

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



2021 Legislative Initiatives

Front Door:

Police powers and oversight: MAJR strongly supports Maryland General Assembly leaders' proposals to restore public confidence in police action through retraining and prioritizing nonviolent services, especially as directed in [HB 139 / SB 626](#) - <https://www.ma4jr.org/police-powers/>

Marijuana legalization: When Prohibition of alcohol was repealed in 1933, crime dropped, law enforcement costs dropped, safe regulation was possible, and substantial tax revenues became available for the public good. Legalization of marijuana will bring the same opportunities and need for precautions. On balance, MAJR strongly supports Maryland General Assembly leaders' proposal to reduce Maryland's misuse of criminalization and incarceration for this public health concern, as well as to provide needed tax revenue. See [HB 32 / SB 708](#)- <https://www.ma4jr.org/marijuana/>

Citations for Misdemeanors: Citations in lieu of arrest are widely embraced by law enforcement Maryland can expand on its history of success in using this tool. Especially with deadly COVID risks for Marylanders awaiting trial in prison, citations offer public health protection and taxpayer savings. This bill has support of Maryland State's Attorneys and law enforcement. See [HB 445 / SB 671](#)- <http://www.ma4jr.org/citations/>

Education Reform: MAJR will work with Strong Schools Maryland and other advocates to override the Governor's unnecessary veto of the Kirwan plan to reduce the "school-to-prison pipeline," provide additional support for at-risk students, and improve education behind the walls. Anticipating COVID-funding troubles, the Kirwan bill already contains a safety-valve to delay its costs when State funds drop too low. See 2020 bill numbers - [HB 1300](#)- <https://www.ma4jr.org/strong-schools/>

Felony Murder Rule: 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 and didn't foresee the killing.. Application of this doctrine is especially troubling as to children whose don't have mature decision-making and are dominated by adults. In Maryland, felony murder is treated the same as a premeditated first degree murder in sentencing. See [HB 385 / SB 395](#) as to juveniles- <https://www.ma4jr.org/felony-murder-rule/>

Behind the Walls:

Rewarding Educational Milestones: Maryland's prison system should use enhanced diminution credits to better encourage more inmate degrees and vocational certificates. "Every dollar invested in correctional education," a RAND study concluded, "saves nearly five in re-incarceration costs over three years." See [HB 89 / SB 397](#)- <https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/EducationCredits.pdf>

Correctional Ombudsman Office: Without independent oversight, Maryland prisons face chronic problems involving prisoners' health, mental health, education, etc. – the COVID crisis unmistakably has demonstrated the need for greater transparency. The Ombudsman concept has been endorsed by Governor Larry Hogan: Cutting through layers of bureaucratic review now required, Maryland could join several other states with an independent Ombudsman to publicly report and recommend improvements as to prisoner's needs, as well as those of prison volunteers and families. See [HB 1188 / SB --](#) - <https://www.ma4jr.org/ombuds/>

Model Prisons: In European nations, prisons are different and provide lower recidivism than U.S. prisons. Why? With evidence-based assistance from the Vera Institute, six other states have initiated fundamental change in their prisons' cultures. If recidivism can be cut in half, improvements for Marylanders in public safety and taxpayer costs would be enormous. See [HB 698](#) / [SB 742](#)- <https://www.ma4jr.org/model-prison/>

Solitary Confinement Initiative. MAJR will support legislation of the Interfaith Action for Human Rights (IAHR): See "Step Down" Act - [HB131](#) / SB -- - <https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Solitary-Confinement.pdf>

Removing the Governor from the parole process for inmates with life sentences with possibility of parole. MAJR continues support of the legislation of the Restorative Justice Initiative. See [HB003](#) / [SB 202](#) - <https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2.3-parole-intro.pdf>

Back Door:

Re-entry Programs: Prisoner reentry is the process by which prisoners, once released, return to the community. Endorsed by DPSCS Secretary Rob Green, a state Reentry Council would bring together representatives of state prisons, local jails, nonprofit providers, and families to more promptly offer connections for returning citizens with resources in their home communities to help them succeed. [Note: No legislation is needed - this measure is to be adopted administratively.] <https://www.ma4jr.org/reentry-council/>

Women's Pre-Release Center: Override the Governor's veto to restore the women's pre-release center in Baltimore City. (Out for Justice, Maryland Justice Project, Maryland Prisoners' Rights Coalition). See 2020 bill number - [SB 684](#).

Expungement: Work with the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) to support the REDEEM Act and other expanded expungement laws. See <http://www.ma4jr.org/expungement-unit-rule/> See 2020 bills numbered HB 83 and HB 1336.

[Revised 2/7/21]