



## Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

### Testimony in Support of SB 621 - Correctional Services - Diminution Credits - Education

TO: Senator Bobby A. Zirkin, Chair and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Stephen C. Buckingham, Chair, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

DATE: February 21, 2019

The principles of my Unitarian Universalist faith to respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person and to promote and affirm justice, equity and compassion in human relations. This bill not only recognizes that the vast majority of inmates will ultimately be returning to our communities, it recognizes that even those convicted of crimes have value and provides a path for rehabilitation that will facilitate reintegration into these communities.

Studies have shown that extended jail time tends to increase the rate of repeat offenses. The best way to reduce recidivism is the concept of *justice reinvestment*, which would provide drug treatment, psychological counseling, and job training and placement.

The following are excerpts from our **2005 Unitarian Universalist Statement of Conscience** on the criminal justice system:

“We offer an alternative moral vision of a justice system that operates in harmonious accord with our values as a community of faith. This vision includes the presumption of innocence, fair judicial proceedings, the merciful restoration of those who have broken the law, the renunciation of torture and other abusive practices, and a fundamental commitment to the dignity and humane treatment of everyone in our society, including prisoners.”

“Costs of imprisonment have increased due to state legislatures criminalizing an increasing number of activities, mandatory incarceration, and mandatory minimum sentencing....public fears have intensified the perceived need for retributive policies and have undermined those that are redemptive, rehabilitative, and restorative. Elected leaders and their constituents commonly conspire in this politics of fear.”

“The American penchant for retribution squanders opportunities for redemption, rehabilitation, and restoration of the individual offender. Failures in the criminal justice system have created a disenfranchised, stigmatized class who are predominantly from lower-income backgrounds, poorly educated, or from racial and ethnic minorities.”

“Our criminal justice system makes it exceedingly difficult for anyone to reintegrate into society . People returning to their communities find that they lack opportunity, skills, and social services to fully function in society and hold down jobs, maintain families, or participate in their communities .”

As Unitarian Universalists, we believe that it is not enough to just be “smart on crime”. While having no illusions about the dangers posed by some violent people, we are convinced that there is a place for the concepts of compassion forgiveness. The national discourse on what to do about crime should include the concept of *restorative justice*, where we seek not only to punish but to heal and rebuild.

In this, we join with other people of faith in our efforts to build a safer, stronger America, that expresses our deeper ideals of who we are as a people.

The Unitarian Universalists in Maryland are supporting this bill because it is not only a part of the process of strengthening our existing correctional education system but done in a way that also reflects the inherent worth and dignity of those who will be impacted by these changes. The enrichment and addition of the benchmark diminution credits in SB 621 provides recognition of the students’ achievements; they can see themselves getting closer to their goal and then earn a reward for all their hard work and accomplishments. This honors their inherent worth and dignity and provides additional knowledge and skills for reintegration into society upon release.

We encourage you to give this bill a favorable report.

Thank you,

*Stephen C. Buckingham*

Stephen C. Buckingham  
Lay Community Minister and Chair,  
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