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February 19, 2026

**TO:** The Honorable Melissa Wells  
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Tiffany Clark  
Director, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

**RE:** House Bill 612 – Correctional Education and Workforce Skills Training Programs - State Correctional Ombudsman and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program for Incarcerated Individuals (Support in Concept)

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The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) conceptually supports House Bill 612 – Correctional Education and Workforce Skills Training Programs - State Correctional Ombudsman and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program for Incarcerated Individuals. HB 612 establishes a framework for certified peer recovery specialist training within Maryland's correctional institutions and adds the State Correctional Ombudsman as a required consultation partner for correctional education programs.

This legislation directly supports our efforts to advance criminal justice reform and strengthen pathways to successful reentry, as identified in OAG's Criminal Justice Reform Strategy, the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC) Report, and the Task Force on Returning Citizens and Expanded Reentry Services.

HB 612 addresses critical gaps in behavioral health services and reentry employment pathways. The MEJC Report found that 69% of people in Maryland jails had a substance use disorder and 39% had a mental illness diagnosis, yet screening tools and treatment capacity remain insufficient. A formalized peer recovery specialist training program expands access to treatment services within corrections while creating credentialed employment pathways, which is one of the most critical predictors of successful reentry.

The bill formalizes an existing successful program with statutory structure and enhanced resources. DPSCS currently operates a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS) program with specialists facilitating over 700 participants at Jessup Correctional Institution. HB 612 provides a legislative framework for this work, creates dedicated staff positions, mandates enhanced wages for incarcerated peer recovery specialists, and provides for ongoing professional development.

Adding the State Correctional Ombudsman as a required consultation partner strengthens accountability. The Ombudsman's independent perspective on conditions within correctional institutions can help identify programmatic gaps and barriers to access that may not surface through the existing DPSCS chain of command.

Peer recovery specialist training provides a concrete pathway to both recovery and post-release employment. With clarifications to address coordination and funding concerns, this bill could significantly strengthen Maryland's reentry infrastructure.

We appreciate the General Assembly's work on this important policy and welcome the opportunity to share our perspective.

Cc: Members of the Committee