



# THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Support  
HB 801

House Judiciary Committee

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

Testimony presented by Rev. Kathy Shahinian  
2/25/2020

*"I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." (Matthew 25:36)*

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland supports HB 801. The State of Maryland currently operates six Pre-Release centers for men returning to our communities. Due to budget constraints the State of Maryland closed the only pre-release center for women in Baltimore City.

Women who are returning to our communities are currently incarcerated in MCIW (MD Correctional Institution for Women), Maryland's only women's prison. As the prison system can be a painful and damaging process for inmates and their families, these individuals are often in great need of being treated with dignity and compassion, as our faith calls us to do.

The Episcopal Church's work on criminal justice issues in recent years can be traced to a 2006 resolution passed by General Convention, and subsequent resolutions have expanded the scope of the church's involvement, including to the problem of mass incarceration. Such commitments overlap with the Episcopal Church's elevation of racial reconciliation to a top priority, given that black and Hispanic inmates make up a disproportionately large cross-section of the prison population.

"There is an increasing awareness throughout the Episcopal Church of the oppressive and dehumanizing impact of mass incarceration on black, Latino and indigenous men, women and children," said the Rev. Charles A. Wynder Jr., a priest and the Episcopal Church's staff officer for social justice and engagement. "Transforming criminal justice ministries from traditional prison ministry models to more holistic work of re-entry and policy advocacy is a holistic and integrated approach to more fully living into our Baptismal Covenant."

The 79th General Convention passed Resolution D004<sup>1</sup> to endorse specific reforms, such as reduction of mandatory minimum sentences, repeal of laws allowing life sentences for nonviolent offenses, and implementation of measures to reduce discrimination against former offenders. Other resolutions seek to end the death penalty and to eliminate a clause in the U.S. Constitution that makes an exception for inmates in the prohibition of slavery.

"Engaging in ministries that involve the accompaniment of men, women and children returning home from prison allows for mutual formation and transformation that may start with pain but doesn't have to remain there," Wynder said. "It is fundamentally part of God's mission of transformation, renewal and justice." We respectfully request a favorable report for HB 801.

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<sup>1</sup> General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Austin, 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), p. 673.