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DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Ways and Means Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
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**Good afternoon Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Government, Labor, Elections Committee. I am Delegate Cheryl Pasteur. I am here to ask for your support for HB 108 to establish the Release Preparation Program. This program will provide formerly incarcerated individuals access to State Correctional facilities for the purpose of assisting incarcerated individuals with release preparations. The bill, also, expands the purpose of the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund to support the Release Preparation Program if needed.**

**The Division of Corrections has full control over who gets access to interact with incarcerated individuals, but grassroots re-entry organizations have expressed challenges accessing and providing services to them. The Division has, however, formed and operated volunteer programs that support those behind the walls and formerly incarcerated individuals beyond the walls. This bill goes a step further by setting protocols for allowing formerly incarcerated individuals to enter the facilities and be a part of the preparation for release.**

**This bill was inspired by several members of groups such as Living Experiences and We are Us who desired a bill to set protocols for supporting those behind the walls who are near release and to codify their work and that of the Secretary. The bill's purpose is to engage in authentic conversations between people who have shared experiences about their inter and intrapersonal skills and attitudes when entering the "new normal". Systems offer preparation for physical release but not release to that new normal that is about what gives a person a sense of being emotionally understood and valued. One of the letters of support for this bill noted, "Formerly incarcerated people who have experienced peer support have expressed that**

**lived experiences of incarceration was the most relevant and applicable experience for their goal of not recidivating.”**

**Without legislation that establishes protocols for the Department of Corrections to permit formerly incarcerated individuals to enter Correctional facilities for this purpose, access is not a guarantee. My cross filer, Senator Sydnor, and I have received letters of support and recommended amendments from both the AG’s Office and the Department of Corrections which we appreciate and will address.**

**These lived experiences assistance programs must be codified so that political and personnel shifts do not cancel them as in the past. We must embrace the work of these groups and Corrections if we really want to reduce recidivism, support our youth, and make our communities safer by nurturing a more inclusive society. I encourage the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 108.**