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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB801
Correctional Services - Prerelease Unit for Women - Facilities and Services
(Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act)

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica

My name is Ioana Stoica and I have been a Maryland resident for 22 of the past 30 years. I have resided in District 21 for the past four years. I am writing as a concerned citizen, and as a member of Bend the Arc's Moral Minyan and Oseh Shalom Synagogue in Laurel, MD. This testimony is in support of HB801, a bill that would require Maryland to operate a pre-release center for women to help them transition back as productive members of our community.

It is unconscionable that our state has several pre-release facilities for men, and none for women. The Jewish tradition teaches us that we must pursue justice above all, (Deut 16:20), and this includes providing equity of treatment to all people, regardless of sex or gender. According to the Maryland Justice Project, women are twice as likely as men to be incarcerated for a non-violent offense, and almost three quarters of these women are primary caretakers in their families. These women, who have been incarcerated, in many cases for outdated laws punishing poverty such as drug offenses (which overwhelmingly punish women of color and low-income individuals), should be provided opportunities for rehabilitation so they can rejoin their families and be able to provide for their children. And it is vital that these facilities have quality women's programming to truly assist them.

Currently, Maryland expects women to be released into the community without any transition period – without a job, cell phone, identification cards/driver's licenses, medical care, public benefits, and without any other supports to ensure a successful transition. How can they transition successfully when we are setting them up for failure? By not funding a women's pre-release center, we are cementing the cycle of poverty, injustice, and discrimination against our most vulnerable citizens.

Another Jewish value is that of care and love for our neighbor (Lev 19:18). This is a value that I know we share with many other faith traditions: "love your neighbor as yourself." It is our moral imperative to assist these women in transitioning back into our communities. This bill would require individualized and comprehensive reentry plans to help ensure that women have the proper help they need in all areas. It should help women procure important documents they need to function such as IDs; assist women in finding jobs, applying for healthcare and other benefits; support reunification of families provide gender-based programming that

addresses the trauma that many of these women have faced; and focus on rehabilitation instead of punishment.

Rabbi Hillel's teachings of two millennia ago, that we should not separate ourselves from our community, that we should share in our common tribulations, are why I support mandating a women's pre-release center be established with gender-responsive services. **I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB801.**