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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 608**

**Correctional Services - Prerelease Unit for Women - Requirement to Operate**

**TO:** Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbearly, & members of the Judiciary Committee

**FROM:** Carol Stern on behalf of Jews United for Justice

I am testifying in favor of HB 608 on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes thousands of Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

In Genesis Chapter 1, we learn that humans are created in God's image - *B'tselem Elohim*. We all contain the divine spark, and we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. This applies to all people, whether they have been incarcerated or not.

It is hard for me to imagine why the State of Maryland doesn't have a dedicated women's pre-release facility. Women who are being released from prison need a transition program that helps bridge the gap between life in the correctional facility and returning to independent living in their communities. While the Corrections Department operates several pre-release facilities for men, women are not accorded the same equitable resources to assist them in transitioning home, even though they represent a growing percentage of the state's total prison population. Women should, at a bare minimum, be accorded the same opportunities as men to make a successful transition home. Additionally, in order for a successful transition to happen, the location of this facility should be as close as possible to where the majority of incarcerated women live.

It is critical that we address the disparity between resources for men and women in Maryland's prison system by requiring the Commissioner of Corrections to operate a women's pre-release facility, which will treat women in Maryland's correctional facilities with the support and respect that all people deserve.

**On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 608.**