

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with the Maryland Justice Project. I am a resident of District 43, and a PhD researcher and violence prevention scientist with a specialty focus in maternal-child health outcomes. Research demonstrates that children with an incarcerated caregiver are one of the most vulnerable and at-risk populations, and accordingly, policymakers across the country (e.g., California, Minnesota, Washington) are putting into place responsive criminal justice reforms for nonviolent offenders who are primary caregivers to mitigate the serious impacts on families. **Therefore, I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 21 (SB0021), Criminal Procedure - Sentencing - Primary Caretaker**



Senate Bill 21 allows a defendant who is the primary caretaker of a child or vulnerable adult to file a motion requesting the caretaker role be considered during sentencing. As an alternative to incarceration, the court may instead order drug and alcohol treatment, family and individual counseling, job training, home confinement, or several other programs. SB0021 would apply to defendants who committed nonviolent crimes and are primarily responsible for a minor child or vulnerable adult.

Separating a caretaker from a child or vulnerable adult doesn't serve families – it further destabilizes them and punishes the child for the sins or mistakes of the parent. Allowing a case-by-case consideration of the ripple effects of incarcerating a parent or caretaker allows reforms that consider the best interest of families and communities and, ultimately, the opportunity to prioritize what is just, effective, and sensible for a better society and to disrupt the generational cycles of poverty, mental health issues, substance use, and struggle.

Incarcerating primary caretakers causes long-lasting damage to Maryland's children, families, and communities. Being separated from a caretaker who is in jail or prison is widely recognized by health researchers like myself as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). It has been well-documented that people who experience ACEs are more likely to have mental health challenges, substance use, and chronic health problems as adults – that is the generational cycle. Specifically having a parent who is incarcerated is associated with poor academic outcomes, antisocial behaviors, and school suspension and expulsion. On any given day, 90,000 Maryland children have a parent under some form of correctional supervision. Persons of color are disproportionately impacted by our criminal justice system, meaning that innocent children of color are especially at risk of experiencing the negative effects of parental incarceration.

While the impacts of incarceration on children are daunting, *these negative experiences can be prevented.* Community-based sentencing alternatives (such as SB0021) help children and caretakers. Sentencing alternatives allow a primary caretaker to be a stable, uninterrupted presence in a child's life. Justice-involved caretakers who stay with their children are themselves stabilized and experience better outcomes as well. In Washington, women who participated in the Parent Sentencing Alternative program had a recidivism rate of 8%, whereas women who were incarcerated and separated from their children had a recidivism rate of 29%.

Finally, SB0021 proposes a more cost-efficient approach to sentencing. This bill saves money by potentially avoiding incarceration (a policy that costs \$44,000 per person per year in Maryland); the additional cost benefits to taxpayers by keeping children out of the child welfare system (and other health and systems costs down the line) are also likely significant.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB0021, Criminal Procedure - Sentencing - Primary Caretaker.** Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tina Bloom, PhD, MPH, RN
District 43 Constituent
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore