

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



2022 LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

Front Door:

Juvenile Justice Reform: The Juvenile Justice Reform Council, with the assistance of the Vera Institute of Justice, has researched best practices regarding the treatment of juveniles who are subject to the criminal and juvenile justice systems. MAJR supports those recommendations. In addition MAJR supports the Juvenile Interrogation Protection Act identifying practices that have been shown to pressure children into false confessions. [HB1187](#), [SB136](#)

Marijuana legalization: When Prohibition of alcohol was repealed in 1933, crime dropped, law enforcement costs dropped, safe regulation was possible, and substantial tax revenues became available for the public good.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 the 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. <https://www.ma4jr.org/marijuana/>

Motor Vehicle Laws - Decriminalize Driving While Poor. In Maryland, driving uninsured or without a valid license is an incarcerable offense or up to one year in jail, a \$1000 fine, or both for the first offense. Yet over 500,000 Marylanders drive uninsured throughout the state of Maryland citing the cost of auto insurance as the primary factor.. JOTF believes that an individual's poverty should not determine their mobility and is pursuing legislation to eliminate incarceration as a penalty of driving uninsured or on a license suspended for child support. [See JOTF initiatives.](#)

Behind the Walls:

Correctional Ombudsman Office: Without independent oversight, Maryland prisons face chronic problems involving individuals' health & mental health, education, etc. – the COVID crisis unmistakably has demonstrated the need for greater transparency. The Ombudsman concept has been endorsed by Gov. 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 the individual's needs, as well as those of prison volunteers and families. <https://www.ma4jr.org/ombuds/>

Direct Release from Solitary. Joining with the Interfaith Action for Human Rights (IAHR), MAJR supports changes to DPSCS procedures so that incarcerated individuals are not released directly from solitary to their community. The proposed "Step-down program" has been designed to implement these changes. [See our testimony on the 2021 legislation.](#)

Back Door:

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/>

Collateral Consequences

Removing Barriers to Employment. Backdoor plans to work with the MGA Reentry Workgroup to propose bills that remove barriers to occupational licensing, business licensing, and direct employment as well as creating incentives for businesses to become second chance employers. See <https://www.ma4jr.org/liability-2/>

Maryland REDEEM Act of 2022 A criminal record can easily be both the cause and consequence of poverty. The appearance of a criminal record in a routine background check can, and many times will, block access to employment, education, housing and occupational licensing- all of which are necessary to advance in Maryland. JOTF seeks to expand access to criminal record expungement for the 1.5 million Marylanders with a criminal record by allowing nonviolent misdemeanor and felony convictions to be eligible for expungement. [See JOTF initiatives.](#)

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Who We Are

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan association of over forty community organizations and churches with members in every part of the state. We seek legislative changes in Maryland's correctional policies to support alternatives to incarceration, address inequities, and aid citizens returning from prison to lead productive lives, thus strengthening families and communities. Individual supporters include judges, attorneys, and corrections professionals, as well as returning citizens, victims, and service providers.

Mission

- To advocate for legislative and other reforms of Maryland's criminal justice system that emphasize rehabilitation and restorative justice over mass incarceration and punishment.
- To create opportunities for those committed to criminal justice reform to meet, share resources, and engage with each other around common purposes.
- To raise awareness and understanding, among citizens of Maryland, of mass incarceration and promote positive alternatives.

Join Us!

We are working together to address the problem of mass incarceration in Maryland in several ways. We invite you to join us to accomplish our goals:

- To fully support alternatives to incarceration where appropriate;
- To save taxpayer dollars and reallocate the savings to build safer communities;
- To strengthen Maryland communities by supporting families, helping people returning from jails and prisons lead productive lives, and preventing crime;
- To end inequities in our justice system.

How We Work Together

Each of us brings unique strengths and perspectives to this work. Our work is enhanced by learning from each other, building on one another's ideas, and sharing responsibility for the group's success.

Our priorities are informed by workgroups that address three major policy areas: (1) The **"Front Door"** workgroup considers changes in how we strive to prevent crime and handle the pretrial process; (2) The **"Behind the Walls"** workgroup addresses issues related to people who are incarcerated, such as the effects of solitary confinement and the need for education; (3) The **"Back Door"** workgroup recommends changes to help people returning from prison re-enter society, including measures to reduce recidivism (return to prison). Membership is open and all are invited to participate at general meetings. Learn more about how we are organized at: <http://www.ma4jr.org/organization/>.

To support and participate in MAJR activities, go to <http://www.ma4jr.org/> and click on "Get Involved." Our website provides background on our initiatives and also offers reports (including reports on key meetings and workshops that address criminal justice issues in Maryland) and resources. You can also like us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ma4jr.org/>