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Prince George's County

Finance Committee
Chair, Rules Committee

Joint Committees

Children, Youth, and Families
Ending Homelessness
Fair Practices and State Personnel Oversight
Management of Public Funds

Chair, Prince George's County
Senate Delegation



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Testimony of Joanne C. Benson

Correctional Services - Inmates - Labor, Job Training, and Educational Courses

Good afternoon chairwoman Kelley and esteemed members of the Finance Committee. Senate Bill 194: Correctional Services – Inmates – Labor, Job Training, and Educational Courses prohibits the compensation rate for inmate labor in Maryland Correctional Enterprises (MCE) from being less than the State minimum wage. The bill prohibits the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) from deducting the cost of food, lodging, or clothing from an inmate's earnings. The Division of Correction (DOC) must offer job training and educational courses to all inmates who wish to participate, as specified.

This bill in its entirety will help inmates receive appropriate treatment and resources that will help the inmates thrive and stop the exploitation by a system that makes over 52 million dollars from sales, which includes products such as furniture, flags, and license plates. Wages for inmate labor ranges from \$.90 to \$2.75 per day at the DOC, which is based on their skill levels. In comparison, the Maryland Correctional facilities inmate laborers are paid 0.17 cents to \$1.16 an hour. Inmates receiving a wage increase will be beneficial towards their release.

Additionally, this bill will create a positive long-lasting effect. Studies have proven that inmates who complete educational courses and programs during sentencing not only have lower odds of returning to prison but higher odds of finding a job. This will not only help them thrive inside of prison but when they return to society. Inmates having educational courses keeps them occupied while serving their sentences and will increase their self-esteem and ultimately change their behaviors.

Inmates receiving a fair wage and education will help to change their lives. Inmates will have better odds of returning to society. They will be able to provide and take care of their families and even allow those seeking education to leave prison and seek even higher education opportunities. This bill will allow inmates the opportunity to utilize the skills learned in prison and better their lives after completing their sentences.

Thus, I respectfully urge the committee for a favorable report with amendments on Senate Bill 194.