



SB0682 Correctional Services- Prerelease Unit for Women – Requirement to Operate

Presented to the Honorable Will Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 26, 2020 12:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee a favorable report on SB0682 Correctional Services- Prerelease Unit for Women - Requirement to Operate**, sponsored by Senators Mary Washington and Jeff Waldstreicher.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we work to ensure every child-bearing individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. Currently the commissioner of corrections is authorized, but not required, to operate a prerelease unit for women. Prerelease case management is drastically different when it comes to women and men, which is why it is imperative to ensure the operation of a separate prerelease unit for women – and that issues of pregnancy and parenting be made priorities in programming.

Pre-release programs, according to Maryland, offer “units that provide work and other rehabilitation for prisoners” and include “programs for inmates to develop or relearn occupational skills”.ⁱ Currently in Maryland, there are a total of nine prerelease centers open to men, while none are provided to women. A proposed co-ed prerelease unit in Jessup, Maryland will not satisfy the needs of the incarcerated population.ⁱⁱ Certain aspects of life after incarceration that are unique to the female prison population are easily overlooked in such co-ed programs. For example, there need to be dedicated programming to assist pregnant and parenting individuals about custody rights, healthcare access, and securement of necessary documents. There are too many barriers for individuals to successfully reintegrate into their communities and effectively care for their families. Women are three times more likely than men to head a single parent household and approximately seventy-five percent of women are primary caretakers of childrenⁱⁱⁱ. The incarceration of women continues to escalate and if we do not offer adequate prerelease services, we will consequently see a rise in recidivism^{iv}. Many returning citizens find themselves challenged with mental health issues or substance use disorders all while trying to secure employment, housing, and other basic needs^v.

This is also an issue of discrimination on the basis of gender. The number of men in prison may be more than the number of women, but the rate of incarcerated women in this state is exponentially rising. Women’s state prison populations have increased since 1978 at a rate that is over twice the rate of men’s.^{vi} Approximately, seventy-six percent of incarcerated people will be arrested again within five years of their release.^{vii} It could be argued that the recidivism of women in our state will continue to be higher without access to services that are already provided to men. These women face daily gender discrimination that we must no longer ignore. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable committee report on **SB0682**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ "DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY & CORRECTIONAL SERVICES." Public Safety & Correctional Services, Maryland Department of - Functions. Accessed February 14, 2020.

<https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/22dpscs/html/22agen.html>

ⁱⁱ Knezevich, Alison. "Maryland Plans a Coed Training Center for Inmates Heading Home, but Women's Advocates Say It's Not Enough." baltimoresun.com. Baltimore Sun, January 29, 2020. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-pol-womens-pre-release-20200127-liorw44dizfjhljzq2zw7h2ui-story.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Women's Pre-Release Facility." mdjusticeproject. Accessed February 14, 2020.

<https://www.marylandjusticeproject.org/women-s-pre-release-facility>

^{iv} Initiative, Prison Policy. "Who's Helping the 1.9 Million Women Released from Prisons and Jails Each Year?" Prison Policy Initiative. Accessed February 15, 2020. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/07/19/reentry/>

^v Bonessi, Dominique Maria. "Advocates Want Incarcerated Women In Maryland To Have Their Own Pre-Release Facility." NPR. NPR, January 29, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/local/305/2020/01/29/800899237/advocates-want-incarcerated-women-in-maryland-to-have-their-own-pre-release-facility>

^{vi} Initiative, Prison Policy. "The Gender Divide: Tracking Women's State Prison Growth." The Gender Divide: Tracking women's state prison growth | Prison Policy Initiative. Accessed February 14, 2020.

https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html

^{vii} "76% Of Released Inmates Arrested Again Within 5 Years: Report." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, June 11, 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/76-released-inmates-arrested-again-within-5-years-report-n86826>