

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working together for a criminal justice system that serves our communities



2015 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR GETTING MARYLAND CORRECTIONS RIGHT

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR)'s 2015 initiatives offer the General Assembly a toolkit to begin repair of our state's corrections system. This bipartisan alliance, with honorary co-chairs former Governor Robert L. Ehrlich and former Chief Judge Joseph H. Murphy, conferred with Maryland citizens, organizations, experts and legislators to sponsor these interrelated bills:

- 1) **BUDGET-SAVINGS and NEW PRIORITIES:** The "Justice Reinvestment" Act—a bipartisan plan recommended by the U.S. Dept. of Justice and adopted in 26 other states— reduces low-risk prison populations and repurposes the same funds for screening, reentry, offender employment, and other services to lower recidivism and to increase public safety. *SB 602 (Miller-D) / HB0388 (Dumais and Vallario)- Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council*
- 2) **DIVERSION:** "Safer Communities Conciliation Act"- This bill expands Maryland's successful juvenile mediation and "restorative justice" programs to adults. 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. *SB 388 (Hough-R) / HB 791 (McComas) - Expungement - Restorative Justice Programs*
- 3) **EMPLOYMENT-RELATED MEASURES:** Regular employment reduces recidivism by 50%, so MAJR also supports:
 - A) The Maryland Second Chance Act of 2015 - Championed by the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF), this bill would allow certain nonviolent misdemeanor convictions to be shielded from public view after a 3-7 year waiting period, balancing the public's need to know with ex-offenders' employment needs. *HB0244(Anderson-D)/SB 526 (Raskin-D) - Maryland Second Chance Act of 2015*
 - B) "Ex-Offenders' Earned Opportunities for Employment Act"-Based on the Uniform Laws Commission (ULC) model, this bill identifies "collateral consequences" in our state law due to criminal records, then permits our sentencing courts and Parole Commission to order part or full restoration of employment rights, licenses, etc., if no unreasonable risk is found to public safety or others' welfare. It also creates a website to notify offenders of "collateral consequences" of conviction as part of a guilty plea and sentencing process; and provides ex-offenders may earn expungement, shielded records, and "certificates of rehabilitation" for confirmed lawful behavior after 5 years for certain categories of offenses. *SB 686 (Benson-D) / HB 1059 (Barnes) - Earned Opportunities – Collateral Consequences*
- 4) **MORE EFFECTIVE PAROLE:** "Parole Incentive for Life"- Developed by Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative (RJI), this bill provides that final decisions concerning offenders with life sentences with possibility of parole will be made by Governor's appointed Parole Commissioners, rather than requiring Governor's continuous intervention and approval. Individual parole decisions apply evidence-based principles, include a victim's input and evaluate an 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 possibility of parole remain unaffected. Release of elderly and medically challenged inmates can provide huge savings to the state corrections budget. *HB0303 (Carter)/ SB0111(McFadden-D)- Inmates - Life Imprisonment - Parole Reform*

For more information on the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, including complete drafts of these bills as described briefly above, please go to the our website at www.ma4jr.org or call the MAJR number (443) 583-4251 at the Annapolis Friends Peace and Justice Center, 351 Dubois Road, Annapolis, MD 21401.