MAJR February Newsletter

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MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities

Now is the time to contact our state legislators and ask them to support the Justice Reinvestment Act! Legislators do pay attention to what voters say. MAJR presents its analysis of this bill below including a list of frequently asked questions.

Who should you contact?

 (1) Members of the House and Senate committees that consider the bill before it comes up for a vote are the first priority. If your representative is on one of these committees, it is especially important to contact that representative now: House – Judiciary and HGO; Senate – Judicial Proceedings

(2) Your own Senator and representatives are always important. You can look up your own legislator's email, phone & office address here. Be sure to let them know about the MAJR resources at http://www.ma4jr.org/justice-reinvestment/

Thank you for all you do to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities!

Phil Caroom for MAJR Executive Board

Justice Reinvestment in Maryland:

JRA, sponsored by Senate President Mike Miller (SB 1005) and House Speaker

Mike Busch (HB 1312), makes these important improvements to our state's criminal justice system.

1. **Fixing the "front door" of the corrections system**. JRA will reduce unnecessary and costly incarceration for   low-risk and nonviolent offenders to gain increased funds for less costly, more effective diversion programs. It proposes:

   - Earlier drug treatment, mental health treatment, and alternative dispute resolution programs.
   - Nondiscriminatory offender "risk-needs assessments" to avoid unneeded intervention for low-risk offenders and to target more effective services to "mid and high-risk" offenders.

2. **Reversing Maryland's high-cost, low-return prison trends**. Similar to bipartisan reforms now being considered by the U.S. Congress, JRA provisions will:

   - Reduce allowable sentences for many drug-related and other nonviolent offenses, as well as permitting fair sentence reductions retroactively for inmates serving time on the same offenses.
   - Expand alternatives to incarceration in the sentencing guidelines and include suspended sentences in calculating guideline compliance.

3. **Fixing the "back door" of the corrections system**. JRA will provide:

   - Grant funding for a statewide network of local reentry programs to help "returning citizens" access appropriate jobs, housing, treatment and other community assistance that will reduce the likelihood of recidivism.
   - Guidelines for use of proven-effective, "swift-and-certain," graduated-sanctions for "technical" violations of probation and parole, rather than inflicting full suspended prison time for every violation.

4. **Other valuable improvements** would provide more victim restitution, parole elderly and disabled inmates, access grants for local reinvestment programs, and train staff to implement "best practices."

MAJR's VIEW
By reinvesting those funds in alternatives to incarceration, our state's crime rate also could be reduced, taxpayer funds could be saved, and communities and families could be strengthened. **For all these reasons, MAJR strongly recommends support and passage of the 2016 Maryland Justice Reinvestment Act**. Together, we can work to fill policy gaps and make further improvements through supplemental policy initiatives and legislation in future years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
See MAJR's website for more extensive explanations and research that supports the Justice Reinvestment practices and provisions: www.ma4jr.org/justice-reinvestment/

Frequently Asked Questions about Maryland's Justice Reinvestment Act

Why "Smart on Crime" beats "Tough on Crime"

- Doesn't the public want government to be "tough on crime"?
- How Does Maryland's recidivism rate compare to other states?
- Why should taxpayers support employment and reentry programs for offenders?
- Where will the money come from?
- Why does the Justice Reinvestment Act need to be so long?

For answers to these and other important questions, read more on the MAJR website.

Voting Rights veto override. Congratulations!

Identical bills to restore the right to vote to people with past criminal convictions who have completed their prison time were passed overwhelmingly by the Maryland General Assembly in its 2015 session The measure was vetoed by Governor Larry Hogan but his veto was overridden by the Maryland House of Delegates on January 20th! The Maryland State Senate followed suit and overrode the governor's veto on February 9th!

Now we ask you, the citizens of Maryland, to contact your Senator and your delegates and congratulate those who voted with us for Unlocking the Vote!

Several important events are scheduled in the next few weeks:

February 26: **Solitary Confinement Reporting**: HB1180
This bill will be heard at 1pm in the House Judiciary Committee.

We are calling for written testimony (30 copies) now!
Contact Toni Holness <holness@aclu-md.org>

March 2: **Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative** 11:00-2:00
Unblocking the Exit: Press conference and rally in Lawyers Mall, Annapolis
Senate Bill 531. Contact: waltermandalalomax@hotmail.com

March 2: **Justice Reinvestment Act Hearing**
Judicial Proceedings, 2 East Miller Senate Office Building, 1:00pm
Senate bill 1005 will need our written testimony. See above.

March 10-13 **Conference on Restorative Justice**
Pendle Hill, Wallingford Pennsylvania
Scholarship assistance available

Help us by forwarding this newsletter to your community!

Stay in touch with MAJR! We will need your help for the 2016 legislative session in Annapolis!

Visit: http://www.ma4jr.org

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