

SB 752/HB 1309: Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System - Establishment: Please vote to **OPPOSE** this bill.

Dear Judicial Proceedings Committee & Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to respectfully **oppose SB 752/HB 1309**, concerning the *Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System – Establishment*.

Ensuring fairness and equal treatment under the law is a fundamental goal within our justice system. However, the creation of an additional state commission raises concerns regarding redundancy, cost, and the effective use of existing resources.

Maryland already maintains numerous agencies, advisory bodies, and oversight mechanisms tasked with reviewing criminal justice policies, outcomes, and practices. Establishing a new commission risks duplicating efforts that are currently underway within existing institutions, while creating additional administrative and fiscal burdens for taxpayers.

Additionally, the bill directs that *“The Commission shall study and make recommendations on:*

(i) the disparate treatment of African Americans, Hispanics, and other non–White individuals in the State’s criminal justice system.”

Framing the scope of the Commission’s work around specific racial or ethnic categories **risks narrowing the analysis in a way that may overlook broader socioeconomic, geographic, or situational factors that can influence justice system outcomes.** A review process focused on predetermined classifications may not provide a comprehensive or objective assessment of system-wide challenges affecting **all** Marylanders in the State Criminal Justice System, including White individuals. Also, by focusing on race, this Commission will disregard the most important aspect, the crime involved.

“...(ii) the need...to improve any racial disparities and lack of transparency in the State’s criminal justice system.” How can any agency, person or group of people *“improve any racial disparities...in the State’s criminal justice system”*? Why is there a **“need”** to focus on race vs. the crime that was committed? Maryland **needs** to be tough on crime!! If **“you do the crime, you do the time”**, regardless of race.

“...(iv) the possibility of using resources of the Division of Parole and Probation in the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to conduct pretrial and

presentence race–neutral risk and needs assessments that could be considered by parties at the time of plea discussions and by judges at the time of sentencing..."

Tasking the Division of Parole and Probation with performing "risk and needs assessments" in addition to all their other official and nonofficial duties that they perform daily is misguided and unreasonable. The Division is overworked as it is, and this will only increase their daily workload.

"... (vi) the possibility of **modifying or abolishing the State's felony murder doctrine** for cases for individuals who are not alleged to be principals in the first degree..." Why would "modifying or abolishing the State's felony murder doctrine" be under the purview of this Commission? This act should be a consideration for the court system and our Maryland General Assembly!! This task **must** go through our legislative process, not through a Commission.

"...(vii) the design and expansion of programs intended to:

1. reduce State prison populations;

2. be rehabilitative; and

3. further reduce the length of prison sentences in a manner that is consistent with public safety..."

Maryland should **not** be reducing State prison populations and reducing the length of prison sentences when crime is already out of control. We need to be strengthening our efforts to crack down on crime. We do **not** need to reduce the length of prison sentences. We **need** to impose sentences that are reflective of the severity of the crime committed. Again, criminals that "do the crime", **must** "do the time"!! If Maryland starts reducing sentences, which, in turn, reduces prison populations as prisoners reach the end of their sentences sooner, this will send a broader message to all Maryland citizens that Maryland does **not** take crime seriously, and this will make Marylanders feel unsafe in our state. That has implications for Maryland residents wanting to open businesses here and will affect tourism as well.

Before creating another permanent body, the State should evaluate whether current data collection, reporting processes, and program evaluations are being fully utilized. Improvements in transparency and outcomes may be better achieved by strengthening existing review frameworks rather than establishing a new commission with overlapping responsibilities.

Additionally, **dedicating funds to administrative structures may divert resources from direct public safety initiatives, community-based programs, victim services,**

and law enforcement training that could have more immediate and measurable impacts.

Addressing disparities in any system requires targeted, evidence-based action.

Expanding bureaucracy that does not deliver the ultimate goal of this Commission, decreasing crime, will not produce the meaningful reforms that all Marylanders seek.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **oppose SB 752/HB 1309.**

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Trudy Tibbals