



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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March 5, 2026

Chair J. Sandy Bartlett
Judiciary Committee
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 1309 - Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System. This legislation establishes a dedicated commission to study, analyze, and recommend reforms related to the disparate treatment of African Americans, Hispanics, and other non-White individuals within Maryland's criminal justice system. By committing to a comprehensive, data-driven review of systemic inequities, HB 1309 represents a meaningful step toward equity, accountability, and fairness in law enforcement and judicial processes. **This bill is a 2026 legislative priority for the Black Caucus.**

The data makes it clear that a systemic approach is necessary. While Black residents comprise approximately 31% of Maryland's population, they account for 72% of the Division of Correction's incarcerated population. In 2019, the Justice Policy Institute reported that Maryland's proportion of incarcerated individuals who are Black was more than double the national average and higher than any other state. In 2023, the Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy acknowledged its limited ability to fully assess racial disparities in sentencing, noting that racial inequities reflect cumulative disadvantage across multiple stages of the criminal processing, including police stops, arrests, charging, incarceration, and community supervision. These findings reinforce the need for a coordinated, systemwide examination.

House Bill 1309 recognizes that racial disparities persist at multiple stages of the criminal justice continuum, from arrest, charging, pretrial detention, sentencing, and probation/parole, to incarceration and reentry. Disparities of this magnitude cannot be resolved by examining one isolated stage of the criminal justice process. In a complex system, there are numerous points at which bias, error or structural inequity can enter the equation. These disparities undermine public trust, exacerbate community harm, and perpetuate cycles of inequality that have profound social and economic consequences for individuals and families. Establishing a permanent, well-resourced commission provides the structure necessary to systematically identify root causes of disparate outcomes and

propose actionable reforms that strengthen both justice and community safety.

The commission created under HB 1309 will be empowered to collect and analyze data, hear from stakeholders and impacted communities, and develop recommendations for legislative, administrative, or policy changes. This inclusive and transparent process ensures that those most affected by inequities have a voice in shaping solutions, and that policymakers receive evidence-based guidance to advance justice reforms that reduce disparities and enhance fairness.

Importantly, **House Bill 1309** aligns with longstanding principles of fairness, equal protection, and civil rights. Addressing racial disparities within the criminal justice system is not only a matter of policy, it is a matter of community well-being, public confidence, and trust in institutions charged with upholding justice for all Marylanders. By studying systemic patterns and recommending reforms grounded in data and lived experience, this bill strengthens both the integrity of the justice system and the promise of equitable treatment under the law.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland urges favorable consideration of **House Bill 1309**.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland