

**SB061 MOPD Written Testimony - Favorable .pdf**

Uploaded by: Allison Stillinghagan

Position: FAV



**NATASHA DARTIGUE**  
PUBLIC DEFENDER

**KEITH LOTRIDGE**  
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

**HANNIBAL KEMERER**  
CHIEF OF STAFF

**ELIZABETH HILLIARD**  
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**BILL: SB061, Division of Correction – Release Preparation Program**

**FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender**

**POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**DATE: January 28, 2026**

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The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on SB061.

Senate Bill 061 seeks to establish a Release Preparation Program (“the Program”) to provide access to formerly incarcerated individuals to State correctional facilities in order to assist currently incarcerated individuals with release preparation. The Program proposed in this Bill will connect soon-to-be returning citizens with others who have personal experience successfully transitioning through release and re-entry. The Program will provide simple yet important assistance for returning citizens to help ensure a smooth transition back into the community.

Many incarcerated individuals—especially those who have served sentences that may span several decades—can struggle upon release without a strong support system. As public defenders, we see the practical challenges that returning citizens must navigate, oftentimes on their own, that can feel insurmountable. Having a support network prior to and upon release is an easy step that helps set up returning citizens for success. Receiving support and assistance from formerly incarcerated people is all the more meaningful, as these individuals can speak to their real experiences upon release and offer advice and insight that other supporters cannot. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB061.

# **SB 61 - Written Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Anthony Wazir Muhammad

Position: FAV

**TO:**

Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair

Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair

Members of the *Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee*:

**FROM:**

Anthony Wazir Muhammad

We Our Us, Community Engagement/Re-Entry Specialist

[anthonywazirmuhammad29@gmail.com](mailto:anthonywazirmuhammad29@gmail.com)

**RE: SENATE BILL 61**

*Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program*

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

January 26, 2026

Greetings,

I respectfully submit this written testimony for the official record to express my **SUPPORT** for *Senate Bill 61*.

I am a returning citizen and justice impacted individual. At the age of 15, I was arrested for two homicide charges in the City of Baltimore. At the age of 17, I was convicted and sentenced to life plus a consecutive 20-years in prison. Ultimately, I served a total of 29-YEARS, 7-MONTHS, & 29-DAYS before I was released under the *Maryland Juvenile Restoration Act (JRA)* on September 20, 2022.

I am one of many JRA releases who have successfully reintegrated back into society, and who collectively share a less than 4% recidivism rate. Both individually and collectively, many of the JRA releases, and other returning citizens as well, are doing phenomenal work in the community, especially in the area of providing re-entry services to fellow returning citizens.

Since the very first day of my release, I have served as a Community Engagement/Re-Entry Specialist with *We Our Us*, where I use my lived experience as a credible messenger doing community violence intervention and directing other returning citizens to key re-entry services and programs.

The Secretary of the Maryland Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services, Ms. Carolyn J. Scruggs, has established a "*Lived Experience Committee*" (LEC), which consist of returning citizens and justice impacted individual who are now productive members of society. The LEC provides limited opportunities for returning citizens to reenter Maryland's Division of Correction (DOC) to speak to inmates and provide re-entry support.

The LEC is operated by the current DPSCS Director of Re-Entry Services, Ms. Ellen Rappaport. Although I am not a direct member of the LEC, on behalf of *We Our Us*, I have collaborated with LEC members, and DPSCS Re-Entry Fairs, to provide reentry services.

The goal of Senate Bill 61 is basically to codify the LEC into Maryland law and provide the necessary funding to allow returning citizens and justice impacted individuals to reenter Maryland's DOC under appropriate circumstances to provide reentry services – without the current offense restrictions and supervision limitations.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 61. Thank you for your time and consideration of this legislation.

# **Testimony - Sydnor SB61.pdf**

Uploaded by: Charles Sydnor III

Position: FAV

CHARLES E. SYDNOR III, ESQ.  
*Legislative District 44*  
Baltimore County

DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Executive Nominations Committee

Legislative Policy Committee

*Joint Committees*

Administrative, Executive, and  
Legislative Review

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.

**MD Catholic Conference\_SB 61\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Garrett O'Day

Position: FAV



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

**January 28, 2026**

**SB 61**

**Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program**

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**Senate Finance Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 61. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 61 would establish a Release Preparation Program within the Division of Correction, allowing formerly incarcerated individuals to re-enter correctional facilities for the purpose of assisting those currently incarcerated with their transition back into society.

The Catholic Church roots much of its social justice teaching in the inherent dignity of every human person and the principals of forgiveness, redemption and restoration. Catholic doctrine provides that the criminal justice system should serve three principal purposes: (1) the preservation and protection of the common good of society, (2) the restoration of public order, and (3) the restoration or conversion of the offender.

The Conference submits that this legislation provides a means to restoration for those that have been imprisoned by supporting their reentry into society, but also gives purpose and greater meaning to the experiences of those who have already reentered by affording them the ability to pass along wisdom and nurture to those about to reenter society.

Senate Bill 61 provides some necessary support to those seeking to reincorporate themselves into society, while allowing them to gain knowledge and experience in reentry from those who can best empathize with what is often a struggle. The Maryland Catholic Conference thus urges this committee to return a favorable report on Senate Bill 61.

**\_Support SB 61 -Reentry Support - UULM-MD- Candy C**

Uploaded by: Karen Clark

Position: FAV



## Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

### Testimony in Support of SB 162- Criminal Procedure - Motion to Reduce Duration of Sentence - Repeal of Sentencing Date Limitation

To: Senator Will Smith, Jr., Chair and  
Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee  
From: Karen "Candy" Clark, Lead Advocate Criminal Justice Reform  
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry-Maryland  
Date: January 28, 2025

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland selects its bills to align with its values. **SB 61 - Criminal Procedure - Motion to Reduce Duration of Sentence - Repeal of Sentencing Date Limitation** is a compassionate program to help those who are "behind the walls" prepare for their future after they are released. The bill provides for formerly incarcerated individuals to assist newly and potentially un-incarcerated individuals as they re-enter society. These interactions add a deeper, more personal, and more effective way to prepare someone to return to society. Instead of a few rushed meetings at the end of their sentence, their Release Preparation Program begins "as soon as they enter the prison." Typically men and women have separate and very different types of release programs. This program intends to meet the needs of both men and women, and sometimes juveniles. The program targets six main areas to practice needed skills: health, nutrition, employment, finance, legal requirements, and academic focuses.

Beside being an impressive program, this is also a fiscally responsible bill, and would be funded through the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund. **SB 61** clearly specifies the details of its management. Currently, with the budget considerations of our State Assembly, this effort by Senator Sydnor and team is remarkable.

UULM-MD is looking forward to seeing the positive impact of **SB 61**; we ask for a favorable report.

Thank you,  
*Karen "Candy" Clark*

*Criminal Justice Reform Lead Advocate*

## **1.26 SB 61- Division of Correction - Release Prepa**

Uploaded by: Lonia Muckle

Position: FAV



**SB 61 - Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program**  
**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**  
**January 28, 2026**  
**SUPPORT**

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 61. This bill will create a peer-led reentry support program and recognize that people who have lived experience with incarceration can be impactful in preparing others for successful release.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

SB 61 establishes a Release Preparation Program within Maryland's Division of Correction that allows formerly incarcerated individuals to return to correctional facilities to support people preparing for release. This bill creates a structured and accountable way to incorporate lived experience into reentry preparation.

Peer-led reentry support strengthens release planning, reduces barriers to reintegration, and promotes safer, more stable outcomes for returning citizens. Individuals leaving incarceration often face immediate challenges, including limited employment opportunities, difficulty enrolling in public benefits, housing instability, and the emotional strain of readjusting to life outside. Support from people who have navigated these same challenges can help individuals better understand what to expect, avoid common mistakes, and connect to resources more effectively.

CASH has seen the power of peer support and community-centered approaches firsthand. As the nonprofit administrator of Baltimore City's Guaranteed Income program, which served 200 young parents ages 18 to 24, participants consistently shared that building community and learning from others with shared experiences was critical to their mental health, stability, and ability to plan for their futures. These lessons apply directly to reentry. People thrive when they have connection, trust, and credible guidance.

This bill represents a practical, evidence-informed step toward improving reentry outcomes, reducing recidivism, and supporting safer communities across Maryland.

***We encourage you to return a favorable report for SB 61.***

*Creating Assets, Savings and Hope*

# **Testimony in support of SB0061 - Division of Corre**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0061\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV

01/28/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON SB#/0061- POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program**

**TO:** Chair Smith, Jr., Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0061, **Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program**

On June 16, 2024, Maryland Governor Wes Moore announced pardons for 175,000 persons convicted of crimes related to the possession of cannabis and cannabis paraphernalia. This bill is an attempt to chart a path for those individuals which will facilitate their integration back into their communities and society.

This bill will establish the Release Preparation Program in the Division of Correction for the purpose of providing access to formerly incarcerated individuals to State correctional facilities to assist incarcerated individuals with release preparation; and altering the purposes of the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund to include providing funds to cover the costs of supporting the Release Preparation Program. It will use funds from the legalization of cannabis to remediate the harms of incarceration for it.

Johns Hopkins University noted the results from the pardons issued and the predominate use of cannabis incarceration on minority communities.

In Maryland, the pardon applies to everyone convicted of marijuana possession—a population that is disproportionately Black. Although Black and African American persons make up 33% of Maryland's population, they comprise 70% of persons incarcerated in the state. This has real impacts in Black communities. Convictions on record make it harder for someone to obtain housing, employment, and education, all of which are crucial for achieving financial stability and building long-term wealth for future generations.<sup>1</sup>

This bill will assist in easing the path forward for formerly convicted individuals to return to productive lives in our communities. It will provide the resources needed to implement programs that fulfill the governor's promise to "leave no one behind".

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#/0061.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://carey.jhu.edu/articles/impacts-marylands-legalization-marijuana>

**SB 61\_ FAV\_ ACLU MD.pdf**

Uploaded by: Tierra Bradford

Position: FAV



## Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

January 28th, 2026

### SB 61: Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program

#### Favorable

The ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on SB 61, which seeks to establish the Release Preparation Program, a program providing grassroots, returning citizen led organizations access to state correctional facilities through a registration process. This would allow reentry groups led by formerly incarcerated individuals to carry out their mission of preparing people behind the wall for release through peer support efforts. This bill would also require that a portion of the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund be allocated towards this new program to cover the cost of operations and administering the program.

TIERRA BRADFORD  
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GENERAL COUNSEL

This legislation tackles one of the vital supports that returning citizens need when they are reacclimating to society, community-based care. Community based care takes place when people of a shared community provide essential services, support continuity of care, and bridge gaps between formal systems and the people they serve.<sup>1</sup> This is an evidence-based model that not only bridges gaps for people facing diverse circumstances, it also reduces stigma and supports inclusion for people with diverse needs.<sup>2</sup> In the context of reentry, peer support service groups (PSSG) are providing community based care that addresses everyday obstacles returning citizens face that institutional resources were not designed to address. The key to recidivism has always been a combination of institutional supports and community support. Both are imperative for decreasing the chance recidivism<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Empowered Communities as Providers of Care*, World Health Organization, January 2026, <https://www.who.int/teams/integrated-health-services/clinical-services-and-systems/emergency-and-critical-care/community-based-care#:~:text=Communities%20are%20not%20only%20recipients,and%20the%20people%20they%20serve.>

<sup>2</sup> See Van Ommeren, Mark, *From Isolation to Inclusion: Community Based Mental Health Care*, July 24, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/from-isolation-to-inclusion---community-based-mental-health-care>

<sup>3</sup> See *Prisoners and Prison Reentry*, United States Department of Justice, January 2026, [https://www.justice.gov/archive/fbci/progmenu\\_reentry.html#:~:text=Assisting%20ex%2Dprisoners%20in%20finding,from%20prison%20back%20into%20society.](https://www.justice.gov/archive/fbci/progmenu_reentry.html#:~:text=Assisting%20ex%2Dprisoners%20in%20finding,from%20prison%20back%20into%20society.)

In Maryland, there are peer support service groups (PSSG) who want to be a resource to incarcerated people as they are preparing for release. Peers have a nuanced perspective and an ability to communicate to incarcerated people that makes their service unique and invaluable in the sphere of reentry.<sup>4</sup> There are experiences people have when they are first released that PSSG can speak to as people who had to navigate the “new normal” of going through life as someone who was previously incarcerated. Formerly incarcerated people who have experienced peer support have expressed that lived experience of incarceration was the most relevant and applicable experience for their goal of not recidivating.<sup>5</sup> PSSG have been shown to improve post-release outcomes, including linkage to health services, reduced substance use and mental health symptoms etc.<sup>6</sup> Studies have shown that peer lived experience, extensive participant engagement, person-centered care, and collaboration between agencies as factors that are all integral to success i.e. lowering recidivism.<sup>7</sup> Returning citizens need access to what institutions can provide like gainful employment, suitable housing, and education opportunities, but they also need a social and emotional assistance provided by peers who were once in their shoes. Unfortunately, PSSGs face barriers that keep them from providing their services to the population they are trying to help. These barriers include a lack of access and issues with sustainability.

It is common for PSSGs to experience administrative barriers preventing them from entering facilities and meeting with incarcerated individuals. Formerly incarcerated people are not prohibited from entering correctional facilities, however, without legislation requiring the Department of Corrections to establish a protocol permitting formerly incarcerated folks to enter correctional facilities, access is not guaranteed. The inconsistency can be detrimental to peer support efforts. There is a window of time ahead of an incarcerated persons release that is critical to the success of PSSGs preparation services in which they are trying to engage and bond with incarcerated individuals.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, scheduling and consistency are important to the success of the peer support. SB 61 would require the Department of

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<sup>4</sup> See Buck G (2020) *Peer Mentoring in Criminal Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup>See Matthews, Esther, *Peer-focused prison reentry programs*, August 23, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/263266632111019958>

<sup>6</sup> See Treitler P, DiGioia-Laird V, Long B., *Peer support services for individuals with health-related needs reentering the community after incarceration: a scoping review of program elements and outcomes*. Health Justice. 2025 Aug 16, 2025, ;13(1):51. doi: 10.1186/s40352-025-00358-0. PMID: 40817968; PMCID: PMC12357432.

<sup>7</sup> Id

<sup>8</sup>See Matthews, Esther, *Peer-focused prison reentry programs*, August 23, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/263266632111019958>

Corrections to coordinate a schedule with PSSGs so they can successfully and effectively carry out their mission.

SB 61 does not just benefit incarcerated people who are preparing to be released and the grassroots organizations led by formerly incarcerated people who are assisting them, it also helps create a safer Maryland. Between 4,000 and 7,400 people are released from Maryland state prisons each year.<sup>9</sup> Maryland has seen successful reentry efforts, in which, peer support has been critical. With the passage of the Maryland Second Look Act, SB 61 will help expand access to peer support services earlier and in a more streamlined capacity.

SB 61 will benefit incarcerated people preparing for release, PSSG's providing reentry services and all Marylanders desiring inclusive and safe communities. We urge a favorable report on SB 61.

AMERICAN CIVIL  
LIBERTIES UNION  
FOUNDATION OF  
MARYLAND

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<sup>9</sup> See Wang, Leah, *Since you asked: How many women and men are released from each state's prisons and jails every year?*, Prison Policy Initiative, 2024, February 28, [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2024/02/28/releases-sex-state/#:~:text=Table\\_content:%20header:%20%7C%20%7C%20Men%20%7C%20Totals,%7C%20Men:%2010%2C580%20%7C%20Totals:%20291%2C817%20%7C](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2024/02/28/releases-sex-state/#:~:text=Table_content:%20header:%20%7C%20%7C%20Men%20%7C%20Totals,%7C%20Men:%2010%2C580%20%7C%20Totals:%20291%2C817%20%7C)

# SB61

Uploaded by: Tierra Bradford

Position: FAV



## Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

January 28th, 2026

### SB 61: Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program

#### Favorable

The ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on SB 61, which seeks to establish the Release Preparation Program, a program providing grassroots, returning citizen led organizations access to state correctional facilities through a registration process. This would allow reentry groups led by formerly incarcerated individuals to carry out their mission of preparing people behind the wall for release through peer support efforts. This bill would also require that a portion of the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund be allocated towards this new program to cover the cost of operations and administering the program.

This legislation tackles one of the vital supports that returning citizens need when they are reacclimating to society, community-based care. Community based care takes place when people of a shared community provide essential services, support continuity of care, and bridge gaps between formal systems and the people they serve.<sup>1</sup> This is an evidence-based model that not only bridges gaps for people facing diverse circumstances, it also reduces stigma and supports inclusion for people with diverse needs.<sup>2</sup> In the context of reentry, peer support service groups (PSSG) are providing community based care that addresses everyday obstacles returning citizens face that institutional resources were not designed to address. The key to recidivism has always been a combination of institutional supports and community support. Both are imperative for decreasing the chance recidivism<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Empowered Communities as Providers of Care*, World Health Organization, January 2026, <https://www.who.int/teams/integrated-health-services/clinical-services-and-systems/emergency-and-critical-care/community-based-care#:~:text=Communities%20are%20not%20only%20recipients,and%20the%20people%20they%20serve>.

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It is common for PSSGs to experience administrative barriers preventing them from entering facilities and meeting with incarcerated individuals. Formerly incarcerated people are not prohibited from entering correctional facilities, however, without legislation requiring the Department of Corrections to establish a protocol permitting formerly incarcerated folks to enter correctional facilities, access is not guaranteed. The inconsistency can be detrimental to peer support efforts. There is a window of time ahead of an incarcerated persons release that is critical to the success of PSSGs preparation services in which they are trying to engage and bond with incarcerated individuals.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, scheduling and consistency are important to the success of the peer support. SB 61 would require the Department of

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Corrections to coordinate a schedule with PSSGs so they can successfully and effectively carry out their mission.

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SB 61 will benefit incarcerated people preparing for release, PSSG's providing reentry services and all Marylanders desiring inclusive and safe communities. We urge a favorable report on SB 61.

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**SB61- FWA- Re-Entry- NAMI MD.pdf**

Uploaded by: Morgan Mills

Position: FWA

January 28, 2026

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 60,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

At NAMI Maryland, we have a strong interest in criminal justice reform due to the longstanding criminalization of mental illness and the disproportionate involvement of individuals with behavioral health needs in the correctional system. This legislation reflects a thoughtful, evidence-informed approach to reentry that prioritizes dignity, preparation, and connection.

Peer support is a cornerstone of healing and recovery in both mental health and substance use systems. The ability to give and receive encouragement, empathy, and validation from individuals with shared life experiences fosters mutual respect, trust, and authentic connection. By creating structured opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals to support those currently incarcerated, this program helps people realize they are not alone and offers a powerful glimpse of what is possible after release.

Programs grounded in lived experience are especially effective at building hope, strengthening engagement, and supporting successful transitions back into the community. Peer-based reentry support has been shown to reduce isolation, improve outcomes, and would likely contribute to lower recidivism rates by helping individuals navigate the complex emotional and practical challenges of release. This approach aligns directly with our organization's criminal justice platform, which calls for treating justice-involved individuals with mental illness with respect and compassion.

While we strongly support this bill, we respectfully encourage consideration of a workforce development or career pathway for the formerly incarcerated individuals to serve as Certified Peer Recovery Specialists (CPRS). Formal training, certification, and employment opportunities would strengthen the program's sustainability while empowering peers to build meaningful careers rooted in service and recovery. With this addition, the Release Preparation Program can serve as both a reentry support model and a pathway to long-term stability for those involved.

Stephanie Slowly-Little  
Executive Director  
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

**Contact:** Morgan Mills-DiEnno  
Compass Government Relations  
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**SB0061\_DPSCS\_LOI.pdf**

Uploaded by: Catherine Kahl

Position: INFO



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## Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

### Office of Government & Legislative Affairs

**BILL:** SENATE BILL 61

**POSITION:** LETTER OF INFORMATION

**EXPLANATION:** Senate Bill 61 seeks to establish the Release Preparation Program (Program) within the Division of Correction (DOC) with the purpose of providing access to formerly incarcerated individuals to State correctional facilities to assist with release preparation.

- The Department appreciates SB 61 and currently has an active volunteer program dedicated to providing incarcerated individuals with a variety of programming and skills that will improve their lives upon release.
- The Department's voluntary program includes formerly incarcerated individuals, many of whom are actively in and out of DPSCS facilities every day.
- Engaging a volunteer to perform administrative and operational support services is an integral part of the Department's service delivery system intended to supplement or extend staff and services provided.
- In addition, the Department started a Lived Experience Committee (LEC), which is made up of justice involved and formerly incarcerated individuals who advise on policy, rehabilitation, and reentry. Members of the LEC work with the Secretary to support incarcerated individuals and improve conditions both "behind the fence and beyond".
- The LEC provides guidance, mentorship, and real-world perspectives to improve the lives of incarcerated individuals and support successful reentry. Members engage directly with incarcerated populations to discuss policy, legislation, and personal growth.
- The Department's organizational restructuring by formally aligning the Volunteers Unit within the Programs, Treatment and Reentry

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DATA, POLICY AND GRANTS

RENARD BROOKS

Department supports the Department's mission and ensures consistency with current practices related to authorizing additional justice-involved individuals to participate as volunteers in Department approved programs. This includes updating existing COMAR.

- The provision in the bill requiring the list of formerly incarcerated individuals participating in the Program to be made public may have unintended consequences for an individual who has obtained an expungement.
- Making this list available to the public undermines the fundamental purpose of expungement. Formerly incarcerated individuals participating in the Program may have had a record expunged. While an expunged record is not visible to the public, the formerly incarcerated individual would be on a public registry, essentially making the public aware the individual was incarcerated and had a record.

**CONCLUSION:** For these reasons, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services respectfully requests the Committee consider this information as it deliberates Senate Bill 61.

# **SB 61 - Letter of Information - MD Labor.pdf**

Uploaded by: Dylan McDonough

Position: INFO

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**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF LABOR TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 61**

**TO:** Judicial Proceedings Committee Members  
**FROM:** Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor)  
**DATE:** January 28, 2026  
**BILL:** Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program

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**MD LABOR POSITION: INFORMATION**

SB61 requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to establish a Release Preparation Program, funded by the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund. The program would allow formerly incarcerated individuals to access State correctional facilities to assist currently incarcerated individuals (IIs) with release preparation.

Connecting currently incarcerated individuals (IIs) with individuals who have been previously incarcerated is an important perspective that will positively impact IIs and reduce recidivism.

MD Labor's Office of Correctional Education (OCE) provides transitional programming to IIs who are preparing to reenter society to ensure students are prepared with what they will need for release and receive support as they return to their communities. Allowing currently incarcerated Marylanders to hear from formerly incarcerated people may encourage them to enter transitional programming altogether or enter a transitional course they may not have planned to take, both of which will better prepare them for a successful life after release.

The Department respectfully requests the Committee consider this information as they evaluate SB 61. For questions, please contact Andrew Fulginiti at [Andrew.Fulginiti@maryland.gov](mailto:Andrew.Fulginiti@maryland.gov).

**LOI\_SB 61\_MCA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Selena Rawlley

Position: INFO



**TITLE SENATE BILL:** SB 61 - Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Judicial Proceedings, Chair Smith

**DATE:** January 28, 2026

**POSITION:** Letter of Information

**SUMMARY OF BILL:** SB 61/HB 108 establishes the Release Preparation Program in the Division of Correction and alters the purpose and distribution of the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund (CREF) to include providing funds to cover the costs of supporting the new program.

**INFORMATION:** Given the CREF's distribution structure defined in MD Code, Tax - General, § 2-1302.2., the distribution proposed in SB 61/HB 108 would not have a direct fiscal impact on the operations of the Maryland Cannabis Administration (MCA). However, the proposed distribution changes present foreseeable negative downstream fiscal impacts on the State's General Fund (GF), Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund (CRRF), the Cannabis Public Health Fund (CPHF), the Cannabis Business Assistance Fund (CBAF), the Office of Social Equity (OSE), and the Social Equity Partnership Program (SEPP). SB 61/HB 108 does not distribute a specified amount to the new Release Preparation Program – a program which does not presently exist and does not have a clearly accessible projected operational budget from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) – which proves difficult to quantifiably estimate these impacts. Given the forecasted deficits as well as significant uncertainty regarding the federal budget and policy changes, it would be challenging for the State to manage this increase in CREF expenditure, especially without a clear understanding of programmatic costs. This challenge is compounded by major, unforeseen changes in federal policy and other ongoing budgetary pressures.

**CONCLUSION:** While SB 61/HB 108 does not directly impact the operational capacity of the MCA, in light of current projected general fund deficits in fiscal 2027 and beyond, the Administration wishes to provide context to demonstrate the significant fiscal impacts of CREF expenditure on the State's General Fund.

**2026\_01\_28 SB 61 Division of Correction - Release**

Uploaded by: Tiffany Clark

Position: INFO

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**STATE OF MARYLAND**  
**OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

**ANTHONY G. BROWN**  
*Attorney General*

January 28, 2026

**TO:** The Honorable William Smith  
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Tiffany Clark  
Director, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

**RE:** Senate Bill 61 – Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program  
(Support in Concept)

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The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) supports Senate Bill 61 – Division of Correction – Release Preparation Program with the amendments described below. SB 61 proposes to establish a Release Preparation Program within the Division of Correction that enables formerly incarcerated individuals to access State correctional facilities to assist currently incarcerated individuals with release preparation.

As Maryland's elected Chief Legal Officer, the Attorney General supervises and directs the legal business of the State. The Office of the Attorney General advises and represents State institutions, agencies, boards, commissions, and officials, while representing Maryland's interests in state and federal litigation. The Office uses the authority of the Office to enforce the rule of law, protect Marylanders, and promote the public good.

We appreciate the intent of this legislation to expand community-based reentry programming and leverage the valuable lived experience of formerly incarcerated individuals to support successful reintegration. This bill directly advances Maryland Equity and Justice Commission (MEJC) Recommendation #12, which calls for expanding community-based reentry programs' access to incarcerated individuals at least 180 days before their reentry date. The approach reflects evidence-based practices from California's Hope and Reentry Team (HART) and Colorado's Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program, both of which have demonstrated significant success in reducing recidivism.

However, to ensure effective implementation and alignment with privacy protections and operational clarity, we respectfully recommend the following amendments:

1. **Expungement Privacy Protection:** Amend page 3, lines 25-26 to clarify that public registration requirements do not apply to formerly incarcerated individuals whose records have been expunged. The current requirement that "the registration of formerly incarcerated individuals in the Program to be made available to the public" could unintentionally disclose expunged criminal history, undermining the statutory purpose of expungement and creating potential legal conflicts with Maryland's expungement laws.
2. **Participant Compensation Authorization:** Authorize use of Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund resources for participant stipends or compensation. Recognizing the value of lived experience and addressing economic barriers will support robust program participation and acknowledge the professional contribution formerly incarcerated individuals make to reentry preparation.

Additionally, it is unclear what the intention is regarding the scope of OAG's approval authority over the Division of Correction's protocol. With these amendments, this legislation will establish a strong, evidence-based reentry support program that protects individual privacy rights, provides clear operational guidance, and creates sustainable incentives for program participation. We have shared proposed amendment language with the bill sponsor and remain available to work collaboratively with the Committee to refine this legislation.

For the foregoing reasons, the Office of the Attorney General respectfully urges the Committee to give Senate Bill 61 a favorable report with the amendments described above.

Cc:

**SB61\_Carr\_inf.pdf**

Uploaded by: Warren (Rusty) Carr

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SB61 Information

Warren (Rusty) Carr

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The Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Fund was intended to cover the administrative expenses of operating the Cannabis program. Funding for the CREF comes before other funds get their split, but funding not spent by MCA goes back to the General Fund. This request is for a non-Cannabis program to get funds from Cannabis tax revenue. However, by funding through the CREF, this request does not take away from Cannabis program funding. Instead, the funding is effectively coming from the General Fund through budgetary sleight of hand. This would have no impact on the Cannabis community

Funding from the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund would appear to be a better fit. However, the local nature of this fund would complicate statewide funding for this program.

Thank you,  
Rusty Carr