

Dear House Judiciary Committee,

I am a voter in Maryland District 44A and a supporter of the Maryland Justice Project and Out for Justice, organizations that support and advocate for formerly and currently incarcerated Marylanders. **I am testifying in support of HB0523, the Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act.**

Under current Maryland law, a woman who gives birth while in incarcerated on average is allowed to spend less than 48 hours with her new child. This bill would provide for those eligible to be transferred to a pre-release unit during pregnancy and post-partum for up to a year, and would allow for increased visitation between incarcerated women and their children.

Immediate separation after birth is traumatic for both the infant and the mother, and can have lifelong consequences for the child who, as a result of this trauma, is at higher risk for PTSD and substance abuse disorders—conditions which for many people are an on-ramp to a lifetime of interaction with the criminal justice system. Mothers separated from their newborn infants are also at much higher risk for depression and other emotional disorders. Beyond the basic humanity of allowing infants and mothers to stay together whenever possible, the increased cost to the state of incarcerated mothers who need more medical treatment and of children spending an additional year in the foster system as newborns is significant.

Fostering strong bonds between a parent and child is in everyone's interest. Children can grow up less traumatized and more secure in themselves and their family, mothers when they return from incarceration have a relationship with their child that they can build on, and families will be stronger as a result, reducing recidivism rates.

The solution is straightforward. For the above reasons and more, I urge you to **vote in support of HB0523.**

Thank you for your time, service and consideration.

Sincerely,
Daryl Yoder
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