

BILL NO: House Bill 801  
TITLE: Correctional Services – Prerelease Unit for Women – Facilities and Services (Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act)  
COMMITTEE: Judiciary  
HEARING DATE: February 25, 2020  
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

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House Bill 801 imposes sweeping and necessary reform upon the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services as it relates to prerelease services for women. The Women's Law Center supports HB 801 as good public policy in responding to the growing disparate treatment of incarcerated women.

Over the past quarter century, there has been a profound change in the involvement of women within the criminal justice system. This is the result of more expansive law enforcement efforts, stiffer drug sentencing laws, and post-conviction barriers to reentry that uniquely affect women. The female prison population stands nearly eight times higher than in 1980. More than 60% of women in state prisons have a child under the age of 18<sup>1</sup>. Women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug or property offense, yet less is being done to address their unique needs.

The Women's Law Center supports reform measures to address the unique needs and challenges incarcerated women face in Maryland. This includes addressing education, job-readiness, mental health, and substance abuse needs, as well as developing comprehensive reentry plans to reduce barriers to housing, child care, and case management, and other basic needs. HB 801 would support such measures.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland supports the rights and dignity of all women, including those who are currently incarcerated. Therefore, the Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on House Bill 801.

*The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women's Law Center operates two hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County, the Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors Project, and the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Sentencing Project, Incarcerated Women and Girls:1980-2016, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls-1980-2016.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=12d509dd-a247-4f77-a4f8-6d0fdbbe0cd6e>