

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 684:

Gender Response Prerelease Act

TO: Chairman William C. Smith, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Derrell Frazier, Policy Advocate

DATE: February 26, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates for policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. JOTF supports Senate Bill 684 as a means to ensure that women are provided with the skills and training needed to ensure their employability upon release.

Today, the country is led by women. In Maryland, there are 306,411 households led by women, and women are 49 percent of Maryland's workforce¹. To dive further into these statistics, 29.1 percent of single women-led households live in poverty versus 7.9 percent of all Maryland families. This shows that while women are a major part of the state's workforce, employment opportunities for women are scarce. Access to proper child care, education, transportation, are all barriers that women face, and these factors are further concentrated on women who also have criminal records

Data shows that 44 percent of women who are returning from incarceration are heads of household. This percentage is higher, 66 percent, for Black women. Simply put, these women are in need of employment to reduce recidivism and to maintain their families. Their criminal record creates a barrier, but lack of access to the valuable skills taught in pre-release puts them at a further disadvantage.

Senate Bill 684 seeks to require the Commissioner of the Division of Correction to provide a comprehensive rehabilitative prerelease facility for female inmates. Also, the Commissioner must provide evidence-based and gender-responsive prerelease services for certain female inmates. Establishing the opportunity to strengthen family and community relationships through extended family leave, parenting workshops, family reunification assistance, and transportation for children and family members to visit female inmates before release.

JOTF strongly supports any legislation that encourages a restructuring of the criminal justice system to ensure that all Marylanders are capable of successfully re-entering their communities and gain employment. For those reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 684.

¹https://dhr.maryland.gov/documents/Initiatives/Maryland%20Womens%20Commission/Reso/urces/Who%20We%20Represent_Final.pdf