



Maryland Alliance For Justice Reform

Major News

Working to make Maryland communities

safer through proven and effective criminal justice measures.

Our bipartisan alliance, with honorary co-chairs former Governor Robert L. Ehrlich and former Chief Judge of the Court of Special Appeals Joseph H. Murphy, has conferred with citizens and organizations around the state as we encourage our legislators to support these bills:

Two Lobby Training Opportunities:

Saturday, January 10 from 9-1 at the MOVE Training Center 1450 Mercantile Lane #157, Upper Marlboro, MD 20774

Saturday, January 17 from 10-2 at Liberty Rec & Tech Center 3901 Maine Avenue (Liberty Heights/Garrison Blvd.), Baltimore, MD

RSVP to MAJR.legislation@gmail.com or 443-583-4251

2015

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR GETTING MARYLAND CORRECTIONS RIGHT

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform will offer the 2015 Maryland General Assembly a full toolkit of strategies to repair gaps in our state's corrections system. These half-dozen interrelated bills offer fixes to funding, risk-screening, **diversion**, reentry, employment, and parole, already proven in other U.S. states. Together, these bills can lower Maryland's incarceration and recidivism rates, and will increase our public safety without any increase to the state budget.

This incarceration reform legislation is urgently needed because: (1) **Funding** now is prioritized for incarceration rather than rehabilitation; (2) **Low risk offenders** are being incarcerated instead of being given community-based supervision, wasting state funds (\$38,000 per inmate annually) and increasing re-offense rates; (3) **High risk offenders** are not offered focused rehabilitation during incarceration or opportunities for employment upon release, boosting odds for repeat offenses; and (4) Needed reentry services, jobs and diversion programs are not available statewide.

Our bipartisan alliance, with honorary co-chairs former Governor Robert L. Ehrlich and former Chief Judge Joseph H. Murphy, has conferred with citizens and organizations around the state as we encourage our legislators to support the recommended legislation, as follows:

1) **FUNDING: "Maryland Safer Communities Reinvestment Fund"** – Using the federally-endorsed method of a "Justice Reinvestment (JR)" budget, this bill funds* other related initiatives below without raising taxes. The same funds now used for state prisons, with reduction of low-risk inmates, are placed in a revolving fund for (a) improved offender screening, (b) **diversion**, (c) re-entry services, (d) victim

assistance, (e) job-training and other services as funds become available. (*Three other recidivism-reduction measures (5B, 5C and 6) require little or no state funds.)

2) **DIVERSION: "Safer Communities Conciliation Act"** – With JR funds, this bill expands Maryland's successful juvenile **mediation** and "restorative justice" programs to youthful adult and misdemeanor offenders. When offenders successfully complete agreements to satisfy victims (e.g., restitution, counseling, no new problems), charges are not filed or are dismissed, so no criminal record impedes employment.

3) **SCREENING: "Screening for Public Safety and More Effective Corrections"** – With JR funds, this bill uses evidence-based screening to identify and target services for inmates based on factors likely to cause repeat offenses. Also, plans call for retraining current staff to employ methods proven more effective.

4) **LOCAL COOPERATION: "Full and Fair Reimbursement for Local Detention"** – With JR funds, County detention centers may agree to assist the State in early screening, re-entry and pre-release services without current financial penalties.

5) **EMPLOYMENT-RELATED MEASURES:** Regular employment reduces **recidivism by 50%**, so MAJR also recommends 3 bills as follows:

A) "Prisoners' Employment and Rehabilitation Resources" – With JR funds, this bill expands Maryland's successful Correctional Enterprises prison job programs, encourages new "social enterprise" employers,

and supports more job placements for departing inmates—thus, reducing repeat offenses.

B) **“Maryland Second Chance Act of 2015”** – Championed by the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF), this bill would allow certain misdemeanor convictions to be shielded from public view after a 3-5 year waiting period.

C) **“Ex-Offenders’ Earned Opportunities for Employment Act”** – Based on the Uniform Laws Commission model, this bill identifies **“collateral consequences”** in MD law due to criminal records, and permits sentencing courts and the Parole Commission to order part or full restoration of employment rights, licenses, etc., if no unreasonable risk to the safety or

welfare of others exists. It also advises offenders of **“collateral consequences”** of conviction as part of a guilty plea and sentencing process; provides that judges and the Parole Commission may rescind some consequences; and provides that offenders may earn **expungement**, shielded records, and **“certificates of rehabilitation”** for confirmed lawful behavior after five years for certain categories of offenses.

6) MORE EFFECTIVE PAROLE: **“Parole Incentive for Life”** – Developed by Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative, this bill provides that final decisions concerning offenders with life sentences with the possibility of parole will be made by the Governor’s appointed Parole Commissioners, rather than requiring the Governor’s continuous

intervention and approval. Individual parole decisions will apply evidence-based principles, such as considering victim input and evaluating the offender’s record. This system, used in 47 other U.S. states, also insulates a governor from possible **“Willie Horton”** anxiety and increases inmates’ incentive for good behavior. Offenders sentenced to **life without the possibility of parole** remain unaffected. The release of elderly and medically challenged inmates can also greatly reduce Maryland’s corrections budget.

For more information including complete drafts of the 8 proposed bills described briefly above, please go to our website www.ma4jr.org or write MAJR at the Annapolis Friends Peace and Justice Center, 351 Dubois Road, Annapolis, MD 21401

The book ***The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*** by Michelle Alexander has been a game changer. In 2013, the Working Group on Racism of Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (the Quaker group encompassing parts of four states) encouraged members of constituent Quaker meetings to read this book, and for meetings to hold study groups. Many complied. Annapolis Friends invited members of St. Phillip’s Episcopal Church, a mostly African American church, to join them for seven sessions of discussion.

Several sessions into the book study, there was an item in the local paper saying that the Anne Arundel delegation to the General Assembly was holding a hearing to learn what county residents hoped the 2014 session would achieve. Members of the Annapolis Friends reading group signed up and presented a proposal to form a task force to see how the rate of incarceration might be lowered in Maryland. A large number of people from the Committee of Concerned Citizens and Maryland C.U.R.E. came to the hearing from Baltimore. They made up about 75% of the audience. This was the beginning of the coalition that now includes criminal justice professionals, people who have been incarcerated, and many others from various parts of Maryland.

Senator Joanne Benson from Prince George’s County contacted us asking to sponsor the bill. Delegate Darren Swain sponsored it in the House of Delegates. We lobbied hard but the bill did not pass. At the end of the session, we hit the ground running, deciding to bypass a task force in 2015 and just put forward seven bills for incarceration reform by the 2015 Maryland General Assembly. As the alliance grew, we adopted the name Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR).

CREATION OF MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

A MESSAGE FROM THE HONORARY CHAIRMEN

Robert Ehrlich
Former Governor of Maryland



We all know the numbers. Approximately a quarter of a million incarcerated in federal prison, almost 1.5 million folks incarcerated in state prisons. We live in a nation that imprisons a higher percentage of its population than any other nation in the world. I remember sitting in the Maryland state legislature between 1987 and 1995 and debating what predicate offenses we would add to our juvenile justice statutes in order to wave more violent teenagers into adult court. Because in the era it was all about being ‘tough on crime’ And here we are, a few years later, with this mess.



Joseph F. Murphy, Jr.

*Former Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals
Former Chief Judge, Maryland Court of Special Appeals
Former Deputy State’s Attorney, Baltimore City
Maryland Champion for Victims Award
Maryland Crime Victims’ Resource Center*

“All of us benefit from programs that are effective in reducing crimes committed by defendants who have been ‘returned’ to our communities.”

STEERING COMMITTEE

Martha Baer

Educator & MCI-J Volunteer

Philip Caroom

Former chair Maryland Judic. Conf. Ad Hoc Committee on Sentencing, Alternatives, Reentry & Best Practices
Former Judicial Liaison to Maryland Reentry Taskforce

Barbara Thomas

Annapolis Friends Peace and Justice Center

Lea Green

Director, Maryland C.U.R.E.

Suzanne O’Hatnick, Chair,
Interfaith Action for Human Rights

Robert J. Rhudy

Former Director of Mediation, Maryland Court of Special Appeals
Former Executive Director, Maryland Legal Services Corporation

Susannah Hills Rose

Senior Writer, Advocates for Human Potential, Inc

Judith Sachwald

Former Director of Parole and Probation, State of Maryland

Christopher Ervin

Vice Chairman, The Committee Of Concerned Citizens
President of The Lazarus Rite LLC

Patience Schenck

Educator
Member, Annapolis Friends Peace and Justice Center

LOBBYING TRAINING & COORDINATING COMMITTEE

- Robert ‘Bob’ Rhudy
- Rebecca Gardner
- Lea Green
- Pat Schenck
- Caryn York
- Barbara Thomas
- Diamonte Brown
- Rose Dailey
- Christopher Ervin
- Suzanne O’Hatnick
- Tiffany McAllister
- Vincent Greco



December 30, 2014. Right to left: Robert ‘Bob’ Rhudy, Lea Green, Senator Joanne Benson, and Christopher Ervin meet to discuss MAJR’s legislative package.

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

OUT FOR JUSTICE

Out For Justice (OFJ) believes that in order to make real change, the people directly impacted must be the people to lead their respective movement. That being said, Out For Justice members mobilize other ex-offenders to stand behind issues that effect them.

OFJ understands that ex-offenders must take responsibility for their actions. We cannot continuously ask for handouts and seek sympathy. We have to use our transferable skills to actively change the negative perception the community has of ex-offenders.

We believe that it is unacceptable for ex-offenders to only be concerned with taking care of their needs and their family. Individual success is not success, it's a step forward. We must succeed as a

unit to truly be successful as a society, not just individuals.

Diamonte Brown, Organizer
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(443) 422-8884

INTERFAITH ACTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (IAHR)

By Suzanne O’Hatnick

(IAHR) represents people from a broad range of faith communities and others in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. who have mobilized to change the culture, policies and practices in our country that would permit torture and abuse or that violate human dignity. In Maryland our efforts focus on ending prolonged solitary confinement in Maryland prisons, a

practice that can have devastating long term effects. All our citizens count. MAJR’s initiatives support human dignity, alternatives to incarceration and the restoration of rights after incarceration. Our common work to reform our penal system - to make it both more humane and effective - makes us natural partners.

COMMUNITY CONFERENCE CENTER

By: Lauren Abramson

I support MAJR because I believe strongly that:

(a) We need to use proven methods to improve our criminal justice system, which is currently: overburdened; costly; not producing the desired social impacts of reducing re-offending; biased based on income and skin

(b) a large percentage of the cases handled by our criminal justice system can be better served by high-quality Community Conferencing and restorative justice processes that are voluntary, community-based, and which include victims in deciding outcomes.

(c) the cost-savings of effective court alternatives should be directed back into programs which are producing those savings.

ANNAPOLIS FRIENDS PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER

Collaborate with FCNL in national initiatives to lower incarceration rates in federal prisons. Include conservative supporters, because rehabilitation saves more taxpayer funds than incarceration and reduced recidivism is “smart on crime.” b) On the state level, network with Quakers and others to promote legislation to reduce incarceration, expand educational opportunities in prison, and promote ex-offender employment (e.g., “Ban the Box” that ex-offenders must check on job applications). c) On the local level, network with local detention centers, nonprofits and others to build comprehensive reentry programs to work with offenders as early as possible in their incarceration. d) On all levels, seek to humanize prisons by increasing prison visitation programs, such as the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP); providing better health care; increasing compassionate release; and reducing solitary confinement

MARYLAND CURE

Lea Green, President

Maryland CURE is a state chapter of National CURE. While we support many prison ministry and advocacy groups, our mission is to work for changes in the legislative system in support of criminal justice reform.

Prisoners cannot vote, but their family members and friends can. One of the goals of all CURE chapters is to make sure that everyone knows who their legislators are and to assist them in registering to vote. No vote means no voice.

THE COMMITTEE OF CONCERNED CITIZENS

Christopher Ervin, Vice Chair

I and the CCC joined the effort which became MAJR as a result of the disparate impact of the criminal justice system on communities of color. The punishment BEYOND the punishment which doesn't just penalize the individual, but further damages whole communities and it must be changed.

MARYLAND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

Walter Lomax, Director

Redemption is what establishes the political, economic, and social structure of our society. Without forgiveness, we are left with a society believing that if you make

some mistakes and will not be forgiven, there is no incentive not to continue making them. Justice treats people fairly in all aspects of their activities—social, political, and economic.

FRIEND OF A FRIEND

Eddie Conway

Friend of a Friend is a community organization that works with people in conditions in which they need help and we come as Friends with Love. MAJR does this work on the Justice Reform front and we support them as our partner and friend.

JOB OPPORTUNITY TASK FORCE

Caryn York

The mission of JOTF is to develop and advocate policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-income workers and job seekers.

- Bethesda Friends Meeting – Peace & Social Justice Committee
- Elite Human Resources
- Interfaith Action for Human Rights
- Patapsco Friends Meeting
- People for Change Coalition
- Stony Run Friends Meeting
- Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis

OUTSIDE WRITING IN

By Vincent Greco

As a person whose life has centered around Maryland politics for the past three plus decades, this year's legislative session is about as promising as I've seen. There is new governor with a new direction, and a super-lobbying group united and guided by a former Governor and a former Chief Judge of the Special Court of Appeals; with an equally impressive Steering Committee.

MAJR (pronounced 'major'), as you've come to know in the previous pages, is a united group of people and organizations invested in bringing significant change to the present (decades long) failing criminal justice system, in particular the prison and parole systems.

During the past two decades since the return to medium security of lifers from work-release and the subsequent prohibition of their return, the Maryland system has become more concerned with political ramifications rather than focusing on a successful system which in turn increases public safety.

It is well known that 95% of all prisoners one day return to the community and their

overall reintegration is far from successful. The system sadly touts a 46% failure rate. This is unacceptable and the public needs to demand better.

If the University of Maryland failed to graduate 46% of its students, the public would demand immediate closure and a complete overhaul. I venture to say it would not re-open until the implementation of a new and proven curriculum which would drastically increase the student graduation rate. MAJR's cadre of proposed legislation to improve the criminal justice system will do such that—implement a new curriculum to improve public safety and decrease the victimization of innocent people.

The foundation and strength of MAJR is the unified front. Over the years there have been numerous organizations attempting to effect change through legislative and/or executive action but they usually forged alone. This year, under the umbrella of MAJR, the various forces have been unified. While groups retain their individuality, now however, they are joining forces under this powerful umbrella, and my friends, this umbrella can withstand a political storm equal to that of a Nor'easter.

The issue of removing the governor from the parole process for lifers and the other pieces of legislation will affect the lives of those on the inside. For those of us who have received a blessing, we must present this unified front and not let any **type of distraction** side track us, including individual agendas.

For the past several years there has been stellar groups of people fighting the good fight and they must be acknowledged and their expertise should be utilized. For those of us out here we owe it to those left behind, we owe it to their families, we owe it to our families, and we owe it to the community to fight the unified fight and tackle the opposition.

Have your family and friends visit the website @ www.majr.org. Have them join MAJR and keep you abreast of the proposed legislation. The next issue will be forthcoming soon. Stay informed and stay unified!

This Newsletter is produced by The Maryland Alliance For Justice Reform. Copying is approved and encouraged. Spread the Word!

Vincent Greco, Guest Editor