

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Melisa Grice and I am writing in support of Delegate Wiley's House Bill 1438 which extends enhanced retirement benefits for juvenile detention specialists. I have worked in a juvenile correctional setting for 8 years at Rappahannock Juvenile Center. Employees in our field, like me, should be entitled to these enhanced benefits due to the nature of our career and the stress it entails. Our job is comparable to that of Sheriff Deputies who work in local jails with the exception that we work with juveniles instead of adults and we are not armed. Those deputies receive the enhanced retirement benefits we are seeking. Our counterparts who work for the Department of Juvenile Justice at Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center also receive these enhanced benefits. Many detention home staff have experience working at Bon Air or previous juvenile correctional centers (Hanover, Beaumont, etc.) and they can tell you the job is the same as for detention home staff. With many committed juveniles being placed at Community Placement Programs housed in local detention homes instead of serving time at Bon Air, I assure you we are serving the exact same population.

JLARC recently published a report entitled, "Eligibility of Public Safety Occupations for Enhanced Retirement Benefits", and my job was a part of that study. According to the report, "Guideline 2 for enhanced benefits: Public safety employees should have physically and psychologically demanding jobs that are more difficult to perform as they age. The job of local detention specialist received three out of four, indicating a high level of physical and psychological demand. Citing the report, "The risk for workplace injuries is high, with approximately 13 percent of local detention specialists filing at least one paid workers' compensation claim each year. This rate is comparable to the claims rate for local police officers and deputy sheriffs. Local detention specialists are at high risk for encountering violent or threatening youth detained at a facility. Detention specialists interviewed by JLARC staff recounted injuries sustained during assaults, and paid workers' compensation claims filed by detention specialists commonly involve altercations with residents".

Every day we are charged with maintaining the safety and security of our community while also providing rehabilitative services to hopefully deter juveniles from entering the adult system. We routinely intervene in crisis and volatile situations that put our health and safety at risk. We work in a 24/7 environment and regularly work evenings, weekends, holidays, and during inclement weather. I would greatly appreciate your support for House Bill 1438.

Thank you!

Respectfully,

Melisa Grice