



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 413

Judges – Implicit Bias – Testing, Training and Evaluation

Courts and Judicial Proceedings Committee

January 27, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

### Member Agencies:

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### Marylanders Against Poverty

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**Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports HB 413**, which aims to ensure that each judge in Maryland receives tests, training, and evaluation for implicit bias.

There are significant racial disparities in Maryland's legal and justice systems, which must be addressed in order for meaningful reform to occur. While across the nation, over half of all state prison populations are Black, Maryland leads the country in this disturbing statistic with a prison population that is 72% African American.<sup>1</sup>

The racial disparities in legal for Black individuals **cannot** be explained by socio-economic status or even education level. Rather, Black defendants are treated differently by the judicial system than White defendants. We know it is critical that the judges presiding over these cases receive training on implicit bias to reduce this bias and eliminate the racial disparities in convictions for Black pregnant individuals. While we recognize that training on implicit bias alone is not enough to eliminate bias by judges and that eliminating racial bias by judges alone will not eliminate racial disparities in Maryland's legal system, we applaud the steps forward HB 413 takes towards that goal.

We applaud HB 413's requirement for judges to receive testing, training, and evaluation on implicit bias. We also applaud the inclusion of a requirement for the State Court Administrator to make the results of this testing data public to better ensure transparency and accountability as Maryland moves towards ensuring that all citizens have equal justice under the law.

**MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 413.**

*Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.*

<sup>1</sup> Nellis, Ashley (2016). "The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in State Prisons," The Sentencing Project. Available at <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/>