



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 607
Public Safety- Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence

TO: Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Katie Allston, Executive Director of Marian House

DATE: February 18, 2020

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Marian House is a holistic, healing community for women and children in need of housing, employment and other support services. Marian House provides wraparound support to assist women exiting incarceration and other homeless women in need of our services. On behalf of Marian House and the women and families we serve, **I write to urge you to support HB 607.**

Marian House was founded as a joint project of the Sisters of Mercy and School Sisters of Notre Dame in response to the cyclical experiences of women exiting the Baltimore City Detention Center. The Sisters noticed that women were exiting jail with the same underlying problems that contributed to their incarceration in the first place, including substance use and mental health disorders among other challenges. Despite desires to change their circumstances, these women would return repetitively to the correctional system.

In 2019, we served 55 individuals with histories of incarceration in our transitional program. 93% of these women report also having a substance use disorder, and 80% have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. In our 36 years of serving women across the state of Maryland, it is common for women to enter our program with one or more co-occurring diagnoses. Often, they have never received treatment or have received inadequate treatment while incarcerated. It is clear that there is a strong relationship between incarceration and behavioral health outcomes for the women we serve, and likely for those with similar experiences across the state.

Implementing a Center of Excellence to aid in the efforts of the Crisis Intervention Team is a necessary step to further divert individuals away from the criminal justice system, and toward much needed supportive services. Filling the void between mental health and substance use treatment, and reducing recidivism rates was the basis upon which Marian House was founded, and continues to be a vital part of our mission today.

A core element of The Crisis Intervention Team emphasizes the importance of partnerships between law enforcement, advocacy, and mental health organizations. Currently, Marian House is an active partner post-release, serving women leaving incarceration, however the Center of Excellence would allow for individuals to be connected to services like ours before they are



MARIAN HOUSE

Women Moving from Dependence to Independence

arrested, to ensure that they are referred to the best intervention. We would appreciate having the opportunity to serve women as an alternative to incarceration and hope this bill will support that goal. We strongly advocate for initiatives that improve the quality of life for those in our communities, and ask that you vote in favor of **HB 607**.

Sincerely,

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

Katie Allston, LCSW-C
Executive Director