

**Testimony of Delegate Jazz Lewis
Regarding Correctional Services – Step-Down Programs – Cause of Action (HB0131)
Before the House Judiciary Committee
On**

To Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am in strong support of HB0131. This bill would provide a Step-Down program to prepare the incarcerated for the transition from restrictive housing to the general population or community. Furthermore, this bill would allow former inmates to seek civil damages if they suffered a specific and direct injury from being denied the right to access a step-down program.

Why the implementation of a Step-Down program?

Restrictive Housing is the involuntary placement of someone in a cell either by themselves or with one other person for 22 hours or more per day. Studies have shown that it has been linked to many negative psychological and physical behavioral problems, including anxiety, depression, ruminations, irritability, anger, paranoia, disturbed sleep, disturbed appetite, cognitive impairments, social withdrawal, cardiovascular disease, impaired vision, self-harm, and suicide.¹

Releasing these individuals directly back into the population without a transition program limits the chance of successful reentry into the community, posing a potential public safety risk. Successful reentry to the general population ensures that released inmates do not re-offend. One study found that without meaningful programming, individuals released from restrictive housing are at a higher risk to return to criminal behavior, returning them back to the prison system.²

Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, decreasing prison populations is more important than ever as they are hotspots for the virus. Maryland's prison system received a D- on its response to COVID-19 when they failed to reduce its prison population by more than 10%.³ A transitional program would help decrease the recidivism rate and continue to decrease our prison populations in a responsible and safe way.

Maryland's Division of Correction proclaims: "A commitment to returning offenders to society with the tools necessary to keep them from their former life of crime is evident in the vast array of job skill opportunities, educational programming, psychological and health sessions, and drug treatment".⁴ Let's make good on that commitment by providing released inmates with a Step-Down program.

For these reasons I urge a favorable vote on HB0131.

¹ *Consensus Statement from the Santa Cruz Summit on Solitary Confinement and Health*, 115 Nw. U. L. Rev. 335 (2020).

<https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/nulr/vol115/iss1/9>.

² <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/256000.pdf>

³ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/MD.html>

⁴ <https://dpscs.maryland.gov/corrections/>

