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HB 1476

March 6, 2020

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Nicholas Blendy, Deputy Director of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 1476 – Independent Oversight and Review Board for Health Care of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities – Establishment

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill 1476.

With 2.3 million people behind bars, the United States has the highest prison population in the world and incarcerates at the staggering rate of 698 per 100,000 residents.¹ The U.S. prison population today also reflects a dramatic demographic shift in age; from 1999 to 2014, the number of federal and state inmates age 55 or older grew by 250 percent.² As the number of older prisoners increases, so too has the number of inmate deaths from chronic diseases that disproportionately burden the elderly.³ Suicide is also on the rise among inmates.⁴ Given the growing medical complexities among our prison population, it is imperative to ensure inmates are receiving adequate healthcare in a timely and efficient manner.

In our history of American prisons, all too often a hands-off reactionary approach to caring for inmates has led to inhumane prison conditions not to mention costly

¹ Sawyer W & Wagner P. Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019. Prison Policy Initiative. 19 March 2019. Accessed 4 March 2020. Available from: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html>

² McKillop M & McGaffey F. Number of Older Prisoners Grows Rapidly Threatening to Drive Up Prison Health Costs. 7 October 2015. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Accessed 4 March 2020. Available from: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/>

³ Noonan M. Mortality in State Prisons, 2001-2004. December 2016. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Accessed 4 March 2020. Available from: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/msp0114st.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

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litigation and media scandals.⁵ Research has demonstrated that all public institutions, from schools to hospitals, benefit from strong independent and external oversight boards.⁶ Particularly in Maryland where the prison population exceeded 19,000 residents in 2018, we need a mechanism to protect the health and well-being of inmates who have limited means to safeguard their own interests.⁷

HB1476 establishes an independent oversight and review board for inmate health care that draws upon the expertise of key stakeholders such as health care providers, prisoner advocates, and former inmates to review inmate health care needs and grievances. An independent external oversight and review board can strengthen public trust and transparency in our prison system. This bill demands accountability in how we care for one of our most vulnerable populations and makes an important step towards ensuring that all Marylanders receive fair equitable healthcare.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 1476.

⁵ Prisons in the United States of America. N.d. Human Rights Watch Prison Project. Accessed 4 March 2020. Available from: <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/advocacy/prisons/u-s.htm>

⁶ Gibbons J & Katzenbach NB. Confronting Confinement: A Report of the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons. Federal Sentencing Reporter, vol. 24, no.1. October 11: 36-41.

⁷ Maryland at a Glance. 29 July 2019. Maryland Manual On-Line. Accessed 4 March 2020. Available from: <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/html/criminal.html>