

## MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



### **2019 Maryland Legislative Session Summary**

Criminal justice reforms, like other initiatives, faced unusual hurdles during the 2019 Maryland General Assembly Session: a crop of newly-elected legislators, an unusually-long administrative delay in getting bills through the drafting office, then a great rush for hearings to catch up before the three-month Session is over. Advocates in some hearings were limited to 60 seconds oral testimony! Serious illnesses of both House Speaker Mike Busch (who died on the final day) and of Senate President Mike Miller also cast a shadow.

Despite these challenges, seven bills MAJR-supported bills passed both houses — tying our 2018 record! Here they are:

1. **Occupational licenses and certificates (HB 22)** provides that an agency cannot deny a license or certificate based on a prior conviction unless it finds a “direct connection” between the nature of the occupation and the conviction.
2. **Inmate Labor (HB 78 / SB 527)** directs that the State must report, prison-by-prison, the number of inmates employed, their job classifications, and wages, as part of the annual report of Maryland prisons.
3. **Justice Reinvestment - clarification (HB 274 / SB 327)** confirms that certain provisions related to violation of probation apply only to cases occurring after 10/1/17.
4. **Women’s Prerelease (SB 821)** requires a detailed study to compare “the prerelease programs and facilities available in the State to men and women.”
5. **Juvenile Justice Reform Council (HB 606 / SB 856)** initiates a year-long process, in which the Council will research and recommend best practices to reduce involvement of juveniles in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems.
6. **Juveniles solitary confinement (HB 1001 / SB 774)** restricts the current overuse of solitary confinement for juveniles in the adult prison system, reducing the severity of solitary restrictions, and requiring annual reporting as to usage.
7. **Opioid and mental health screening (HB 116 / SB 846)** establishes statewide pretrial assessment and treatment for opioid abuse and mental health disorders. The process begins with 4 counties by January 2020, 6 more counties by October 2021, and the remainder of the State by January 2023. Annual reporting of statistics beginning in 2020.

Three other bills involved “near misses,” passing one or both houses:

1. **Expungement (HB 13 / SB 238)** passed in both House and Senate but, unfortunately, with different amendments. A conference committee to resolve the differences ran out of time on the last day of Session. The bill cannot become law in 2019, but should pass in 2020.
2. **Citations in lieu of arrest (HB 280)** for simple drug possession, when no overdoses or more serious offense occurs, passed the House for the second year but once again was stopped in a Senate committee.
3. **Correctional education milestones (SB 621)**—to restore incentives for prison inmates to obtain GEDs, college degrees, and vocational certificates—passed the Senate but was stopped in a House committee.

And, finally, the single bill that MAJR opposed (further restricting **Parole for those with Life sentences - SB 150**) failed. Unfortunately, despite the support of MAJR and other advocate-groups, the bill to eliminate Maryland Governors' long-overused veto of Parole-eligible Lifers (**HB 443 / SB 121**) also failed.

On balance, it was a successful Session. Thanks to each and every MAJR member who contacted his or her representative on one or more of these issues. You made a difference!



Also, this Session, we continued our tradition of offering a **Legislative Breakfast**— with this year's theme of "Unfinished Work of Justice Reinvestment" focusing particularly on the unmet mental health needs of those in Maryland's correctional system.

We thank MAJR's honorary co-chair, former DPSCS Secretary Stu Simms for his keynote address and our sponsors Sen. Delores Kelley, Del. Kathleen Dumais, and Del. Erik Barron for their insightful remarks.

After the Breakfast, we held our annual Lobby Day for members, visiting more than two dozen legislator's offices and obtaining valuable feedback.

We also enjoyed the opportunity to continue partnering with National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI- Maryland), the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association (MCAA), Job Opportunity Taskforce (JOTF), Out for Justice (OFJ), Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle (LBS) and others in support of their initiatives.

As we look ahead toward the new 2019-2020 "school year" for Maryland Criminal Justice policy, MAJR has begun planning for a new initiative to encourage "Seamless Reentry"— that is, improved preparation and assistance for "returning citizens" as they leave state prisons and return to the communities. A stakeholders' "Reentry Roundtable" tentatively is planned for September 2019. Stay tuned for more details!





Also, as MAJR completes its 5th year of existence, we plan to “take stock” of our group and to consider whether there are ways we can improve: Should we begin fund-raising and hire part time staff? Should we expand or change our committee / workgroup system? Are there different initiatives we should pursue? We will invite member input at a General Meeting in September — with more detail to be provided in a later newsletter.

Thanks again to all MAJR members for your ongoing support this year!



## MAJR General Meeting

Friday September 20th, 2019

6:00pm - Potluck Supper

7pm-9pm General Meeting

....Location to be announced....

MAJR is a nonpartisan association of over fifty community organizations and churches with members in every part of the state, formed to support justice reinvestment. Individual supporters include judges, attorneys, corrections professionals, as well as returning citizens, victims, and service providers.

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