates of unemployment, hovering around **six out of every 10 people** being jobless from the time of release to four years after release.”¹ With approximately 86,000 people being released from Maryland jails or prisons each year,² getting out while remaining out of work has devastating impacts on formerly incarcerated people, including increasing their risk of housing and food insecurity,³ substance use disorder,⁴ and poor physical and mental health outcomes.⁵

These risks, in turn, drive up the likelihood of recidivism and reincarceration.⁶ Put simply, without genuine opportunities to learn, work, grow, and thrive, thousands of Marylanders could remain in a vicious cycle of committing crimes out of desperation and returning to incarceration, only to be released again and face similarly dismal, if not worse, prospects of employment. This cycle not only destroys the lives of the people trapped within it, but also threatens public safety and stunts economic growth. Releasing

¹ Stephanie Ferguson et. al, *Data Deep Dive: The Workforce Impact of Second Chance Hiring*, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (May 25, 2022) (emphasis added), <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/data-deep-dive-the-workforce-impact-of-second-chance-hiring-3>.

² Leah Wang, *Since You Asked: How Many Women and Men Are Released from Each State’s Prisons and Jails Every Year?*, PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE (Feb. 28, 2024), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/releases-ex-state/>. This study is based on data from 2019.

³ Jude Al Abosy et. al, *Determinants and Consequences of Food and Nutrition Insecurity in Justice-Impacted Populations*, CURRENT NUTRITION REPORTS (May 24, 2022), https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9126700/pdf/13668_2022_Article_421.pdf.

⁴ Adam Chamberlain et. al, *Illicit substance use after release from prison among formerly incarcerated primary care patients: a cross-sectional study*, ADDICTION SCIENCE & CLINICAL PRACTICE (2019), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13722-019-0136-6>.

⁵ Kamala Mallik-Kane and Christy Visher, *Health and Prisoner Reentry: How Physical, Mental, and Substance Abuse Conditions Shape the Process of Reintegration*, URBAN INSTITUTE JUSTICE POLICY CENTER (Feb. 2008), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/31491/411617-Health-and-Prisoner-Reentry.PDF>.

⁶ See, e.g., *supra* note 3.

incarcerated people without giving them the resources to reintegrate into their communities is **not** justice. We **must** break this cycle.

One organization striving to that end is Vehicles for Change (VFC), which repairs and awards donated vehicles to low-income families in Maryland. In 2015, VFC launched its Full Circle Auto Training Center: a reentry internship program for formerly incarcerated people that trains them as automotive technicians. Programs like the Full Circle Auto Training Center are a lifeline for formerly incarcerated people hoping to obtain employment and successfully reenter their communities, but these programs need financial support if they are to help break the cycle of criminality and carcerality.

In this regard, Senate Bill 305 is a substantial step forward. The bill carries the momentum of Senate Bill 181 from the 2024 Session, which authorizes the Governor to appropriate \$1 million in the annual budget for fiscal years 2026 through 2028 toward grants for certain nonprofit organizations providing training in automotive repair to incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people. SB 181 passed by a large margin: 46–0 in the Senate and 111–23 in the House of Delegates. Now, SB 305 seeks to extend the period in which the Governor may make this annual appropriation to fiscal year 2029. The bill also updates the statutory language to reflect the new name of the Governor’s office administering the grants: the Office of Crime Prevention & Policy.

Ensuring the success of formerly incarcerated people, alongside the safety of our communities and growth of our economy, necessitates continued investment in the education and training of people who have experienced (and who continue to experience) life behind bars. Without such steps, the cycle of crime, punishment, release, and re-offense will simply continue, while harming the lives and livelihoods of people across Maryland. SB 181 started the engine, and SB 305 will allow for the continued drive toward justice. Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 305.