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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB684
Correctional Services - Prerelease Unit for Women - Facilities and Services
(Gender-Responsive Prerelease 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 SB684 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 several 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. As a matter of equity, women should, at a bare minimum, also be provided with a pre-release facility to help them to transition home. However, to ensure a successful transition home, women need the types of services that this bill would provide - access to job training, employment, community resources, and reentry planning assistance within a less restrictive and safe environment. This bill would also provide much needed gender-responsive and trauma-informed services as well as medical, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment.

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 comprehensive, rehabilitative women's pre-release facility, which will treat women in Maryland's correctional facilities with the supportive services required in this bill and the respect that all people deserve.

On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB684.