

SB0944 – Correctional Services – Reentry Readiness

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Position: FAV



TESTIMONY

SB0944 – Correctional Services – Reentry Readiness Program

Bill Sponsor: Senator Charles

Committee: Senate Judicial Proceedings

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, CoChair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in support of **SB0944** on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. We are an association of unpaid citizen advocates—individuals and grassroots groups in every district across the state—representing and supporting more than 30,000 Marylanders.

Too many returning citizens leave incarceration without the identification, records, or employment support necessary to secure housing, apply for jobs, or access healthcare. Without these basic tools, individuals face unnecessary barriers that increase the likelihood of instability and recidivism. SB0944 provides a structured, whole of government approach that helps people reenter their communities with dignity and a real chance at success.

For the Reentry Readiness Program, SB0944 brings together the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, the Motor Vehicle Administration, the Division of Vital Records, and the Department of Labor to ensure that individuals preparing for release have coordinated access to essential documents and services.

When returning citizens have the documents and support they need, they are far more likely to find employment, reconnect with family, and avoid the circumstances that lead to reoffending. SB0944 strengthens Maryland’s commitment to rehabilitation by ensuring that people are prepared for life after incarceration—not set up to fail.

SB0944 also aligns with the mission of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. Our work centers on transparency, accountability, and social justice. A coordinated reentry system reduces barriers, supports families, and strengthens communities across the state. Therefore, we respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** report on SB0944.

MOPD Testimony SB 944 FAVORABLE.pdf

Uploaded by: Kirsten Downs

Position: FAV



NATASHA DARTIGUE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

KEITH LOTRIDGE
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

ELIZABETH HILLIARD
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

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

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.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

Authored by: Kirsten Gettys Downs
Director of Systemic Reform, Maryland Office of the Public Defender
Kirsten.Downs@maryland.gov

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAVSB944_.pdf

Uploaded by: Michelle Zelaya

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 24th 2026

SB944

Data Privacy - Consumer Data, Public Records, and Message Switching System (Data Privacy Act)

Economic Matters Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 944**. The Maryland 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 944 establishes a coordinated Reentry Readiness Program within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and requires the Department to work in partnership with the Motor Vehicle Administration, the Division of Vital Records, and the Department of Labor. The goal is to ensure that individuals returning to society have access to essential documents, identification, workforce support, and the foundational resources they need to transition successfully.

The intent of this bill is straightforward: to reduce the unnecessary barriers that too often lead to cycles of recidivism, unemployment, and instability. Many individuals leave incarceration without a state ID, birth certificate, or access to job training—basic tools that are necessary to secure housing, apply for employment, enroll in education, or receive healthcare benefits. By requiring the relevant state agencies to collaborate directly, this program increases efficiency, minimizes delays, and ensures that returning citizens leave custody better equipped to contribute positively to their communities. This strengthens public safety, reduces taxpayer costs associated with reincarceration, and supports stronger, more resilient families across Maryland.

This legislation also speaks deeply to the values of Catholic social teaching, which calls us to uphold the dignity of every person and to support pathways to redemption and restoration. The principles of human dignity and the preferential option for the vulnerable remind us that no individual is defined solely by past mistakes; each person deserves the chance to rebuild their life with hope and stability. Ensuring that returning citizens have the tools they need to reintegrate successfully honors the belief that all people are created in the image of God and are capable of transformation.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference urges a favorable report on **Senate Bill 944**.

SB0944-JPR-FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

SB 0944

February 25, 2026

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: Senate Bill 944: Correctional Services – Reentry Readiness Program

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 944. This bill would require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to establish a Reentry Readiness Program to support Marylanders preparing to return home from incarceration with assistance accessing vital records and employment development programs.

Approximately 2,000 Baltimoreans return from prison each year. According to the Justice Policy Institute, Baltimoreans are disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration — representing 40% of the state's prison population despite being home to just 9% of Maryland's overall population.¹ Often, these residents return home with significant barriers to meaningful employment and successful reentry. They frequently lack current driver's licenses, birth certificates, and skills needed to fully reintegrate into society.

People should not return home from incarceration to the exact same circumstances that they faced when they were arrested. By offering support ahead of release, we can help ensure formerly incarcerated Marylanders have the resources and opportunities necessary to rebuild their lives on the outside. This very approach is expressly outlined in Baltimore's Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan. We are committed to continuing to work with DPSCS and other re-entry partners to strengthen reentry efforts here in Baltimore.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 944.

¹ "Baltimore City, and Other Black Communities in Maryland, Disproportionately Harmed by Alarming Rates of Incarceration - Justice Policy Institute." Justice Policy Institute, June 27, 2022.
<https://justicepolicy.org/press/baltimore-city-black-communities-in-maryland-disproportionately-harmed-by-alarming-rates-of-incarceration/>.

Testimony in support of SB0944 - Correctional Serv

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0944_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
02/25/2026
Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703-7134

TESTIMONY ON SB#0944 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Correctional Services - Reentry Readiness Program

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

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0944, **Correctional Services - Reentry Readiness Program**

This bill will provide help to those who have been incarcerated in their return to society after completing their sentence. The bill will establish the Reentry Readiness Program in the Department of 4 Public Safety and Correctional Services. It will specify what other Maryland agencies will staff and administer the program.

The bill will require the program staff assistance to each returning citizen in:
enrolling in vocational, workforce training, and job placement programs

- obtaining a certified copy of the returning citizen's birth certificate
- ...obtaining a photo identification or driver's license.

At least 90 days before the anticipated release from confinement of a returning citizen, program staff within the releasing institution shall assist a returning citizen in completing and submitting any necessary applications and documents for enrolling in a vocational, workforce training, or job placement program. At least 60 days before the anticipated release from confinement of a returning citizen, the commissioner and the program staff within a releasing institution shall provide the returning citizen the appropriate forms for obtaining a photo identification card ... or a driver's license from the motor vehicle administration. They shall also assist the returning citizen in completing the forms. At least 30 days before the anticipated release from confinement of a returning citizen, program staff shall verify that the returning citizen has received assistance as required.

This bill meets the requirements by establishing the Reentry Readiness Program in the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; and requiring the Department to work jointly with the Motor Vehicle Administration, the Division of Vital Records in the Maryland Department of Health, and the Department of Labor to staff and administer the Program.

If the end result of incarceration is rehabilitation this bill adds positive steps to assist in a reintegration into society of formerly incarcerated individuals.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0944.

SB 944 T Asten 2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Tabitha Asten

Position: FAV

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB 944 Correctional Services- Re-Entry Readiness Program

FROM: Tabitha Asten

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: February 23, 2026

I am writing to respectfully request that the Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 944.

Senate Bill 944 establishes the Reentry Readiness Program within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and requires the Department to collaborate with the Motor Vehicle Administration, the Division of Vital Records within the Maryland Department of Health, and the Department of Labor to staff and administer the Program. This coordinated approach is essential to ensuring that individuals returning to the community from incarceration have timely access to the vital documents necessary for successful reentry.

My name is Tabitha Asten, and I serve as the Statewide Lead Peer Support Specialist for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender. I identify as a person in long-term recovery from a substance use disorder and as a returning citizen. I submit this testimony in support of SB 944 on my own behalf and not as a representative of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender.

In 2012, I was released from the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women without a birth certificate or photo identification. One of the conditions of my parole was to obtain gainful employment as soon as possible. However, I quickly encountered significant barriers. To obtain a birth certificate, I was required to present photo identification. To obtain photo identification, I was required to present a birth certificate, Social Security card, and two pieces of mail. Each of these documents required fees that I could not afford. In order to earn the money needed to pay for the documents, I needed employment-but in order to secure employment, I needed the very documents I did not have.

Navigating these bureaucratic requirements was discouraging and overwhelming. I felt defeated before I had a genuine opportunity to succeed. The stigma associated with incarceration compounded these challenges. I was forced to use my prison identification for basic transactions, which was a constant reminder of my status and carried a sense of shame. Ultimately, I was unable

to secure the documents necessary to stabilize my life. The frustration and hopelessness I experienced contributed to a relapse, which resulted in a violation of probation and my return to incarceration.

At the conclusion of my second term at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, I was provided with my birth certificate and Social Security card, but not a state-issued photo identification. When I later went to the Motor Vehicle Administration to obtain a Maryland ID, I once again confronted the stigma of presenting prison-issued identification.

Access to vital documents should be a routine and standardized part of the release process. Ensuring that individuals leave correctional facilities with a birth certificate, Social Security card, and state-issued identification significantly increases their ability to secure employment, comply with supervision requirements, and reintegrate successfully. These documents are not simply administrative paperwork; they are foundational tools for stability, dignity, and opportunity.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 944.

Authored by: Tabitha Asten, tabitha.asten@maryland.gov 443-586-5870

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Uploaded by: Zachary Alberts

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 944

Correctional Services - Reentry Readiness Program

TO: Hon. William Smith, Chair, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Zachary Alberts, Director of Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives at the Center for Urban Families

DATE: February 23rd, 2026

Good afternoon, my name is Zachary Alberts. I am the Director of Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives at the Center for Urban Families, a workforce and family strengthening program in Baltimore City. The Center for Urban Families requests a favorable report on SB 944, which would assist individuals returning from incarceration (“returning citizens”) with obtaining necessary I9 documents, as well as enrollment in a workforce employment program if they so desire.

As a workforce development organization who serves more than 1000 individuals a year, almost half of whom are justice impacted, we see every single day what a challenge it is for returning citizens to navigate re-entry without proper documentation. Because a birth certificate and driver’s license or photo id are required to access housing, get employment, access benefits, etc. individuals who come home from incarceration without them face an even tougher, more bureaucratic path to a post-incarceration life.

Not only is scheduling the actual appointments challenging for individuals who may not be comfortable or familiar with modern technology and modern processes, but they often cost money to obtain. We have even seen these types of processes feeling so insurmountable, that individuals return to the underground culture and economies they are comfortable navigating.

This legislation will provide individuals a strong foundation from which to build the rest of their life.

We urge a favorable report.

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Uploaded by: Tiffany Clark

Position: INFO

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STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

ANTHONY G. BROWN
Attorney General

February 25, 2026

TO: The Honorable William Smith
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee

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

RE: Senate Bill 944 – Correctional Services – Reentry Readiness Program

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) supports in concept Senate Bill 944 – Correctional Services – Reentry Readiness Program. Senate Bill 944 establishes a structured, multi-agency program within DPSCS to ensure that individuals approaching release from incarceration receive assistance in obtaining identification documents and connecting to workforce and vocational programming before they leave state custody.

This legislation directly supports our efforts to advance equitable reentry outcomes and reduce the recidivism rate that continues to affect too many Marylanders. The period immediately following release is one of the highest-risk windows for reincarceration, and the lack of a valid ID or employment pathway on the day of release is among the most preventable barriers to successful reintegration. By codifying pre-release assistance timelines and requiring coordinated action across DPSCS, the MVA, the Division of Vital Records, and the Department of Labor, SB 944 reflects a practical, evidence-consistent approach to closing that gap.

We appreciate the General Assembly's work on this important policy and welcome the opportunity to share our perspective. The OAG notes, however, several areas where the Committee may wish to refine the bill before final passage.

First, DPSCS has already established MOUs with the MVA and the Division of Vital Records for providing vital documents to returning citizens, operates the Reentry Passport system for pre-release document access, and partners with the Department of Labor on correctional education and workforce programming across 18 facilities.

Second, DPSCS reentry specialists currently begin individualized pre-release planning approximately 180 days before release, twice the bill's 90-day trigger. Aligning the statutory timeline with this existing practice would make the legislation more ambitious and consistent with the evidence base for effective reentry intervention.

Third, and most critically, it is our understanding that DPSCS currently has only 11 reentry specialist positions statewide, converted from case manager roles without dedicated appropriations. Without a funding mechanism to support adequate staffing, the bill risks creating a statutory mandate that DPSCS cannot fulfill in practice.

Subject to these concerns, the OAG believes SB 944 takes an important step toward ensuring that returning citizens have the foundational tools they need to succeed.

Cc: Members of the Committee