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**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

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**The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**SB 285 – Higher Education – Scholarships for Correctional Officers**  
**Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza**

Thank you Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the distinguished Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 285 – Higher Education – Scholarships for Correctional Officers.

The shortage of public safety professionals, including correctional officers, continues to be a challenge across the State of Maryland, and in my district, I have worked with the leadership of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections and Eastern Correctional Institute (ECI) to increase the number of Correctional Officers which increases the safety of the facility and overall community.

Over the years as we have focused on recruitment and retention of COs at ECI and the county detention facilities, we look for opportunities to ensure that Correctional Officers are on par with the opportunities of other public safety professionals, and that is the intention of Senate Bill 285.

The Maryland Police Officers and Probation Agents Scholarship Program provides tuition assistance to Maryland residents enrolled in degree programs that further a career in law enforcement or community supervision, and SB 285 would expand the program to include correctional officers.

The best ideas for legislation come from the front lines of our constituents, and that was the case when Shytina Drummond, Assistant Warden of the Worcester County Jail and member of the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association Legislative Committee, shared with me this recommendation to expand the eligibility of the Maryland Police Officers and Probation Agents Scholarship Program to include Correctional Officers. As she will discuss in her testimony, this legislation would provide a tool for the recruitment and retention of correctional officers, and would boost morale for current correctional officers.

House Bill 670, the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021, established the Maryland Police Officers Scholarship Program, which was then expanded by House Bill 982 of 2023 to include Probation Agents. Senate Bill 1101 of 2024, sponsored by Chair Smith, allowed these scholarships to be used at community colleges in addition to four-year institutions. This Scholarship Program was originally created as a result of research that showed higher education for public safety officers is beneficial to more than just the officer, as public safety officers who

are college graduates are less likely to be the subject of citizen complaints. Higher education enables professionals to develop leadership skills, improve rehabilitation efforts, and contribute to evidence-based practices within the correctional system.

As of August 2025, DPSCS had approximately 848 vacancies across 9,229 positions for a department-wide vacancy rate of 9.2 percent. Correctional officer vacancies remain an ongoing issue for the department. DPSCS has approximately 474 vacancies out of 5,192 correctional officer positions, which is a 9.1 percent vacancy rate. The number of correctional officer positions filled has remained relatively flat over the past year. In August 2024, there were approximately 4,772 correctional officer positions that were filled and a year later, in August 2025, there were 4,718 correctional officer positions that were filled. A growing correctional facility population combined with the stagnated number of correctional officers has led to increased workloads, overtime hours, and attrition.

By extending these important financial incentives to correctional officers, we can strengthen recruitment and retention in a field that is critical to the safety and well-being of Maryland communities, as correctional officers are an integral part of Maryland's public safety network.

Public safety personnel, including correctional officers, serve on the front lines of justice and rehabilitation, often under challenging conditions, and with limited career advancement opportunities without further education. Offering this education incentive can lower barriers to entering and remaining in these careers, ultimately contributing to a more effective and stable public safety workforce.

This bill is supported by the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association, Maryland Higher Education Commission, the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, and Wor-Wic Community College.

I thank you for your kind attention and consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable and very swift report on SB 285.