



MARIAN HOUSE
Women Moving from Dependence to Independence

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB828
Correctional Services- Prerelease Unit for Women- Requirement
Women's Pre-Release Equity Act

TO: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, & members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Katie Allston, Executive Director

DATE: February 24, 2020

Marian House is a holistic, healing community for women and their children who are in need housing and support services. Marian House provides comprehensive wraparound services to assist women that are re-entering the community after incarceration. Marian House strongly supports House Bill 828 Correctional Services- Prerelease Unit.

Over 37 years ago, Marian House was opened to provide reentry supports for women leaving incarceration as Sisters and laywomen recognized that lack of support contributed to recidivism rates. They opened a community-based program that provides a safe and stable environment for women to feel empowered to build a strong foundation for their reintegration into the community. Years of working with incarcerated women have shown us that these women often find themselves in prison in part due to multiple histories of traumatic experiences including abuse (sexual, physical, & emotional), violent experiences as children, neglect, addiction, and more. In addition, for many, if not all, women, incarceration becomes another traumatic experience to add to their complex histories. It is evident that these issues need to be addressed in a trauma-informed, supportive environment – one that does not re-traumatize women.

A separate, stand-alone pre-release unit for women that begins to address these issues and barriers by providing comprehensive, integrated supportive services can make a huge impact on successful re-entry by preparing individuals for the goals they need to meet and the barriers they will face as they transition back into the community. Dedicated spaces for pre-release services offer an opportunity to create a physical environment and organizational culture that helps facilitate the transition. In addition, when pre-release centers are community-based, they will also allow individuals to build connections within the community that they will move into after release. These connections include family members, prospective employers, recovery support and substance abuse treatment, healthcare providers, and more – all of whom play a vital role in successful re-entry.

Women deserve equitable services that are comparable to those provided to men. Without adequate support, women have greater barriers to succeeding in life after prison. While empowerment and support for incarcerated individuals is important for both men and women, it is even more so for women as their health and healing is linked to the health and healing of the next generation, including breaking the cycle of incarceration. Research has shown that when we invest in women, they utilize that investment differently than men. Specifically, women invest in



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other people as well, including their families. Therefore, investment in women directly translates into investing in families, including the next generation.

We have seen first-hand that a women-only, community-based program supports previously incarcerated women and their unique needs. On behalf of the women we serve at Marian House, I respectfully urge you to take the call to action in **SUPPORT of HB828**.

Thank you for your support,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Allston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Katie Allston, LCSW-C
Executive Director