



TESTIMONY FOR HB0037
Reentry Services for Women
Commission and Pilot Program - Establishment

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Bartlett

Committee: Judiciary

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0037 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

HB0037 aims to address the reentry challenges faced by formerly incarcerated women. It establishes the Commission on Reentry Services for Women, which is to create a comprehensive reentry plan specifically tailored for formerly incarcerated women. It also establishes the Reentry Pilot Program to connect formerly incarcerated women with support services.

This bill is a logical follow-up to SB0684/HB0801 which, as enacted, now requires a pre-release center for women with reentry services such as family reunification, employment, housing, and addictions counseling. While there are many pre-release centers for incarcerated men, there were ZERO pre-release centers for women in Maryland. Maryland needs to continue to bolster its programs for returning women.

The pilot program required by HB0037 gives an indication of the comprehensive reentry services more women could receive in the future. The "Local reentry navigators" identified in the bill are to help women access reentry services provided by the Maryland Department of Health, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Human Services, and the Maryland Department of Labor, among other agencies. This, in combination with tailored reentry plans developed by the Commission on Reentry Services for Women, will offer a smooth transition for women.

For the convicted individual, a smooth transition offers better chances for housing, education, and employment. This, in turn, reduces the impact on families and children who stand to benefit from a more successful reentry of the former offender.

In addition, a successful reentry aids in keeping an individual from becoming a repeat offender. Thus, a more successful reentry could mean avoided costs associated with re-incarceration and the support families would need who were financially dependent on this individual.

The bill represents an important step toward addressing the needs of formerly incarcerated women during their reentry process and bring those services on par with those offered to men. The Maryland Legislative Coalition continues to advocate for this and similar bills that increase chances for a successful reentry for all former offenders.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.