



**House Bill 37-Services for Formerly Incarcerated  
Women - Commission and Pilot Program –  
Establishment  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**March 26, 2024**

**FAVORABLE**

My name is Monica Cooper, Executive Director of the Maryland Justice Project, an organization dedicated to advocating for Maryland’s incarcerated women and girls and providing support upon their release. I am also a co-founder of the Women’s Pre-Release Equity Coalition, a coalition of non-profit organizations that has been advocating for the re-opening of a pre-release center for women in Maryland since 2016. The Women’s Pre-Release Equity Coalition was the driving force behind the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act that the Maryland General Assembly passed in 2020 and again in 2021 with an override of the Governor’s veto. I am a formerly incarcerated woman who spent 14 years at MCI-W. I am submitting this testimony in support of **HB37-Services for Formerly Incarcerated Women-Commission and Pilot Program-Establishment**.

HB37 initially placed the Commission on Services for Formerly Incarcerated Women under the control of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), a proposal that neither the Maryland Justice Project nor the Women’s Pre-Release Equity Coalition could support. DPSCS has been failing incarcerated women for decades and placing it in charge of the proposed Commission would only allow it to paper over its own failings and to delay the provision of adequate rehabilitative and re-entry services to women. However, with the bill’s transfer of oversight of the Commission to the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services, we support this bill and urge its passage.

During my time with the Maryland Justice Project, re-entry navigation for women leaving MCI-W has consisted of nothing more than DPSCS dropping women at a transit station with \$50, perhaps a bag of condoms, and little else. Women with mental illness have been left without supervision and without arrangements for family to meet them. Women have been released without adequate drug treatment programming and have relapsed and overdosed shortly after release. The same is true of poor (if any) mental health services that have left women unprepared to cope with the world outside the walls and led to suicides.

DPSCS must be accountable for the services that it is, and is not, providing to women in its custody and upon release. It is my hope, and the hope of all members of the Women’s Pre-Release Equity Coalition, that HB37 will lead to that accountability and to improved services for women returning to their families and communities.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB37.

Respectfully submitted,

Monica Cooper  
Executive Director  
Maryland Justice Project