

February 25, 2020

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB801
Correctional Services - Prerelease Unit for Women - Facilities and Services
(Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act)

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Mark Paster

My name is Mark Paster and I am a resident of Silver Spring (District 20), Maryland. I am writing in support of HB801.

“Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” Someday soon, hopefully, the Equal Rights Amendment will become part of US law. Many laws already exist that prohibit different treatment of men and women without sound reasons. And yet Maryland continues to have no pre-release facilities for women who are about to be released from incarceration, despite providing such programming for men. The legal justification for this lack of gender parity is non-existent and the State should not continue to assume that no one will sue the State for this obvious and indefensible discrimination.

Pre-release facilities have been shown to help lower recidivism, smooth integration back into families and the community and help people who have been incarcerated become more successful in their lives. In order to accomplish this, however, it is essential that the programming fit the needs of the population that it serves. For women, this bill is necessary in that it requires gender-responsive, trauma-informed services as well as the opportunity for women to take classes, get workforce training, job placement, and family reunification assistance.

A more just society includes treating everyone more justly and equitably. Providing women, as we do men, with prerelease programming is simple justice and tailoring that programming to the needs of women being released simply makes sense. **I urge you to issue a favorable report on HB801.** Thank you.