



**Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee
February 25, 2020**

**HB 828 – Corrections – Women’s Prerelease Unit – Requirements
(Women’s Prerelease Equity Act)**

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The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 828, which would clarify the definition of a “prerelease unit for women,” and locate a prerelease unit in communities where women are most likely to return upon reentry.

Women must have a separate, stand-alone prerelease unit.

Everyone exiting the prison system must be given the best chance to succeed in reentry. However, while Maryland has several lower-security prerelease units across the state that are designated for men, there are no similar facilities for women. Women only have access to prerelease services from the confines of MCI-Jessup, a maximum-security facility. This current scheme is inherently discriminatory, and runs counter to the principle of prerelease programs, to prepare people to successfully reenter their communities. Additionally, for women who have survived intimate partner violence or gender-based violence, accessing these services in a coed facility may be re-traumatizing, and make further success less likely. Women deserve to have a separate low-security level pre-release unit, that would provide them with a safe place to prepare to reenter their communities.

Prerelease units must be located in communities to which women will return.

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 often serve shorter sentences for low-level, nonviolent offenses. They are also often primary or sole caretakers of children. Having equitable access to job opportunities and community-based resources, and beginning to reunite with families, friends, and support systems, would make the difficult transition easier, and present them with the best opportunity for successful reentry.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 828.