

## Pro-Choice Maryland Action

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### **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 191: Correctional Services - Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act)**

TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Pro-Choice Maryland Action

DATE: February 27, 2024

Pro-Choice Maryland Action 501(c)(4) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates for policies that protect reproductive freedom and that advance reproductive justice, including support and services for those who have children. Pro-Choice Maryland Action **strongly supports House Bill 191 as a means of promoting secure attachment between infants and their birth parent, and of advancing better health outcomes for both children and parents.**

Currently, infants born to incarcerated individuals in Maryland are separated from their birth-parents almost immediately. Within one to two days of birth, newborns are placed with secondary caregivers or into the foster system. Research studies show that when newborns are shuffled from one caregiver to another, or placed in an otherwise unstable environment, they suffer severe trauma that may lead to complications throughout life, including mental health struggles, developmental regression, heart disease, hypertension, decreased longevity, substance abuse, and more. For the birth parent, the separation can lead to feelings of extreme grief and loss, and profound mental health challenges.

The problem of infant separation addressed by this bill will only be exacerbated in upcoming years. While men constitute a larger share of the incarcerated population, the rate of growth for incarcerated women has been twice as high as that of men since 1980. Of these women, up to 8% of them give birth behind bars.

Current policies disproportionately harm individuals who already face significant other systemic disadvantages. Women of color, individuals who have been trafficked, or who live in poverty are more likely to be incarcerated and pregnant behind bars. Maryland has an opportunity to not only promote the well-being of infants born behind bars, but also to address racial disparities created through the practice of separating infants from their birth parents, as well as to support the rehabilitation of their birth parents, and their subsequent successful reentry.

For the aforementioned reasons, **we urge a favorable report on House Bill 191.**