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DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Judicial Proceedings Committee

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Administrative, Executive, and
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Children, Youth, and Families

Senate Chair, Legislative Ethics



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony for Senate Bill 61
Division of Correction – Release Preparation Program
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 28, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Smith, members of the committee.

The Division of Corrections (“Division”) currently provides some engagement, with programs such as Lived Experiences. However, the purpose of Senate Bill 61 (“SB 61”) is to create a formal public mechanism for formerly incarcerated individuals and other innovative community programs to get behind the walls without relying on individual Division views.

Senate Bill 61 will establish the Release Preparation Program to provide access to State correctional facilities to formerly incarcerated individuals, assisting them with release preparation. Senate Bill 61 also expands the purpose of the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund to also cover the costs of supporting the Release Preparation Program.

Since the Division of Corrections has full control over who gets access to interact with incarcerated individuals, grassroots re-entry organizations have had challenges accessing and providing services to them. Having formerly incarcerated people work with incarcerated individuals is an effective way to have them engaged in activities that will be productive for that person, their family, and the community, enhancing our public safety.

Pursuant to § 9-619(C), the Division of Corrections must develop a protocol for registering returning citizens to subsequently have access to detention facilities. The list of those registered will be public. The protocol should be presented to the Attorney General's office for approval. The procedure for those who are registered to have access to the facilities should require written communication with the Division regarding a schedule for entry into the facilities. Entry can only be denied if it interferes with normal functioning of the facility.

The Division of Corrections will establish partnerships with community-based organizations led by formerly incarcerated people to provide re-entry services in their facilities. Corrections will use their volunteer management protocols to vet the partnerships. Previously incarcerated individuals have testified to the favorable experience of coming out of prison and working to prevent violence in Baltimore. It is important to codify assistance to incarcerated individuals inside prison facilities, so that self-help programs cannot be cancelled on political whims as they have in the past.

The current ecosystem of support resources is not sufficient. Groups like We Are Us, comprised of formerly incarcerated individuals, have trouble getting into adult facilities to help those about to be released. While they can be admitted to youth facilities, there are more difficulties for adult facilities. Division of Corrections will tell them they can come in, but they are often ultimately denied, curbing their ability to do consistent programming.

I urge the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 61.