



THE MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE
CORRECTIONAL
OMBUDSMAN

The Maryland Office of the Correctional Ombudsman
300 W. Preston St. Suite 213
Baltimore, MD 21201

The Maryland Office of the Correctional Ombudsman
Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget
Response to the Department of Legislative Services Analysis
Josh Weinstock

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Public Safety, Transportation, and Environment Subcommittee
Senator Shelly Hettleman
January 30, 2026

House Appropriations Committee
Public Safety and Administration Subcommittee
Delegate Gabriel Acevero

Dear S. Briey-Wilson

6-29-25

THANK YOU FOR SEEING US, HEARING US

AND VALUING US ENOUGH TO TAKE ACTION.

YOU ARE A

Hero!



The letter I just shared came from an incarcerated individual after OCO spent several days in a DPSCS facility providing effective oversight and facilitating change. The incarcerated individual appreciating the impact of our office's presence sent this letter of thanks. It speaks to

the importance of the Maryland Office of the Correctional Ombudsman (OCO) and the work that we do for incarcerated adults and adjudicated and detained youth, your constituents, and the state.

Good morning, I am Yvonne Briley-Wilson, Esquire, the first Correctional Ombudsman for the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing OCO the opportunity to appear before you today in consideration of our budget and providing the occasion to address and clarify any questions and concerns. Thank you, Mr. Weinstock, for your analysis. I am joined here today by Adam Cummings, the OCO Executive Administrator, as well as other OCO leadership and staff in attendance.

We would like to provide a brief update to some of OCO's initiatives and outcomes which have been successfully initiated as a result of the FY2026 allocation and as a relatively new agency. OCO was officially established boots on the ground in October of 2024. This process began with the hiring of me as the Correctional Ombudsman and the transferring of the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit under the supervisory authority of OCO. The Agency has often drawn an analogy of the work to a tree with two branches; correctional and juvenile oversight. While the branches are different, the structure symbolizes unity and a shared purpose while maintaining distinct functions between the two visions of oversight. The shared objectives include observations, reflections, our philosophical evolution toward a common goal, and most importantly, our team approach to effective oversight.

OCO remains steadfast to the mission and mandate to function with transparency, accountability, and impartiality, ensuring that incarcerated adults and detained or adjudicated youth are treated fairly, with dignity, humanity, and respect; working to improve the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) while striving to reduce recidivism, improve opportunities and increase public safety upon the return of those behind the wall to the community.

OCO emphasizes the importance of collaboration among the agencies we oversee, the individuals in their care and custody, and the staff working within them. We also value the strength of our community partnerships and prioritize the reduction of recidivism and the safety of all Maryland residents.

Over the last year, OCO has effectively utilized funding to support, among other tasks, the hiring of staff, boots on the grounds in both DPSCS and DJS facilities, building the advisory board, determining methods of maintaining confidentiality with the OCO and incarcerated individuals, and developing processes all while attempting to address complaints and provide oversight.

Since appearing before you last year, OCO has successfully onboarded a Deputy Ombudsman for Correctional Oversight, two Assistant Ombudsman for Correctional Oversight, one of whom was promoted from the Intake Specialist position and the second who is a formerly justice-involved individual. On the Juvenile Oversight side, we have promoted a former Juvenile Monitor to the Deputy Ombudsman for Juvenile Oversight/JJMU, and we have sustained a former Senior Monitor to a Senior Assistant Ombudsman and hired an Assistant Ombudsman with lived experience.

OCO currently has seated 11 out of our 12-member Advisory Board. The Advisory Board consists of a group of experts with experience in Corrections, Parole, Probation, Re-entry Specialist, Juvenile Care, Mental Health, Recidivism Program Specialist, formerly incarcerated individuals, and leader of large government, returning citizens; we are actively seeking to seat a family member of an incarcerated individual.

OCO in collaboration with DPSCS has placed secured mail boxes in all the focused facilities in Jessup with OCO having exclusive access to the mailboxes. DPSCS staff have no access. Similarly, to remain consistent with the mandate of creating opportunities for confidential communications, OCO is currently experiencing a pilot program utilizing the ViaPath Tablets at the DPSCS Dorsey Run Facility. OCO hopes to slowly expand this method of communication releasing facility by facility, expanding first in the Jessup Region.

In addition to in-person complaints taken by OCO staff while in facilities, OCO have successfully created multiple mechanisms to file complaints or make inquiries of OCO inclusive of:

1. an 844 number; **(844) OCO-INFO/(844)626-4636**
2. OCO email addresses – OCO.cotact@maryland.gov and jod.contact@maryland.gov
3. The OCO website which was recently launched in December of 2025 which will soon provide another mechanism for filing a complaint with OCO
4. as mentioned, we have mailboxes in the focused facilities and
5. have instituted the pilot tablet program within Dorsey Run Correctional Facility.

The impact of OCO is evident in our complaint process, which has collected approximately 1,978 complaints filed with OCO. 1457 complaints on the DPSCS side (Correctional Oversight) and 511 complaints filed on the DJS side (Juvenile Oversight) since October when we begin tracking and please note this does not include the incident reports reviewed and addressed by OCO staff, and 10 complaints from County/Federal facilities which we do not provide oversight. We approximate the total numbers because OCO has not yet been successful in procuring a case management system as we are still engaged in that process. However, for tracking and accountability, in the meantime, OCO has instituted its own tracking system utilizing Excel.

OCO recognizes the critical role our new agency plays in ensuring that individuals within the care and custody of DPSCS and DJS are treated fairly with dignity, humanity and respect. We know the importance of our work to these individuals and their family members who are your constituents. The goal is sustainability and OCO intends to continue to be proactive in balancing the needs of those individuals with transparency, impartiality, and creating accountability.

With the current funding awarded, OCO will work to continue providing the critical services necessary to OCO's mission. We will continue to remain primarily focused on the Jessup Region when exercising our oversight authority to DPSCS and will address emergent issues as appropriate within other facilities based on staffing assignments and capacity and we will continue our current oversight within the DJS facilities.

It is the expectation that OCO will complete the procurement process for the successful integration of a more appropriate case management system which will, as already stated, improve OCO's ability to track trends in the number of cases and respond to inquiries and complaints. The system will allow OCO to monitor the submission of complaints, assign cases to investigators, track issues identified by OCO staff, analyze data to help identify legal or policy violations better and identify systematic issues with both agencies.

The OCO with the current allocation will continue to assign three Assistant Ombudsman for each division respectfully. However, it is our hope that you think about what the future looks like for us. OCO has often been compared to the New Jersey Office of the Correctional Ombudsman. We ask that you consider New Jersey the legislative basis for SB 134 and Minnesota which is the only state that mirrors the state of Maryland in that it provides oversight to the adult and juvenile population. There are a couple of noteworthy points of comparison. Number one, neither Ombudsman is responsible for visiting facilities on a regular basis. Number two, the juvenile population is extremely low in the state of Minnesota as compared to Maryland. In New Jersey, the staff of 26 is only responsible for providing oversight to juveniles that are convicted as adults, as well as the entire prison population. So, the agency only provides oversight for those juveniles within that population that have convictions as adults, which is much less than OCO.

The average percentage of funding for Correctional Ombudsman Offices tends to be 1% of the total budget of the agencies for which they provide oversight authority. Given this, OCO considers it essential to our future sustainability and eventual growth after the fiscal year that we move toward this model being cognizant of the fact that OCO provides oversight for two agencies; DPSCS and DJS and therefore we should strive to have our budget representative of 1% of each. We recognize this will take time.

The OCO agrees with the recommendation of DLS requiring OCO to submit the MFR prior to July 1, 2026.

100%

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Veterans of JCI

Veterans of JCI Group Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter #1 135
Jessup Correctional Institution PO. Box 534
Jessup, Maryland 20794

January 7, 2026

[REDACTED]
Ms. Janine Meckler, Esq.
Deputy Ombudsman for Correctional Oversight

Ms. Meckler,

My [REDACTED] name is [REDACTED] and spoke with you on your visit to JCI this past December, In short, there are currently many issues that we Veterans have been experiencing during the past couple of years which need attention.

With this in mind, I would like to formally invite you to meet with the JCI Veterans Group board members to address the various issues and treatment of Veterans within this institution.

Our group ~~meets~~ every Wednesday from 11:30am to 1:30pm at the VAC. Whenever it is convenient for you, please contact us to schedule a date to us for a special board meeting. Your assistance and expertise ~~would~~ be greatly appreciated by the group.

Sincerely,

111 <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox?project>

This is another example of the important and impactful work of the Office of the Correctional Ombudsman; work we want to sustain and grow.

Maryland has a unique opportunity; the collaboration between OCO, DPSCS, and DJS can become the torchbearer in correctional oversight with proper investments and partnership. OCO

has already become an integral part of the Maryland Justice System which is necessary to sustain and grow.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We welcome any questions.