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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB683

Corrections - Women's Prerelease Unit - Requirements (Women's Prerelease Equity Act)

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Carol Stern on behalf of Jews United for Justice

I am testifying in favor of SB683 on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes 5,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

In Genesis Chapter 1, we learn that humans are created in God's image - *B'tselem Elohim*. We all contain the divine spark, and we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. This applies to all people, whether they have been incarcerated or not.

It is hard for me to imagine why the State of Maryland doesn't have a dedicated women's pre-release facility. Women who are being released from prison need a transition program that helps bridge the gap between life in the correctional facility and returning to independent living in their community. While the Corrections Department operates pre-release facilities for men, women are not accorded the same equitable resources to assist them in transitioning home, even though they represent a growing percentage of the state's total prison population. Women should, at a bare minimum, be accorded the same opportunities as men to make a successful transition home.

Additionally, in order for a successful transition to happen, the location of this facility should be as close as possible to where the majority of incarcerated women will be returning to live. **The Maryland Task Force on Prisoner Reentry stressed how important it is to support returning citizens through creating comprehensive reentry plans** and allowing them to live in less restrictive facilities prior to their release which are “closer to family and community resources that can provide them with important assistance.”

It is critical that we address the disparity between resources for men and women in Maryland's prison system by requiring the Commissioner of Corrections to operate a women's pre-release facility which will treat women in Maryland's correctional facilities with the support and respect that all people deserve, closest to where most women live.

On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB683.