



Criminal Justice Reform Questionnaire: *Candidate Responses*
April 2023

Monica Gary Candidate State Senate District 27

1. Describe what you consider to be the most pressing needs for reform in the Commonwealth's criminal justice system. Please be as specific as you can.

The most pressing and immediate needs are to address the lack of mental health services (within and outside prisons), lack of community, and protection of rights of incarcerated persons. This cannot be achieved without increased transparency and oversight committees. The last private correctional facility in Virginia, Lawrenceville, must be turned over to the state or shut down and we must ban any private prisons from operating in the Commonwealth in the future.

The juvenile justice system in Virginia resembles more of a school to prison pipeline, with schools referring about 16/1000 children to law enforcement, which is 3 times the national average. That is \$148,000 PER CHILD spent every year that would be better used in prevention, community building and mentoring programs to help our youth better achieve their potential.

2. What are your thoughts on solitary confinement, the good time law, and creating a VADOC ombudsman?

Solitary confinement is cruel, counterproductive to the recovery of inmates and poorly regulated as well as discriminatory in its application. It deteriorates the mental wellbeing of those who are subjected to it and often leads to physical health issues as well. It should be banned and any inmates in need of confinement for psychological reasons deserve to be in mental health facilities that are equipped to address their unique challenges in a humane and professional manner.

The good time law must be restored immediately. With no opportunity for discretionary parole in Virginia (eliminated in 1995 and replaced by the TIS requiring inmates to serve at least 85% of their sentence), it is the most beneficial tool we have to provide positive reinforcement of changed behaviors and incentivize participation in programs that aid in recovery. The abolishment of it is discriminatory, has resulted in an increased population of incarcerated persons, and massive waste of taxpayer dollars.

I would support an ombudsman if the implementation of this position was in conjunction with an oversight committee for correctional facilities. A single point of authority on matters of human rights would be ripe for abuse and likely become a single point of failure for protecting those rights.

3. Returning citizens are sent back to prison for technical violations more than for any new crimes. What are your reactions or recommendations?

People should not be required to serve jail time for technical violations. Tax dollars being wasted on reincarcerating individuals with technical violations should be redirected to programs that help prevent recidivism and aid recovery and reentry into the community.