



February 24, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in full support of House Bill 1275, the Suzanne Jones Act. As the President and CEO of the Washington County Community Action Council, it is my responsibility to ensure our agency is serving the residents of Washington County that are striving for self-sufficiency. We serve 10,000 clients each year in a variety of programs including energy assistance, eviction prevention, housing counseling, mediation, food pantry and transportation to mention a few. We are 95% grant funded from federal, state and local governments. All of these grants have very specific requirements to assist only Washington County residents and further they have a minimum of a 30-day residency requirement.

Inmates that are released into our community from other counties in Maryland where they committed the crime attempt to get services from CAC. They are denied until they can meet the grant requirements. Frequently these newly released inmates tell staff they have no plan and need help with housing and food, however have no employment or plan for self-sufficiency, which conflicts with our mission. We give our clients a hand up and not a hand out. As a result, too frequently these former inmates regress to committing crimes in our community.

CAC has limited resources that we use to help productive low-income members of our community when they experience a life event such as a medical bill, loss of a job or other unanticipated event that affects their family budget. We cannot and will not provide services to inmates as they are released into our county because they do not meet the minimum qualifications for the grants.

It is critical for our community that House Bill 1275 is passed. It is not the responsibility of Washington County nonprofits to assist inmates who were not originally residents of Washington County.

Personally, I have lived in Washington County for the majority of my life. I moved from a 560-acre waterfront farm on Kent Island that I was paying \$175 a month in rent after I completed graduate school. I did so because there was no sense of community like the one we have in Hagerstown. I love the fact I cannot go anywhere in town without running into someone I know. However, I should not feel unsafe in our community because there are criminals being released with no resources and revert to the life that caused them to be locked up in the first place.

Respectfully submitted