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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: Emily Blank

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your G-d. - Micah 6:8

My name is Emily Blank, and I am a resident of District 47A. I am testifying in favor of SB684, asking you to support the creation of one or more pre-release facilities specifically for women and to provide them with comprehensive, gender-responsive, rehabilitative pre-release services.

Although I am a MD resident, I teach Economics of Black Community Development and other economics courses at Howard University. I have also had training in teaching incarcerated people. Imagine that you were previously incarcerated but have paid your debt to society. You may be estranged from your family members. You may have children in foster care or farmed out to relatives. If you were convicted of a felony, you may find it nearly impossible to find a job or a place to live.

If you are male, you may (near the end of your sentence) have been housed in a pre-release facility. Individuals on pre-release status can participate in work-release, meaning they can start working in jobs that are based outside the facility. With a separate facility, folks can access community resources, comprehensive reentry planning assistance, and reconnect with their family and loved ones in a less restrictive and safe environment. There are no such facilities for women.

There are currently over 150 women with pre-release or minimum security status that are housed at Maryland Correctional Institute for Women (MCIW). These women consistently express fear for their safety, as they are co-housed with women on maximum security status who may assault them to deter their exit. The inmate assault rate at MCIW is 1 in 16, as opposed to 1 in 25 at the men's separate pre-release facilities.

Women need a separate facility with gender-responsive, trauma-informed services and comprehensive reentry planning to address needs they may have around family reunification, housing, jobs, childcare, and mental health and substance abuse treatment - all necessary for successful reintegration. Women, in particular, are in need of significant assistance since they

still have the primary responsibility for children and are more vulnerable to physical abuse than men.

In the words of our Holy Scripture: "Justice, justice, you shall pursue." Deuteronomy 16:20.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB684.