



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB0523

February 21, 2023

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 0523 – Correctional Services - Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act)

POSITION: Support

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 523.

This legislation calls for the establishment and implementation of a “Healthy Start Bonding Program” (herein referred to as “Program”) under Maryland’s Department of Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS). Via this Program, pregnant and postpartum women incarcerated in DPSCS custody may be temporarily re-classified and relocated to the Prerelease unit. Women could stay for the duration of pregnancy and up to one year postpartum. Their baby would be able to reside with them in the prerelease unit for that year. Fathers (or another secondary caretaker) would have increased opportunities to visit their babies residing at the Prerelease unit.

Research shows that keeping incarcerated mothers and children connected increases positive behavioral, emotional, and health outcomes for both the parent and child, which may in turn reduce correctional costs and increase community safety.ⁱ Families thrive with stability and connectedness; a strong bond between a mom and her baby is less likely to form if separated.

Alternatives to incarceration, such as community-based supervision, would be more effective toward keeping families together and promoting healthy communities.ⁱⁱ Nevertheless, co-locating mom and baby in the carceral unit may ameliorate many barriers, such as exorbitant costs related to transit, lodging, and phone or video calls.

Keeping families together via the proposed Program may facilitate family cohesion, thereby improving health and social outcomes for moms and babies and ultimately strengthening Maryland’s communities.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on HB0523.

ⁱ Snyder, Z. (2009). Keeping Families Together: The Importance of Maintaining Mother–Child Contact for Incarcerated Women.

Women & Criminal Justice, 19(1), 37-59. DOI:10.1080/08974450802586869

ⁱⁱ The Opportunity Agenda. (2006). “Keeping Families Together.” Accessed via transformingthesystem.org/criminal-justice-policy-solutions/fostering-an-environment-for-respecting-childrens-rights/keeping-families-together/