Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee
February 25, 2020

HB 801 – Correctional Services – Prerelease Unit for Women –
Facilities and Services (Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act)

FAVORABLE

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The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 801, which would require the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to provide specific evidence-based, gender-responsive services, to women in prerelease facilities. These services include areas such as jobs, training, education, treatment, and family reunification. Correctional staff would also work with women to develop comprehensive and individualized reentry plans that would connect them with community-based service providers to prevent a gap in services and treatment, and ensure that women receive support as soon as they exit the prison system.

Maryland's prison system has traditionally willfully neglected the individualized needs of women in its care. While women exiting the prison system face many of the same barriers as men – including housing, jobs, education, and treatment – women have unique needs as well. For instance, women are often primary or sole caretakers of children. On average, they serve shorter sentences, and are more likely to be incarcerated for low-level, non-violent offenses.

Women deserve equitable access to the resources and benefits that will make them more likely to succeed upon reentry. By requiring these services to be gender-responsive, evidence-based best practices, this bill will ensure that women are best situated to thrive when they return to their families and communities.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 801.