



Charles County Board of Commissioners,
200 Baltimore St,
La Plata, MD 20646

Dear Charles County Board of Commissioners,

Life After Release is a nonprofit organization led by directly impacted Black women, committed to advocating against the disproportionate injustices faced by Black and Brown communities within the legal system. A pressing example of these systemic disparities in Charles County is the absence of a pretrial services program — a gap that continues to undermine both individual rights and community stability.

According to the Maryland Local Detention Center Population Statistics Dashboard, an alarming 86% of individuals incarcerated at the Charles County Detention Center are being held pretrial, meaning they have not been convicted of any crime. Equally troubling, Black residents account for 64% of the jail population, despite representing only 56% of the county's total population. This stark imbalance reflects a pattern of racial disparities that cannot be ignored.

Moreover, data shows that Charles County's violent crime rate stands at 20.2 incidents per 100,000 residents, notably lower than the national average of 22.7. This indicates that the majority of individuals detained pretrial are charged with nonviolent offenses. Despite this, they endure incarceration that leads to devastating consequences: loss of employment, disruption of housing stability, separation from their children, and long-term economic insecurity—all before any legal finding of guilt.

At a time when our country and county face deep social and political uncertainty, it is more critical than ever to uphold the principles of democracy and justice. Ensuring that every individual is given due process and presumed innocent until proven guilty is not merely a constitutional right; it is a reflection of our community's values.

Implementing a pretrial services program would not only strengthen public safety and individual rights but also lead to substantial fiscal benefits for Charles County residents. It currently costs an estimated \$5,030 per month to incarcerate one individual in Maryland. A robust pretrial services program would reduce unnecessary incarceration and, consequently, save taxpayers significant resources.

Importantly, this initiative has strong local support. Both the Charles County Circuit Court and District Court judges have expressed their endorsement of pretrial services. Furthermore, the Charles County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC)—comprising local advocates, the Sheriff's Office, the State's Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, and judicial representatives—has identified the establishment of pretrial services as a priority. However, final approval for funding rests with the Charles County Board of Commissioners.

We urge the Commissioners to act swiftly to approve and fund a pretrial services program, demonstrating a firm commitment to justice, fiscal responsibility, and the well-being of our entire community.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and for your leadership in advancing a fairer, more equitable Charles County.