



**PREPARE**  
PREpare for PARole and REentry

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### **SB0061 - Division of Correction - Volunteer Services Program - FAVORABLE**

I am a formerly incarcerated individual who co-founded PREPARE while at MCI-W. PREPARE offers parole education and support, holistic reentry planning and post-release peer support. Over 50% of our staff, and all of our full-time staff, are formerly incarcerated. I created my first parole packet in 2017 to help a neighbor, and when she went home, I kept going. Ultimately this work led me to the collaboration that was incorporated as PREPARE in 2021 with a pilot at MCI-W where I was housed. Since my return to the community in 2022, we have been scaling to the men's institutions, and currently have tablet programming, materials and consultation support for incarcerated individuals in DOC facilities statewide with in-person programming in the Jessup and Eastern Regions.

The reason PREPARE doesn't offer in-person workshops and clinics in the Western Region is not because we lack the capacity, but because the staff that lives close enough to those regions to provide services and has the expertise to conduct the clinics are excluded as volunteers due to our backgrounds. I would personally be willing to drive to Cumberland once a month and conduct workshops at NBCI and WCI, but although I am able to be received inside facilities for one-time events and engagements, I am categorically barred from being received as a volunteer to conduct a monthly program. This barrier is not a thoughtfully imposed limitation. It is the result of remnants of decades old policy from a time in history when the now proven positive impact of lived experience was not well understood. The current Administration has made a monumental effort to open the doors to important peer-led educational, recovery and reentry programming, however these zombie policies lie in wait in various policy manuals and COMAR, rising to hinder progress and delay implementation.

SB0061 legislatively opens a door that parties have been prying from both sides for 3 years with limited success. It gives an important stamp of approval on the ongoing collaborative efforts of DPSCS, formerly incarcerated people and impacted-led organizations. It is recognition of what we can achieve when we move away from an adversarial structure, break silos, and come together as one team to create mutually beneficial outcomes, and it ensures that impacted voices like mine are part of the conversation in years to come. I urge a favorable report.

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