

SUPPORT HB1300 / SB1000 - Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Implementation

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Maggie McIntosh and House Appropriations Committee,
Chair Anne Kaiser and House Ways and Means Committee,
Chair Guy Guzzone and Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, and
Chair Paul Pinsky and Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

FROM: Jenny Zito, MAJR Executive Committee

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The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) has long recognized that one of the key ways to reduce crime and incarceration is to ensure an opportunity for those born into poverty to build productive and happy lives. The implementation of the Kirwan Commission's recommendations in HB1300 and SB1000 is not only an opportunity to bring a world class education to all Maryland children, it is also a chance to make dramatic, long-term reductions of the flow into Maryland prisons. MAJR whole-heartedly supports this package of reforms.

In our testimony, we highlight three components of these bills which provide children living in poverty the opportunity to become self-reliant adults who contribute to their communities.

The first component we would like to highlight is providing more quality early education and support for young children living in poverty. These bills expand the early childhood Judy Centers and quality pre-Kindergarten for students living in poverty. Over and over again, studies have shown that providing quality early childhood education and support to low-income families, not only allow children to arrive in Kindergarten ready to learn, but have lifelong benefits. The children receiving this early childhood support have improved graduation rates, lower teen-pregnancy rates, better paying jobs and increased home-ownership, reduced need for special education, reduced discipline issues, and, most significantly to MAJR, they commit many fewer crimes and have far less incidence of incarceration. This not only increases the quality of their lives, but also dramatically reduces the cost of incarceration borne by taxpayers. This is truly an investment in the financial strength of all of Maryland.

The second component we would like to highlight is preparation for careers even for those not heading to college. While it is clearly important to provide access to college for students in poverty, it is even more important to the majority of students coming from impoverished backgrounds, who are not college bound, that their education leads to well-paying career opportunities. In countries with world-class reputations, there are strong career readiness programs in the last years of high school. For example in Canada, in the last two years of high school, students can earn trade certification and participate in paid apprenticeships in industries who have formed partnerships with the schools. These programs have led to increased graduation rates and excellent careers. They are also beneficial to industries, because it helps them fill entry-level positions with much needed qualified young people. Implementing the career and technical education programs in the bills before us will similarly ensure a supply of quality applicants for Maryland business and industry. With good-paying jobs like these, young people are far less likely to turn to crime.

The third important component of the bill is providing "behavioral health services" rather than just suspending or expelling kids with disciplinary problems. Maryland educators long have realized that suspension or expulsion leads to increased dropout rates and, in turn, to increased likelihood of criminal justice involvement.

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.

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REFERENCES

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