

MAJR  
Behind the Walls Workgroup Meeting  
January 13,2022 24 attendees

Olinda welcomed the 24 attendees and began with legislation of upcoming issues and bills.

**TOPICS**

**Legislative Matters**

A – RESTRICTIVE HOUSING – Kim Haven, advocate with IAHR - Interfaith Alliance for Human Rights; shared that Jazz Lewis the dedicated sponsor of these Restrictive Housing bills will be running for a congressional seat of Maryland's Fourth District. He is the sponsor of a long line of solitary confinement bills. In this years' session UULM is advocating for the last of his bills , **HB67 – Direct Release**. It prohibits direct release to the community from solitary confinement. Instead, a period of rehabilitation addressing the needs of the returning citizen will be created to ensure greater community safety and a more successful reentry. Kim shared that there is strong legislative leadership support and expects it to pass. IAHR has created a letter for organizations to sign in support which Kim will forward to Olinda in early Feb.

A. WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES Monica Cooper presented two bills from the Maryland Justice Project .

1. FORCED INFANT SEPARATION ACT Sen. Jill Carter is a sponsor -This gives a mother who gives birth in prison the right to keep the child with her for one year during which both mother and child will receive professional medical and rehabilitative care as needed. Discussion addressed the concern that the father or some other family member should also have the opportunity in the selection of the caretaker. Delegate Leslie Lopez is also sponsor of this bill.

2. PRIMARY CARETAKERS ACT – This bill permits non-violent, low-level primary care takers who are serving a sentence to do so at home under a home monitoring plan. This approach reduces the trauma on the family of imprisonment of primary care takers. Monica will send a fact sheet to Olinda to share. Jill Carter and Leslie Lopez are also sponsors of this bill. Similar bill has been passed in LA, TN, MA. Now, by contrast, those who are sentenced to six months or more have their children sent to foster care and risk losing their housing.

C. OMBUDSMAN – a MAJR sponsored bill; Sen.Hettleman and Del. Debra Davis are lead sponsors. This bill establishes an oversight of the operation of the Correctional system. Past events and situations have revealed a need for more accountability and transparency in the operations and interactions within the facilities. It calls for the ombudsman to have the discretion to assess a facility with unannounced visits. Currently the Secretary of Corrections is not responsive to this change and has not responded to request to meet to discuss bill proposal. This bill is being reintroduced from last session.

**D. MODEL PRISON** – Phil Caroom shared that this is a modification of last year’s bill both of which aim to create a more rehabilitative environment behind the walls. This would focus on juveniles starting with those under twenty-five years of age, and is currently modeled in DC’s YME (Young Men Emerging) program and other states like Conn. It focuses on intense counseling, educational classes, and mentorship with older model prisoners in an environment of rehabilitation rather than intense punishment. This bill also includes a request for a Study for Youthful Offenders. Both the Vera and the Justice Policy Institute are acutely involved in this issue. Steve Steurer and others expressed moving positively towards advocating for rehabilitation approaches.

Last year the bill ran into a hurdle. The Vera Institute, which is behind some of those efforts, didn’t want to legislate the policy into existence; it wanted DOC to adopt it voluntarily. Secretary Green has been contacted several times but has not responded. This year the legislative effort is to form a study commission to look at the overall structure of prisons at it applies to all incarcerated people, not just youth.

#### OTHER POSSIBLE BILLS

As our session develops, other bills may be added to MAJR’s list –medical parole and geriatric parole are being introduced by the Maryland Prisoner’s Rights Coalition. They did not appear at the meeting this evening – representative Jene Tatore was scheduled to attend. There is a concern that the Governor will propose longer sentences to be “tough on crime” which contradicts the findings of the Justice Reinvestment Act.

#### **Non-Legislative Matters**

BTW member activity: Olinda recognized and members shared their recent work.

- Prison Correspondence Team– Ellen/ Lucy /John Sturc
- Letter Writing Team - Anita Weis leads a group that wrote a letter to Secretary Green regarding programming and treatment services. They received a letter in response. She reported that they are very disappointed in the quality of the response to MAJR’s letter of concerns about the lack of treatment of services to those behind the walls. They also noted the inaccuracy accuracy of information. There will be a follow up to this to Secretary’s Green. The group is scheduled to meet again on January 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- COVID CONCERNS – Omicron spread was severe, spoiled dosages were received by prisoners, lack of masks, prisoners making their own, Prison officers not adequately trained, Keith Wallington and staff of JPI will met with Secretary Green concerning these issues.
- Web Information – Jim Rose reported on the great response to MAJR mailings made available by the addition of MUSTER technology; last session 7,000 emails sent with 60-70% of members responding to alerts He is seeking another person to step up to managing this incredibly important job.

#### Logistic information:

1. MGA set to go in-person mode pending... Feb. 14
2. MAJR zoom Lobby Day Jan. 31

Minutes by Judith Lichtenberg & Candy Clark