



# MEJC

MARYLAND EQUITABLE JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE



Established by the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Public Defender

For Immediate Release:

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## Attorney General and Public Defender Form Historic Partnership to Launch Groundbreaking Initiative Committed to Reducing Mass Incarceration of African Americans and Other Marginalized Groups

**BALTIMORE, MD (October 25, 2023)** - Attorney General Anthony G. Brown and Public Defender Natasha M. Dartigue today announced the creation of the *Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative* (MEJC), a new initiative dedicated to reducing the mass incarceration of African Americans and other marginalized groups in Maryland prisons and jails. The goal is to examine the scope and causes of this crisis, and to develop a comprehensive plan for reform and recommendations by January 2025.

“The disproportionate mass incarceration of Marylanders, felt most starkly in the African American community, is a devastating trauma in our State that demands our immediate and abiding attention and resolve,” **said Attorney General Brown**. “It is a sad reality that the vast majority of people who have been removed from communities across the country and put behind bars are Black. The formation of the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative will bring together experts from the criminal justice system, academia, government, and the community to identify the underlying causes of this crisis and develop a roadmap for reform. I’m honored to launch this historic collaboration with Public Defender Dartigue.”

“As the first-ever advocacy partnership between the Attorney General and Public Defender, the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative will bring renewed focus to the development and implementation of meaningful reform in the criminal legal system and will amplify the voices of the marginalized communities in more expansive ways. I applaud Attorney General Brown for prioritizing the elimination of mass incarceration, and for taking the bold step to partner with OPD to get this critical work done. We hope that the historic magnitude of this partnership inspires the significant changes that are urgently needed,” **said Public Defender Dartigue**. “I am thankful for the expertise of our diverse group of community stakeholders and their willingness to join us in this endeavor to address the crisis of mass incarceration and its particularly harsh impact on Black communities and other marginalized populations.”

African Americans constitute approximately 30% of Maryland's population but make up a staggering 72% of our prison population – the highest percentage of imprisoned African Americans in the country. More specifically, Black men make up 14% of Maryland's general population but a staggering-73% of the state's male prison population, while Black women make up 16% of the state's population but a disproportionate 53% of the female prison population. Nearly 80% of those serving sentences of 10 years or more are Black, and 41% entered prison as young adults.

The consequences of this crisis are grave - from shattered family and community bonds to lost job skills, lower life expectancies, and forfeited opportunities for wealth accumulation. The determination to put an end to these harms suffered by so many, and to chart a path for a brighter future for all, is the foundation on which the MEJC was born.

The MEJC is a partnership between the Maryland Office of the Attorney General, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender, and the University System of Maryland through the *Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. Center for Education, Justice & Ethics* at University of Maryland College Park, and the *Institute for Restorative Justice and Practices* at Bowie State University.

"The United States incarcerates more people per capita, than any other nation in the world. Mass incarceration is a pervasive problem that has significantly contributed to the devastation of families and communities," **said the Honorable Judge Alexander Williams**. "Despite a reduction in incarceration rates in the U.S., Black people remain overrepresented in our prison and jail populations. America's failure to sufficiently address the underlying causes of mass incarceration, which disproportionately imparts minority populations, is one of the grand challenges of our time."

"This initiative is an opportunity to help change the lives of individuals, families and communities," **said Dr. Aminta Breaux, president of Bowie State University**. "By collaborating and working with the Attorney General, Public Defender and the other partners on this project, we can provide more hope for people. Maryland can make a difference and reverse the decades long pattern of black and brown people dominating our prison population."

To accomplish its goals, the MEJC will be comprised of committees focused on the issues that drive incarceration rates. Each committee will be led by a representative from the Attorney General's Office, the Office of the Public Defender, and a community partner. More than three dozen criminal justice key government, community and private sector stakeholders will be involved in this work which include:

ACLU  
Annie E. Casey Foundation Juvenile  
Justice Strategy Group  
CASA  
Caucus of African American Leaders of  
Anne Arundel County  
Center for Urban Families  
Disability Rights Maryland  
Federal Public Defender for the District of  
Maryland

Members of the Maryland Congressional  
Delegation  
Maryland Criminal Defense Attorney's  
Association  
Maryland Department of Health  
Maryland Department of Housing &  
Community Development  
Maryland Department of Human Services  
Maryland Department of Juvenile  
Services

Fenix Youth Project Inc.  
FreeState Justice  
Gatekeepers  
Institute for Restorative Justice and  
Practices at Bowie State University  
Job Opportunities Task Force  
Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. Center for  
Education, Justice & Ethics at University  
of Maryland  
Justice Policy Institute  
Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle  
Life After Release  
Maryland Administrative Office of the  
Courts  
Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform  
Maryland Chiefs of Police Association

Maryland Department of Labor  
Maryland Judiciary  
Maryland NAACP  
Maryland Sheriffs' Association  
Maryland State's Attorney's Association  
Mayor of Baltimore's Office  
Office of the Attorney General  
Office of the Public Defender  
Out for Justice  
TIME Organization  
Turnaround Tuesday  
University of Baltimore Center for  
Criminal Justice Reform  
University of Maryland School of Law  
Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the  
Law  
Youth Advocate Programs

MEJC's structure and makeup was guided, in part, by input received during listening sessions, held by the Attorney General and Public Defender, to gather critical feedback from residents, small business owners, stakeholder organizations, formerly incarcerated individuals, and others directly impacted by this crisis.

The MEJC held its inaugural meeting on Wednesday, October 25, 2023, at Bowie State University. The public can access a recording of the meeting here:  
<https://youtube.com/live/RvLsmEmPgHQ?feature=share>.

The MEJC will host a public forum on November 6, 2023, at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum in Baltimore, which the public is encouraged to attend. An MEJC website is also currently in development so that Marylanders can access the latest developments and follow MEJC's progress as we work towards building a more fair, just, and equitable Maryland.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2023/102523.pdf>

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