



ON OUR OWN
OF MARYLAND

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 612: Correctional Education and Workforce Skills Training Programs - State Correctional Ombudsman and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program for Incarcerated Individuals

Thank you Chair Wells, Vice-Chair Kerr, and committee members for your commitment to improving the quality and accessibility of healthcare services for Marylanders, especially community members who experience significant behavioral health challenges. On Our Own of Maryland (OOOMD) is a nonprofit behavioral health education and advocacy organization, operating for 30+ years by and for people with lived experience of mental health and substance use recovery.

OOOMD is in strong support of HB 612, which would establish the Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS) Training Program to provide sustainable funding, allowing for incarcerated individuals to be trained as CPRS' and provide non-clinical recovery support "behind the fence" of correctional facilities. The bill would require the Maryland Department of Labor (DOL) in partnership with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to fund training and staffing for the program.

The CPRS Training Program launched a pilot in 2019, as a partnership between the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), DOL, and DPSCS. Incarcerated individuals completed the state-level CPRS certification program established by the Maryland Addiction and Behavioral-health Professionals Certification Board, which consists of required educational courses, an exam, and supervised practicum hours. Once the training hours and exam are completed, they are then able to provide non-clinical peer support to others in the facility either as volunteers or through paid work positions. Since its inception, the program has expanded to 10 correctional facilities across the state. Notably, through 2024, over 100 individuals who have completed training while incarcerated have since received their CPRS certification, and all of those who have been released have secured employment!

The goal of this program is two-fold: to bring more peer support resources to individuals inside correctional facilities, and to equip peers with a skillset and professional credential that offers an employment pathway as they come back into the community. This program is a source of hope, purpose, and opportunity to rebuild lives both while serving time and when returning to community. **We strongly encourage a favorable report on HB 612. Thank you!**