

HB37 Reentry Services for Women - Commission and Pilot Program – Establishment

Testimony

Good afternoon, Chairman Clippinger Vice Chairman Bartlett and members of the Judiciary Committee: I am pleased to present House Bill 37 Reentry Services for Women - Commission and Pilot Program – Establishment on behalf of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women of Southern Maryland. We seek a favorable vote on this bill. This bill would address Maryland's lack of 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 establishing the Reentry Pilot Program for Formerly Incarcerated Women by connecting these citizens to supportive services. Reentry refers to the transition of an incarcerated individual from prison or jail back into the community. Reentry programs also known as post release, reintegration and resettlement in correctional facilities are not created equal, with some institutions committed to preparing individuals for their return home, while others provide little to no reentry services or programs.

When women are released into the community, they encounter many difficulties such as poor and inconsistent health care, lack of or no social support, parenting stress, homelessness and poverty, and reduced, or very limited employment opportunities. This is especially acute with African American women. African American women face challenges in reentry and reintegration that other populations do not have to face most notably, racism. Additionally, incarcerated African American women are often mothers, care givers, and heads of household before they become offenders.

Though not relegated solely to African American women, some challenges that women face are addiction, abuse, unemployment, and poverty. Furthermore, homelessness is a reality for many women who leave prison if they do not have family or social support are faced with, thereby leaving them into a downward spiral.

The rising rates of women in prison is a serious health and social policy issue in the context of what is already known about the intersecting health and social inequality experienced by women in prison and the barriers to women accessing social determinants of health resulting from disempowerment within broader social structures. Thank you for the opportunity to present HB37 and on behalf of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women of Southern Maryland, we respectfully request your favorable support for this bill.