

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



Initiatives 2020

You have an opportunity to lift up your concerns to members of Maryland's legislature. For the complete list of questions and resources visit: <https://www.ma4jr.org/issue-briefs/> Find your Maryland Legislator by going to the following website: <http://mdelect.net/>

Smart on Crime

MAJR Perspective:

Governor Hogan and Maryland's Executive Branch have the responsibility not only to keep our streets safe in the short run by getting the worst offenders off our streets. But they also should ensure those offenders learn from their mistakes and return to our communities in the long run with the ability and enthusiasm to live better, more productive lives and to build safer communities. Currently, a large part of the crime problem is that violent offenders return to our communities without the skills, knowledge, training, or connections to make their lives better.

<https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/SmartonCrime.pdf>

<https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ag/legacy/2013/08/12/smart-on-crime.pdf>

<https://www.ma4jr.org/smart-on-crime/>

Front Door

Felony Murder Rule

MAJR Perspective:

Under the legal doctrine of felony murder, if someone dies as a result of a felony, anyone who participated in that felony is ruled as guilty as a killer—even if they themselves didn't kill, didn't foresee the killing, and never meant to kill anyone. In Maryland, felony murder is treated the same as a premeditated first degree murder in sentencing.

Thus, the felony murder rule undermines a central concept of criminal justice — that we punish people for the crimes they commit or intend to commit. This doctrine also can lead to unjust results, including cases where the person who actually committed the murder receives lesser punishment than another person who did not. One study suggests that women and youth are convicted disproportionately under the felony-murder rule. The cost to the taxpayers of such disproportionate and unjustified punishment is enormous.

<https://www.ma4jr.org/felony-murder-rule/>

Citations for Misdemeanors

MAJR Perspective:

This initiative (HB408), that passed the House in 2017, could increase use of citations. Increased citation use also is recommended by the national conference of state legislatures and has begun in many other states and local jurisdictions.

<https://www.ma4jr.org/citations/>

[International Chiefs of Police, “Citation in Lieu of Arrest”](#)

[Pretrial Justice Institute, “Citation in Lieu of Custodial Arrest: Recommendation”](#)

Risk Assessment

MAJR Perspective:

Court systems in more than two dozen US cities and states are using algorithms that assess flight risk without considering race, gender, or socioeconomic status, in an attempt to remove implicit bias from the equation producing a more objective assessment. In over 90% of Maryland criminal cases sentencing decisions are made without risk-assessment or pre-sentence investigations. Judges have no standardized method to learn what factors caused an offender to commit an offense or what measures might prevent repetitions. There is an urgent need to standardize the judicial review process.

<https://www.ma4jr.org/smart-on-crime/>

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/reentry/posts/risk-assessment-what-you-need-to-know/>

Behind the Walls

Rewarding Educational Milestones

MAJR Perspective:

To help people who have served time in our state prisons live stable, productive lives when they re-enter our communities, providing education while they are in custody is critical. Motivation is a key ingredient in educational achievement and our correctional system needs to use diminution credits to benefit both the State and the inmate. “Every dollar invested in correctional education,” a RAND study concluded, “saves nearly five in reincarceration costs over three years.” Currently, Maryland inadequately rewards education in its prisons.

<https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/EducationCredits.pdf>

<https://www.abell.org/sites/default/files/files/Abell%20Prison%20Education%20Report%2072517%20final.pdf>

Parole Incentive for Lifers

MAJR Perspective:

Maryland law provides two types of life sentences – those eligible for parole and those without the possibility of parole. However, some Governors have eliminated this distinction by automatically vetoing parole for every life-sentenced inmate. Rather than veto every parole, Governors should select capable Parole Commissioners who would make evidence-based recommendations, prescribing parole for inmates who earned it and providing the safest parole supervision conditions.

<https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2.3-parole-intro.pdf>

Solitary Confinement

MAJR Perspective:

Nationally, 4-5% of prisoners are in solitary—but Maryland’s practice is roughly twice that, 8% of Maryland’s prison population is in solitary. During 2017, 73% of Maryland’s prison population was placed in restrictive housing at some point. It is three times more expensive to hold a prisoner in segregation than in the general population. Experts have documented that prolonged solitary confinement is cruel, expensive and ineffective. We need your help in correcting Maryland’s system of corrections.

<https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Solitary-Confinement.pdf>

<https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/TalkingPoints.pdf>

Back Door

Reentry Programs

MAJR Perspective

Prisoner reentry is the process by which prisoners who have been released return to the community. Seamless reentry is an effective combination of services and resources that remove barriers and hurdles preventing returning citizens from succeeding as productive and contributing members of society. Many types of programs have been implemented with the goal of reducing recidivism; from 2001 to 2004, the federal government allocated over \$100 million for reentry programs.

Women’s Pre-Release Center

MAJR Perspective

The State of Maryland operates six Pre-Release centers for men returning to our communities. Due to budget constraints the State of Maryland closed the only pre-release center for women in Baltimore City. Women who are returning to our communities are incarcerated in MCIW, Maryland’s only women’s prison. We need your help in making sure men and women have equal access and equal opportunities. MAJR will work with OFJ and the Maryland Justice Project on this issue.

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (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.