

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



Behind the Walls Workgroup

Minutes July 14, 2020

A. Attendance –zoom-meeting 38

Facilitator/Host - Olinda Moyd co –hosts – Mia.../ Candy Clark

B. A brief overview of MAJR and the Behind the Walls Workgroup was presented by Phil Caroom

C. Current bill proposals and related details where shared by key members.

1. Restrictive Housing (Solitary Confinement) _ Kim Haven (IAHR and Reproductive Justice) Two of their previous bills were passed in 2018. One stated that juveniles were to only be placed in solitary as a last resort and a strict policy stating their treatment was to be followed. The other changed the rule of mandating that pregnant women be placed in solitary during their last tri- semester to it being done only if requested from the mother. Two other bills were presented in 2019 but session closed before any action. So they will return in 2021. One prohibits direct release of a person from solitary to the public community. It requires a preparation program to be implemented before release. This bill was gathering support in the House. The other bill prohibits placing seriously mentally ill in solitary only as a last resort and limits it to no more than 15 consecutive days.

2.Ombuds Initiative - Judy Lichtenberg - This bill addresses accountability oversight of the prison facilities by an independent group. The bill states that the visits may occur anytime unannounced but they will not have the authority to make charges. They will write up and submit reports.

3. Parole for Lifers - Lea Green Lea is working to engage the family and others closely connected to those behind the walls to be involved with and support there loved ones. The bill did not get any attention last year and will be submitted again. It removes the governor from having the final say as to which lifers are approved. ED Sabin urged us to thank all of our legislators who supported the bill along with a result of the vote with names. If your

representative did not support please ask them to in the next session. Thank you – ED!

4. Correctional Education – Dave Jenkins - Dave and his team are all seasoned correctional educators and have committed to transforming it using evidenced based data. Next session's bill will be returning again from the last 2 years. It is the Diminution Credits bill, which recognizes and rewards the person who has completed a specific course with a specific large number of diminution credits that reduces the sentence length.

5. Second Look Act – Kim Haven allows anyone who has served a specific number of years (15+) to be able to request that his/her case be reviewed to determine to see if the sentence can be reduced.

6. COVID-19 – Phil Caroom – Phil shared up dated stats and added that 2,000 were eligible for release. There is a belief amongst those who are working inside the walls that unreliable data is being released. Julie Magers who directs the Justice and Recovery Advocates center in Frederick shared some insight into the situation that mask- wearing; social distancing and accurate data collection are not being followed.

D. NEW INITIATIVES

a. Maryland Parole Commission Accountability – Olinda Moyd - Olinda reviewed the Composition and Statutory Authority and Systemic issues that need to be addressed. Accountability is lacking which impacts the entire system. These include delays and failure to conduct hearings. Also family meetings with a commissioner (10 commissioners exist) are often cancelled; inadequate time allowed to review trial before hearings and other inefficiencies. Olinda is advocating for new parole commission and asking for other MAJR volunteers to help.

b. **Open door suggestions for other initiatives** - Phil Caroom would like to have the correctional system try a new approach used by Connecticut with the high-risk inmates. The inmates have a non-penal approach to their treatment and a low risk of being violent while serving their term and after release.

c. Jim Rose has a concern about the safety of the Lifer/Parole group who were released due to concerns of the dangers of COVID-19. He shared a link from MAJR board member – Jerry Mc Laurin of People for Change in Prince George's County concerning the well-planned and safe release of about 200 MD prisoners under Unger.

E. Poll of members aligning with specific Behind the Wall issues:
All issues above had members who wished to focus on that particular issue.

F. Olinda will send out a doodle poll to establish our next meeting. We plan to hold issue focus break out groups.

Respectfully submitted, Candy Clark