



LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

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Date: February 1st, 2022

Re: HB 67 (Correctional Services – Step-Down Programs – Cause of
Action)

Position: SUPPORT

To: The Maryland House Judiciary Committee

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Mike Hilliard, and I'm a retired Major in the Baltimore Police Department. I am here representing my own views as a career law enforcement professional and as a representative of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP), a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety, addressing the root causes of crime, and working toward healing police-community relations. We support HB 67.

I spent decades working in our state's justice system, so my perspective isn't just based on personal opinion; it's based on empirical truths I witnessed on the ground. Many of the people with whom I interacted as an officer had previously been incarcerated. Our current practice of releasing incarcerated individuals from restrictive housing straight into our communities without an adjustment period is setting them up for failure and making us less safe.

In 2011, when Tom Clements was hired as Director of the Colorado Department of Corrections, 1500 people – nearly seven percent of the state's prisoners – were in solitary confinement. Tom Clements wanted to change the state's use of restrictive housing, but he didn't get the chance to complete his work. On March 19, 2013, he opened the door of his home

and was murdered by a man who had recently been released directly to the community from solitary confinement.¹

Today, no one in Colorado is released directly from solitary to the community. Instead, the state has developed a graduated step-down program to prepare people for their return home. Maryland can and must do the same.

From 2016 to 2018, we released 834 people directly from isolation in Maryland correctional facilities after spending an average of 60 days in restrictive housing.² Without any preparation, resocialization, transition coordination, or reentry services, we discharge those least likely to successfully and safely reintegrate. This practice puts the individual at risk of relapsing into criminal behavior and endangers community members who may be victimized by them.

This legislation seeks to end this unsafe practice by preventing placement in restrictive housing within 6 months of release, barring clearly delineated extenuating circumstances. For individuals in restrictive housing within 180 days of their anticipated release date, the bill would establish a transitional process for providing them with reentry planning services, including housing and public benefit assistance.

On behalf of myself and the Law Enforcement Action Partnership, I ask you to favorably recommend HB 67 to the Maryland House of Delegates for passage.

Many thanks for your time and attention.

Maj. Mike Hilliard (Ret.)
Baltimore Police Department
Spokesman, The Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP)

¹ Susan Rose. "Interview with Rick Raemisch." Interfaith Action for Human Rights.

https://www.interfaithactionhr.org/interview_with_rick_raemisch

² Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Reports on Restrictive Housing, Fiscal Years 2016-2018.