

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform

Working together for a criminal justice system that better serves our communities



Written Testimony on behalf of The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform

Submitted by Olinda Moyd

RE: Budget Hearing for The Office of Correctional Ombudsman

Friday, January 30, 2026

Before the Budget and Taxation Committee

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is an all-volunteer, non-partisan justice reform organization with over two thousand members representing all counties in the state. Partnering with Senator Shelly Hettleman and Delegate Debra Davis, we spearheaded the creation of the Office of Correctional Ombudsman upon recognizing the need for independent oversight in our prisons and juvenile detention centers in Maryland. With support from the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of The Public Defender, the law became effective with approval from our Governor.

Governor Moore appointed Yvonne Briley-Wilson as the Correctional Ombudsman in September 2024, and she was subsequently confirmed by the Senate in February 2025. The office has launched an informative website, maintained a visible presence at the institutions, engaged in several corruption and abuse investigations that have resulted in DPSCS staff changes and, most importantly, men and women in our prisons report that they are responsive to their complaints.

We write to demonstrate our support to ensure that the funding for this office be sustained and expanded to continue the critical work of this office. This also is needed to comply with the enactment legislation which specified that *the intent of the legislation that the first year of the OCO will focus its activities primarily on those State correctional facilities located in the area of Jessup, Maryland with operations expanded to all Maryland prisons in later years*. It is imperative that this office be adequately staffed and funded to expand beyond the Jessup area so that all of our men, women and (as the OCO now incorporates the previously-existing Juvenile Justice Monitor office) children behind bars can benefit from independent oversight.

Independent prison oversight is a critical component of a just and humane criminal justice system. As an organization that has studied and witnessed the operations of correctional facilities, we are compelled to testify to the profound importance of oversight in ensuring the safety, dignity, and rights of incarcerated individuals, staff, and the broader community.

Ensuring Accountability and Transparency

Oversight mechanisms serve as a safeguard against abuse, neglect, and misconduct within prisons. Without independent review and investigation, instances of excessive force, medical neglect, and unsanitary living conditions can go unnoticed or unaddressed. The OCO holds correctional institutions accountable for upholding legal and ethical standards, providing a check on practices that may otherwise lead to human rights violations and corruption, as has recently been highlighted in several media outlets.

The OCO published reports are thorough and detailed and demonstrate the importance of transparency which is vital to building public trust in the correctional system. These findings and reports inform the public, policymakers, and stakeholders of what is happening in hidden places. Without transparency, prisons risk becoming isolated institutions where problems are hidden, rather than addressed.

Effective and efficient oversight all promote humane treatment, rehabilitation and improve safety for all Marylanders.

Conclusion

The current Maryland State Operating Budget provides for a 2026 appropriation budget of \$1,859,194 and 2027 allowance budget of \$2,162,141 (at page 242). We believe that these amounts should be increased to support the OCO as this office carries out its designated function of providing independent oversight in conducting investigations, review, and assessments of administrative acts taken by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and the Department of Juvenile Services in Maryland.

Upon reviewing the key observations in the analysis of the FY 2027 Maryland Executive Budget it is important to note that OCO is developing a case management system to enhance their ability to track cases and respond to inquiries and complaints. This is critical for the OCO to maintain its reputation for responsiveness among members of the population and the staff at both DPSCS and DJS.

MAJR supports an adequate budget that will support the current operations of the OCO and allow for expansion of this office as promised in the enactment legislation in order to provide independent oversight for all Marylanders.

Olinda Moyd

moydlaw@yahoo.com

www.ma4jr.org