



Maryland
Justice
Project

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB0828

Correctional Services - Pre-release Unit for Women

To: Chairman Luke Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Vonunette Allen Maryland Justice Project, Volunteer

Date: 2/12/2020

I am writing seeking your assistance with passing the bill to give the women a Pre-Release facility of their own. Over twelve years ago, the only pre-release facility for women was closed. No one could actually explain why it had been closed. The men have 8 pre-release facilities which are Poplar HUI Pre-Release Unit, Maryland Correctional Pre-Release System, Baltimore Pre-Release Unit, Eastern Pre-Release Unit, Jessup Pre-Release Unit, Southern Maryland Pre-Release Unit, Dismas House East and Dismas House West.

You have women going out on work-release and paying room & board being housed in a maximum security prison. Housed on a unit with people that are maximum, medium and have life. At this time the women that are eligible for work-release are being housed in B-Building on B-West on the same unit that has a program called B-West Merit System.

There are limited work release and pre-release opportunities for women. Opportunities that do exist are either in Baltimore City or drug treatment. I am an ex-offender and I came home from prison after doing almost 9 years unprepared and no transition from prison. Thank God for my family and church family who assisted me with that adjustment. It was hard for me to find employment that would accept me without judging my criminal history. Being at a maximum facility failed to prepare me, yet if the women had a pre-release facility I would have had the tolls that I needed in order to have a smooth transition.

These opportunities when the Baltimore Pre-Release for Women was opened it produced positive results. It taught women how to be self-sufficient, independent and responsibilities. Meaning it allowed us to seeking stable employment; establish bank accounts in order to build a savings, and housing. At this point in time, the work release opportunities were offered through Baltimore Pre-release Unit for Women which was located in Baltimore City. It allowed women nearing the end of their incarceration to work in an area that requires 2 hours or less transportation time, using public transportation. The areas included Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Anne Arundel County. The availability of opportunities are based on employers who are willing to hire and inmate on work release. Having a work-release facility for women who never worked before have employment lower the recidivism.

Decreasing recidivism is partially based on effective transitioning to the community and the provision for education, skill development, and work ethics that you develop while at the pre-release facility. Since transitioning to the community is an important element of community adjustment expanding transitional and aftercare services to everyone that is within a year of release or a disputation of parole.

Unfortunately, people who have a criminal background carry a stigma, making it harder for us to adjust to life after release. Some people are unable to make that transition being in a maximum-security environment. I am asking that you support the passing of this bill. Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation with assisting us with this bill.

Respectfully,

Ms. Vonunette Allen

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