



Senate Bill 602

Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: March 25, 2015

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 602. This bill will help to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the detention system so that resources can be refocused on increasing public safety and reducing recidivism.

SB 602 establishes a Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council in the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention. As amended, the bill would require the Council to convene an advisory stakeholder group to assist the Council in holding roundtable discussion forums across the state. The Council is also charged with using a data-driven approach to develop a statewide framework to reduce the state's incarcerated population, reduce spending on corrections, and reinvest in strategies to increase public safety and recidivism.

MACo believes that the proposed Council will be well-served by a representative from a local detention center. Public safety is the third largest component for county spending. The primary purpose of local detention centers is to hold individuals awaiting trial or those sentenced for less than 18 months. Increased incarceration and longer sentences have left local detention centers overcrowded and overburdened.

For instance, individuals suffering from mental illness cycling in and out of the justice system is a problematic issue. As noted in a 2013 report from the National Alliance on Mental Illness: "Jails and prisons are neither designed nor funded to provide mental health treatment, yet with the erosion of public mental health services, they have increasingly become *de facto* mental health facilities." Another report from the Vera Institute of Justice entitled "Incarceration's Front Door: The Misuse of Jails in America" found that local jails were filled with the poor, addicted, and mentally ill. Additionally, those incarcerated were there for minor violations and were housed for longer periods of time because they were unable to pay court costs.

MACo believes this bill will be the catalyst for efficient and cost-effective strategies to reduce incarceration and increase public safety. For these reasons, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 602.