



PAUL DeWOLFE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

TERRI COLLINS-GREEN
DIRECTOR, SOCIAL WORK DIVISION

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 194:

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES – INMATES – LABOR, JOB TRAINING, AND EDUCATIONAL COURSES

TO: Sen. Kelley, and members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Joanie Shreve, LCSW
DATE: February 2, 2021

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender is a statewide agency providing legal representation and advocacy for people in Maryland’s criminal justice system, including individuals currently incarcerated seeking Post-Conviction relief. Licensed social workers throughout our agency collaborate with attorneys and may be tasked with conducting biopsychosocial evaluations for mitigation purposes, assessing and linking clients to evidence-based services, and when needed, integrating those services into pretrial, sentencing, or post-sentencing plans. Social workers in OPD are concerned with the conditions in prison, and support bills that offer opportunities for our clients to succeed in the future. The Maryland Office of the Public Defender supports Senate Bill 194 because of the meaningful educational and vocational opportunities it provides.

Many clients I have worked with held high-ranking, skilled positions through Maryland Correctional Enterprises (MCE). Those who have been in MCE shops and were ultimately released were far more likely to find employment in skilled jobs. However, despite decades of employment through MCE, my clients had no savings upon release and have relied on elderly family members, many who are on fixed-incomes and have limited financial resources. Many clients are hesitant to rely on family members for financial support upon release, knowing the significant financial burden they will place on them. They are eager and motivated to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible. But reentry is a process, and it can take 12 months to establish stability and independence. Providing fair compensation, no less than the minimum wage, for the skilled labor they provide the state will help them create a safety net for themselves and their families, and will help them stabilize quickly upon release. This bill helps reduce barriers to financial stability and independence.

More people are serving longer sentences, and are removed from the labor market for a greater percentage of their working years, while simultaneously the risk of recidivism goes down with age. Correctional industries, job training programs, financial counseling and post-GED courses help bridge the gap between incarceration and future success in the community.

OPD supports this bill to fully compensate MCE employees for their skilled labor, and the expansion of training and educational opportunities. For these reasons the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 194.