



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

March 7, 2024

HB0037

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 37 – Reentry Services for Women - Commission and Pilot Program – Establishment
POSITION: **Support**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill 37.

Through the establishment of the Commission on Reentry Services for Women, HB 37 would identify the specific challenges that women face when returning home after incarceration or detention; and create a comprehensive 5-year reentry plan to help ensure that women receive the services and supports needed to successfully reintegrate in their communities. The Commission will be composed of nine members, including at least one reentry professional and one previously incarcerated woman, and will be overseen by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. In addition, HB 37 would establish the Reentry Pilot Program for Formerly Incarcerated Women to ensure that women returning to their communities are connected with supportive services from providers including the Department of Labor, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Formerly incarcerated women have particular needs distinct from male returning citizens. For example, incarcerated women are significantly more likely than incarcerated men to have sole custody of their children and to resume their parenting role following release.¹ Another gender difference is that formerly incarcerated Black women have significantly higher rates of unemployment than other formerly incarcerated people.² Safe and stable housing is especially important for women returning home from prison in order to reduce their reliance on abusive relationships to meet basic needs.³ Research also indicates that reentry services should include, for example, gender-based screening instruments for substance use and psychiatric disorders; gender-informed substance abuse interventions, such as group-based therapy and the use of peer recovery specialists; and family housing supports designed specifically for women.⁴

In Maryland, as elsewhere across the country, insufficient resources have been dedicated to developing and providing reentry services that meet the specific needs of formerly incarcerated women. HB 37 is an important step toward ensuring that women returning home from prison have access to gender- and trauma-informed services and supports to help them address challenges including medical and mental health, employment, and housing needs.

For these reasons the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 37.

¹ “Female Reentry and Gender Responsive Programming, Recommendations for Policy and Practice,” Holly Ventura Miller, May 19, 2021, National Institute of Justice, available at <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/female-reentry-and-gender-responsive-programming>

² “Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people,” Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, July 2018, Prison Policy Initiative, available at <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html#appendix>.

³ “After Incarceration: A Guide to Helping Women Reenter the Community, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration,” available at https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/PEP20-05-01-001_508.pdf

⁴ “Female Reentry and Gender Responsive Programming, Recommendations for Policy and Practice,” Holly Ventura Miller, May 19, 2021, National Institute of Justice, available at <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/female-reentry-and-gender-responsive-programming>