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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: HB 0037- Re-Entry Services for Women

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 3/3/24

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 0037.

House Bill 0037 will establish the Commission of Reentry Services for Women overseen by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and create a comprehensive reentry plan for formerly incarcerated women; requiring the Commission to study the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated women, gather data from counties, identify service gaps, and report its findings to the Governor and General Assembly by June 30, 2025; establish the Reentry Pilot Program for Formerly Incarcerated Women and connect formerly incarcerated women to supportive services.

My name is Shalon Pangburn; I am a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist II for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender as well as a person in long term recovery from a substance use disorder. Due to my lived experiences with active addiction I have the knowledge and understanding to assist others through their life in active addiction to recovery. Although every person suffering from addiction does not necessarily have the experience of crossing paths with the justice system through various arrests or incarcerations, I do. These experiences give me further knowledge of the injustices incarcerated women experience and how having a substance use disorder further complicates incarceration, creating unnecessary barriers.

I have experienced many ups and downs during my 13 years in active addiction which resulted in various arrests and incarcerations. In 2012 I experienced my first “brush” with the justice system which resulted in a 1 year sentence to be served at the Harford County Detention Center. I spent that time looking for education and assistance with what I felt was the core issue, my drug addiction.

I was met with minimal assistance and resources in the detention center. Upon leaving on parole, I was met with no assistance or resources to again address the core issue of addiction or to prevent my return to incarceration.

Recovery was my desire but I was lost trying to find a path. For the next several years I was arrested in both Baltimore and Harford Counties which resulted in various periods of incarceration. Throughout these years I was met with no guidance to prevent my return to the justice system. My involvement with the justice system was a side effect of my unaddressed substance use disorder.

My story was different than most of my friends in active addiction and those I had been incarcerated with. I had a home with two supportive parents to return to. I had the support but again not the direction as to where I could go to get help. I watched others be released to the street because they did not have the supportive family like I did and were not given realistic usable resources. Of course there were resources available to each of us but we weren't given direction on how to access these or the ability to grasp what was really available to us. We relied on each other for support and guidance but even that was limited.

While at Harford County Detention Center I felt extreme frustration as most of the programs they had available were for the male incarcerated individuals only. Female incarcerated individuals were left with minimal support and a lot of idle time. Luckily while at Baltimore County Detention Center I was court ordered to their START program. In that program I was met with more information than I knew what to do with. We spent the next 3 months working through various programs which included the recovery process, addressing past trauma and guidance to create a better life for ourselves once we were released. We were given an abundance of resources, however those resources were for the most part available in Baltimore City which created limited opportunities for those of us who did not live in the City and had minimal transportation options.

Once I was released from jail and was able to address my substance use disorder appropriately, I began actively searching for resources. These resources were not just for myself but to pass along and share with those ladies I had been incarcerated with.

Currently I have 5 years in recovery and work with various programs and resource centers to provide education, resources and opportunities to the clients I work with as a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist II for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender.

If House Bill 0037 were in effect during the years I was incarcerated, myself and so many others would have been given a better chance to succeed and thrive in a life not ruled by active addiction. We would have been given the tools needed to effectively make changes and the resources necessary to begin life after incarceration.

For these reasons, The Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 0037.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

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