



www.marylandwomen.org

# Maryland Commission for Women

A Commission of the Maryland Department of Human Services

51 Monroe Street, Ste. 1034 – Rockville, Maryland 20850

240-306-5718

www.marylandwomen.org

February 7, 2024

*Tawanda A. Bailey, Chair*

*Maxine Griffin Somerville,  
First Vice Chair*

*Patricia McHugh Lambert, Esq.  
Second Vice Chair*

*Pier Blake*

*Jonathon Carrington*

*Gloria Dent*

*Essita R. Duncan, Esq.*

*Judith Emmel*

*Kathryn M. Fiddler, DNP*

*Maggi G. Gaines*

*Linda Han*

*Sarah Ackerstein Klein, Esq.*

*Lauren M. Lambert*

*Christine S. Lee, Ph.D.*

*Brenda McChriston*

*Evelyne S. Steward*

*LaShaune Stitt, Ph.D.*

*Lenita Walker*

*Monica Watkins*

*Rev. Tamara England Wilson*

*Vacant,  
Executive Director*

*Tammy Wise  
Management Associate*

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair  
The Honorable Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair  
Judicial Proceeding Committee  
2 East  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB0071 – Correctional Services - Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act)

Dear Senators Smith and Waldstreicher and Members of the Judicial Proceeding Committee:

The Maryland Commission for Women writes to you with respect to support SB0071 – Correctional Services - Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act) requiring the Division of Correction to allow a certain pregnant woman and a certain women who recently gave birth to transfer to the prerelease unit for women for up to 1 year following the birth.

The MCW was established in 1965 and was set in state law in 1971. An office of the Department of Human Services, the commission is a 25-member advisory board whose duties outlined in its enabling legislation include:

- Study the status of women in our state.
- Recommend methods of overcoming discrimination.
- Recognize women's accomplishments and contributions.
- Provide informed advice to the executive and legislative branches of government on the issues concerning the women of our state.

It is to fulfill this mandate that the commission writes to you today. Please note that the positions expressed in this letter are those of the Commission for Women and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Governor or the Department of Human Services.

An average of 4-8% of incarcerated women are pregnant during their incarceration. Incarcerated pregnant women are at risk for prenatal complications and preterm births. Additionally pregnant women often enter our correctional system with multiple socio-cultural factors that contribute to detrimental social and Health outcomes for themselves and their babies upon release.

During the period of incarceration, Maryland's correctional system has a unique opportunity to address issues, including facilitating strong bonding of the infants with their mothers and incentivizing the mothers to comply with requirements to remain with their child in the prerelease unit. This bill requires the Division of Correction to

establish the Healthy Start Bonding Program to facilitate strong bonds between incarcerated women and their children; and requiring the Division to allow liberal visitational between certain individuals and certain children under certain circumstances. In addition, this bill will give our state correctional system the means to provide services aimed at improving potential mental health issues that can arise from the separation of mother and child during periods of incarceration.

This bill will undoubtedly improve health and mental health outcomes when new mothers leave prison and re-enter society. Therefore, we strongly urge you to support for SB0071.

With very best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tawanda A. Bailey', written in a cursive style.

Tawanda A. Bailey, Chair  
Maryland Commission for Women

*(The positions expressed in this letter are those of the Commission for Women and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Governor or the Department of Human Services.)*