



BRIDGE Maryland Criminal Justice Task Force

A Statement on Criminal Justice in the State of Maryland

According to statistics published in The Baltimore Sun, as of last June 30 (2018), Maryland had 18,998 incarcerated people. While Gov. Larry Hogan signed the Justice Reinvestment Act in 2016, which seeks to divert nonviolent offenders from prison to drug treatment programs and other programs, the decrease in incarceration numbers has been recently met with an inexplicable need to get tougher on crime. While there has been a difficulty in reducing the murder rate in Baltimore, there has been equal tone deafness at the State level to the systemic quality of life issues the city's legislators, community leaders, and faith leaders have decried. Instead, the response has been to draft policies that seemingly aim to further tamp down the frustrations of the citizenry instead of addressing the economic and racial inequities of both Baltimore and several of the surrounding jurisdictions. As the criminal justice task force of one of Maryland's leading faith based social justice organizations, we seek to openly address several bills being presented in the 2019 Maryland Legislative Session.

Senate Bill 121: Establishing that inmates serving a term of life imprisonment may be paroled without the Governor's approval after serving 30 years under certain circumstances. (Sponsors Sen. Kelley, Carter, Hayes, Nathan-Pulliam, Washington, et. al.) As this bill has moved beyond the first reading BRIDGE Maryland supports this bill and asks that it be passed in the current session.

Senate Bill 130: Altering the designation of a certain crime that a police officer may not charge by citation. (Sponsor Sen. Lee) This bill will curtail citations for city residents at a police officer's discretion concerning consuming alcohol in public spaces. In many situations law abiding citizens must hold their picnics/cookouts in public parks and in front of their homes. Many neighborhoods have neither back yards or greenspace. Citations for consuming alcoholic beverages in moderation at these gatherings are issued despite no evidence of public disturbance. Passage of this bill would move to lessen the racial tension between citizens and law enforcement. BRIDGE supports the passage of this bill and asks that it move to be voted on in the current session.

House Bill 88: Making it a civil rather than a criminal offense to consume an alcoholic beverage in public under certain circumstances or to possess an alcoholic beverage in an open container under certain circumstances; requiring certain offenders to be issued a citation under certain circumstances; and providing a maximum fine of \$100. This bill accompanies and further explains SB 130 and BRIDGE Maryland supports the passage of this bill and asks that it move to be voted on in the current session.

HB 116: Repealing the requirement for a certain inmate to be placed on a program of methadone detoxification under certain circumstances; requiring State and local correctional facilities to conduct a certain assessment of each inmate within 24 hours of incarceration to determine whether opioid treatment or medication-assisted treatment for opioid addiction is appropriate; requiring State and local correctional facilities to provide certain treatments to inmates suffering from opioid use disorder under certain circumstances; etc. (Sponsor Sen. Barron). While BRIDGE Maryland supports this bill in principle we seek to meet with Sen. Barron for clarity on specific placement sites. Overall, BRIDGE Maryland supports the passage of this bill and asks that it move to be voted on in the current session.

HB 236: Altering penalties for a certain crime relating to use of a firearm in the commission of a crime of violence or felony. This bill presents several troubling issues. The lack of bipartisanship in sponsoring this bill is glaring. There are 29 Republican delegates and no Democrats sponsoring this bill. While the bill presents the illusion of public safety, it presents numerous complications in communities of color and poverty. Given the family ties of many to persons active in the drug trade, and the recycling of guns throughout these communities, the crime of “holding someone else’s gun while being black” can expose one to being charged with a crime they didn’t commit. They were simply holding a relative’s firearm under the unwitting favor of “safekeeping”, unaware of its use in the commission of a recent crime. This tough on crime policy has too many potholes and mine fields for young black citizens in this state and BRIDGE Maryland asks that the passage of this bill, as well as its counterpart, **SB 166**, be denied.