

Oral Testimony in Support of SB0285, Restrictive Housing – Individuals with Developmental or Intellectual Disabilities Bill

My name is Perpetua Abongnelah. I am a Maryland resident in Montgomery County. I strongly support the Restrictive Housing (RH) Bill for Individuals with Developmental or Intellectual Disabilities (DD, ID) because Many lives will be saved. My son, Funiba Abongnelah, a 27-year-old African American was incarcerated at age 20 and almost lost his life in RH. Funiba has Serious Mental Illnesses (SMI) and a seizure disorder. From December 17, 2024, to November 28, 2025, Funiba experienced severe abuse, neglect, and assault while incarcerated. He witnessed correctional officers (CO) assault his cellmate until he became unconscious. Funiba was also assaulted by same COs and locked up in RH for a total of 10 months out of 11.5 months that he spent in that facility. Although Funiba's cellmate's record indicated that Funiba complied with the COs instructions while his cellmate did not, Funiba's record stated that Funiba violated institutional policies. He was among many things denied food, medication/medicals, showers, bible, adequate out-of-cell time, and fan during summer months.

I filed grievances with DPSCS and other agencies to save his life but with no resolution although investigations were made. Funiba experienced retaliation, leading to a significant decline in his mental and physical health. I later connected with A Mothers' Cry (AMC), who referred me to the Office of the Correctional Ombudsman (OCO). The OCO transferred Funiba to another facility in general population, where he is recovering. Without the OCO's intervention, my son would have died in RH.

Funiba has lived in seven Maryland State Prisons and has witnessed several inmates lost their lives and minds in RH. Some defecate and urinate in containers while ingesting and throwing them at officers. Funiba made mistakes as a teenager but has reflected and takes accountability for his actions. He helps other inmates by sharing commissary, caring for injured cellmates, and praying for others. He strongly desires an improvement in RH policies.

Please remember my son's story as you make these critical decisions about RH. While I understand that it is limited to people with DD, ID, I do hope that those with SMI will be considered soon.

Thank you for listening to my story.

Perpetua Abongnelah,

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