

New board supports correctional officer measure

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Prince Frederick, MD - With three new members on a five-man board, change is always a possibility. In their first business meeting, the Calvert County Commissioners elected to office this past November held their first full agenda meeting Tuesday, Jan. 8. The board considered the previous panel's list of requests for the 2019 session of the Maryland General Assembly. In doing so, the new board revisited an issue that failed to garner the support of the majority of commissioners. The request submitted by Sheriff Mike Evans [R] to convert the Calvert County Detention Center's correctional officers to correctional deputies now has board support.

County Attorney John Norris explained that currently the correctional officers are county employees. Under the proposed legislation, the officers would become "correctional deputies" and would be merit employees of the Calvert County Sheriff's Office. "This is long overdue," said Evans, who noted jurisdictions across Maryland are transitioning correctional officers to the authority of law enforcement. "We just want to be on the same page." The sheriff also affirmed that the transition would occur with no additional cost to the county.

"The goal is to make it better," said Captain Kevin Cross of the detention center. "This absolutely makes the agency more transparent." The transition would mean that any disciplinary matters among the correctional officers would now be handled by the sheriff's office instead of the county government's Department of Human Resources. Other proposed legislation "would provide peer review and evaluation of personnel actions within the correctional system through s Correctional Officer Bill of Rights," Norris stated in a memo to the board.

"You have a unique view that we don't have," Commissioner Mike Hart [R-District 1] told the local law enforcement officials in the hearing room.

At the invitation of Commissioners' President Thomas E. "Tim" Hutchins [R-District 2], a few of the several correctional officers at the meeting addressed the meeting, indicating significant support from their coworkers.

While Commissioner Steve Weems [R-At large] voted against adding the initiative to the list of legislative requests supported by the commissioners due to concerns about its fiscal impact, he voted in favor of confirming the board's commitment to the list of proposed legislative items.

Other legislative items that had previously earned the board's support include a request for \$10.3 million in bond authority and extension of a Length of Service (LOSAP) benefit of \$6,000 to the family of a volunteer who gives his or her life in the line of duty.

Contact Marty Madden at marty.madden@thebaynet.com

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