

Support HB 1476 -- Health Care of Inmates

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Jim Rose, MAJR Executive Committee

DATE: March 6, 2020

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR-www.ma4jr.org) supports HB 1476.

Most inmates in our prison system will return to our communities and be able to contribute to our healthy society. Their health in prison, as well as their health when they return is a focal responsibility of Maryland's system of correction.

How has Maryland done? In 2018 Maryland issued a multimillion dollar contract for inmate health care to Corizon. David Fathi, director of the ACLU's National Prison Project, said having any private, for-profit company responsible for inmate health care can lead to a desire to cut corners to make more profits.

He said Corizon has had a "horrific" record in other states, noting it has had to make multi-million-dollar payouts to relatives of people who died in prison. "Privatized health care in prisons and jails has almost always been a disaster," Fathi said.

Corizon Health is one of the nation's largest for-profit medical providers for prisons and jails. Recent lawsuits against the company, however, call into question the quality, and even the availability, of the healthcare services it is supposed to provide.

"There have been thousands of lawsuits" filed against Corizon, added Maria Morris, an attorney with the Southern Poverty Law Center who has researched the way the company operates in a number of states, finding a disturbing pattern. Perhaps, if Corizon focused on providing competent and adequate care to prisoners, it would not be the subject of so many lawsuits and at risk of losing its lucrative contracts.

What does HB1476 accomplish? Among other things it creates an independent oversight and review board for healthcare of inmates in State correctional facilities that includes representatives from the Department, State Health Commission, healthcare providers/professionals, directly impacted persons, advocacy organizations, Correctional officer Union, Public Defender's office, and University Law schools that focus on these issues.

Because this is potentially a life-and-death concern, MAJR urges this committee to support legislation that can adequately monitor and regulate the provision of health services in our prisons. Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) urges a favorable report on HB1476.

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-board-prison-20181219-story.html>

<https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2017/aug/30/numerous-lawsuits-filed-against-corizon-nationwide-company-loses-contracts/>