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## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**BILL:** Senate Bill 944 – Correctional Services – Reentry Readiness Program  
**FROM:** Maryland Office of the Public Defender  
**POSITION:** **FAVORABLE**  
**DATE:** February 25, 2026

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The Maryland Office of the Public Defender (MOPD) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 944, which establishes a Reentry Readiness Program within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS).

Senate Bill 944 establishes a structured interagency program to assist individuals confined in a state correctional facility who are expected to be released within nine (90) days with critical reentry tasks. The bill requires DPSCS to work jointly with the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), the Division of Vital Records within the Maryland Department of Health, and the Department of Labor to staff and administer the program. This collaborative structure is both practical and essential.

Senate Bill 944 requires program staff to assist each returning citizen with:

- Enrolling in vocational, workforce training, and job placement programs;
- Obtaining a certified copy of a birth certificate; and
- Obtaining a photo identification or driver’s license.

The timeline requirements are equally important. The bill mandates action 90 days before release for workforce enrollment, 60 days before release for identification assistance, and verification 30 days before release. These benchmarks create accountability and reduce the likelihood that individuals will leave a facility without the tools needed to secure employment, housing, or benefits.

### **Potential Impact on Successful Reentry**

MOPD represents Marylanders whose successful community reintegration is directly tied to public safety, family stability, and reduced recidivism. The barriers this bill addresses—lack of identification, lack of documentation, and lack of connection to workforce programs—are among the most common obstacles our clients face upon release.

For our clients, a state-issued ID is not merely administrative; it is the gateway to employment, housing applications, medical care, and compliance with supervision conditions. A certified birth certificate is often required for identification and for enrollment in public benefits. Workforce enrollment before release increases the likelihood of immediate employment and reduces the destabilizing “gap period” that too often leads to technical violations or re-arrest. This legislation is not ancillary to justice—it is central to it.

### **Alignment with the Maryland Justice Partnership**

Senate Bill 944 is also fully aligned with the goals of the Maryland Justice Partnership (MJP), a statewide, implementation-focused initiative coordinated by the Office of the Public Defender. The MJP organizes cross-sector reform efforts into six Implementation Hubs, including Community Reintegration and Stability and

Behavioral Health Justice. The MJP is designed to move evidence-informed recommendations into coordinated, operational action by aligning existing agency authority, community expertise, and data-driven accountability mechanisms. Its core principles include:

- Cross-agency collaboration rather than siloed reform;
- Structured implementation with measurable benchmarks; and
- Shared responsibility for outcomes that affect system-involved individuals.

Senate Bill 944 reflects these same principles. It does not create an isolated program within DPSCS. Instead, it explicitly requires joint staffing and administration with the MVA, the Division of Vital Records, and the Department of Labor. That statutory collaboration mirrors the MJP model: aligning agencies with distinct statutory authority to solve practical barriers that no single agency can resolve alone.

The Reentry Readiness Program fits squarely within the Community Reintegration and Stability Hub of the MJP framework. That Hub prioritizes access to identification, employment pathways, and coordinated service delivery at the point of transition from confinement to community. Senate Bill 944 operationalizes those goals through defined timelines, agency coordination, and institutional accountability. This legislation advances the same implementation-oriented, partnership-based reform architecture that the MJP was designed to support.

### **Benefits to Public Safety**

Reducing post-release instability reduces technical violations, lowers the likelihood of new criminal legal system involvement, and therefore decreases the likelihood of long-term correctional costs. Embedding reentry preparation within the final 90 days of confinement shifts from reactive crisis management to proactive community stabilization. Moreover, this approach strengthens interagency communication and data coordination, reducing agency silos and fostering modern system reform.

### **Conclusion**

Senate Bill 944 recognizes a fundamental truth: releasing without preparation poses a systemic risk. This legislation directly and responsibly addresses that risk by ensuring that those released from incarceration secure the necessary identification, documentation, and employment pathways already in place.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 944.

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