

January Newsletter

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MAJR January Newsletter

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MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



Several important events are scheduled in the next few weeks:

January 28th: **Maryland Advocacy Day** 9:30-2:00
House Office Building, Room 406, 6 Bladen Street, Annapolis
Lobby for Solitary Confinement bills. Register by
contacting suzanneohatnick@comcast.net

January 31st: **Elijah Cummings Speaks**

Homewood Friends Meeting House 3107 N. Charles St; 3:00-4:15
"One Baltimore" and "What can concerned citizens do to make things better in Baltimore?"

February 7th: **Judaism and Human Rights**

The Meeting House, 5885 Robert Oliver Pl, Columbia; 3:00-4:00
Join us as Rabbi Feinberg shares a few Jewish texts as a basis for defending the dignity of every human being. He will speak about Prison Reform Issues, especially the abuse of solitary confinement in Maryland Prisons.

February 24th: **Solitary Confinement** 6:30-8:30

Episcopal Church of the Ascension, 633 Sligo Ave, Silver Spring
Rabbi Charles Feinberg, Executive Director of IAHR, Diamonte Brown, Executive Director of Out for Justice, and Returning Citizens speak. Learn about the abuse of solitary confinement in Maryland State Prisons. Rabbi Feinberg will discuss the policy issues. Ms. Brown and the returning citizens will share their personal experiences in Maryland prisons.

Justice Reinvestment Legislation

The **JRCC** is currently preparing its legislation soon to be introduced jointly by Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr. and the House Speaker Michael E. Busch. Here is a preview:



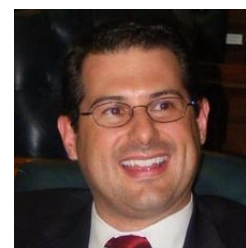
“It is our responsibility to ensure that every Maryland tax dollar spent on our criminal justice system delivers the highest return on our investment in public safety,” said Governor Hogan. “Throughout its work, the Council focused on how to treat offenders suffering from substance abuse or mental health problems, and explored reentry programs that could help them become contributing members of their communities once they return home. I want to thank the Council for its hard work on this significant report.”

“Maryland has done a good job reducing crime and incarceration over the last decade and now we are in a unique position to double down on those wins,” said Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller. “We charged the Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council with this important work last session, and they have succeeded. The Council’s recommendations are a roadmap to make our streets safer and save millions of taxpayer dollars.”



“The Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council’s recommendations provide a unique opportunity in Maryland to get better, fairer results from our criminal justice system,” said House Speaker Michael E. Busch. “This cross-section of experts has outlined strategies for smart sentencing that will better focus our resources on serious offenders to keep communities across Maryland safe.”

“Our goal is to end the revolving door of inmates cycling in and out of prison,” said Christopher B. Shank, the Council’s chair, and executive director of the Governor’s Office of Crime Control & Prevention. “I look forward to continuing this important work in the coming months, as the Hogan administration and the General Assembly consider legislation that would put these long-needed reforms into place.”



See the [Governors full press release](#).

While this anticipated 200-page JRCC bill, expected to be filed in early February, may not be perfect from [MAJR](#)'s viewpoint, its many important reforms could reduce Maryland's prison population within 10 years by at least 16% and save \$270 million. 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 bill. Together, we can work toward further improvements through policy initiatives and supplemental legislation in future years. [MAJR](#) soon will provide more information on how Marylanders can support this year's important Justice Reinvestment bill.



Voting Rights veto override.

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 "special-ordered" – or postponed – an override vote on SB340 to February 5th.

We eagerly await February 5 for the Senate to affirm the House's override vote. Thirty days after this Senate vote to override, the bill will go into effect and over 40,000 Marylanders will regain their right to vote. We thank our House of Delegates for standing firm in furthering the right to vote for all Marylanders.

Now we ask you, the citizens of Maryland, to contact [your Senator](#) NOW and urge your legislator to Unlock the Vote!

[Out For Justice](#) has partnered with [Communities United](#) to spearhead the Unlock the Vote Coalition. We are a coalition of voters' rights advocates and ex-offenders who are working to reform the current voting policy in Maryland (for ex-offenders). Currently in Maryland ex-felons that are on parole and probation cannot vote. The Unlock the Vote Coalition wants to change this law so that immediately upon release, ex-felons can vote. For more information or to join the Unlock the Vote Coalition, please contact Jane Henderson at

Collateral Consequences to be studied

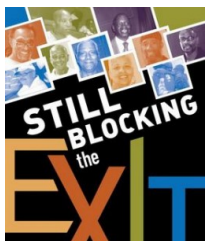
Governor Larry Hogan announced a multi-agency initiative, led by the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention, to conduct an extensive review of the legal and regulatory barriers that individuals with a criminal record face when re-entering the community after time in prison.



Lea Green of Maryland C.U.R.E.
with Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford

In addition to criminal penalties that may be imposed at sentencing, there are many legal and regulatory penalties, sanctions, and restrictions—commonly known as collateral consequences—that are distinct from the direct consequences imposed as part of the court's judgment at sentencing. For example, those with a criminal record may lose their professional or occupational licenses. They may have difficulty getting a job, starting a business, accessing public services and programs such as student loans and housing, or volunteering in the community. While these consequences are often discussed within the context of re-entry from incarceration, they can also affect those who serve no prison time.

This effort will build upon the work of the **Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council**, a group organized to develop recommendations to further decrease the State's prison population, reduce recidivism, and control corrections spending.



Unblocking the Exit

1. Because of Maryland's broken parole system, taxpayers have spent millions of dollars incarcerating people who could safely be released, most of whom are African American.
2. Maryland is one of only three states that require gubernatorial approval to grant parole to parole eligible lifer's. This requirement wrongly politicizes the parole process.
3. Since 1995, no lifer has been paroled in Maryland, even though more than two thousand people are serving parole-eligible sentences and several dozen have been recommended for release by the Maryland Parole Commission after

have been recommended for release by the Maryland Parole Commission after extensive vetting and review.

4. The average age of individuals who have been recommended for release but are still inside is 60 years old.
5. These people were sentenced with the understanding that they would have a meaningful opportunity for release if they were rehabilitated. Many were expected to serve less than 20 years, and have now served twice that much time.
6. Studies show that people serving life sentences have lower recidivism rates than those convicted of less serious crimes. The success of those released due to the Unger case demonstrates that lifers can return home without compromising public safety. (Since May 2013 over 125 have been released, with no recidivist.)
7. The parole decision should rest with the parole commissioners who have expertise and a thorough process. Without a change, Maryland will continue to spend millions to incarcerate an elderly and aging lifer population who could live safely in the community, simply because of politics.

See the YouTube video: **Unblocking the Exit:** <https://youtu.be/8qTdJxkrLxs>

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