



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 1309 - Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System - Establishment

To: Delegate Sandy Bartlett, Chair and the Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Karen “Candy” Clark, Lead Advocate Criminal Justice Reform
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry-Maryland
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The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland asks for your support on **HB 1309 - Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System – Establishment**, because it would move Maryland toward being a more just and equitable place to live.

Maryland has the most diverse legislature, the largest black caucus in the country, and many strong Black Leaders including our first Black Governor, Wes Moore, and our first Afro-Latina Speaker of the House in Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk.

However, this progress is juxtaposed against the largest racial prison population disparity.

In March 2025, The Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative released a 111-page report citing troubling statistics and reiterating its call for a state commission on racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

For example, while Blacks account for about 30% of the state’s population,

- They represent almost 44% of drivers pulled over for secondary vehicle problems,
- They make up 71% of the state’s prison population, and
- They account for 77% of state inmates who served 20 or more years.

This bill creates a commission that will study the treatment of “African Americans, Hispanics, and other non–White individuals.” Members of the commission would invite members who are disproportionately harmed by the current system, including advocates and individuals with lived experience. This legislation would empower the commission to “make recommendations,” that would improve the livelihood of those who live “behind the walls.”

This commission would also look at the disparities on sentencing and how that is impacted by race. For example, they would study (and hopefully end) the practice of charging everyone involved with the worst outcome of the crime, ie: charging a person with “Felony Murder” even if they weren’t the primary person committing the crime.

These, along with the other bill requirements, should help us reverse this negative trend of our state’s racial disparities in prison. That is why UULM-MD asks for a favorable report on **HB 1309**.

Thank you,

Karen “Candy” Clark

Criminal Justice Reform Lead Advocate