



TESTIMONY FOR HB0191
Correctional Services
Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Mireku-North

Committee: Judiciary

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0191 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Currently, Maryland women who are incarcerated are only permitted to remain with their newborns until they are discharged from the hospital – typically 24 to 48 hours after birth for a standard vaginal delivery. Then the infant must either be placed with a secondary caregiver or enter the foster care system at just a few days old.

With the Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act, pregnant women who are at pre-release status can relocate to the facility for the duration of their pregnancy and up to one-year postpartum. During that postpartum period, infants will be permitted to live in the facility with their mothers and have access to care specialized for their developmental needs. For women who are not eligible for pre-release, the bill allows increased visitation for infants and access to infant bonding programs.

The benefits of allowing an infant to be with their mother are infinite and life-long. As a mother, I cannot imagine the heartache and depression I would endure if my child were taken from me within hours of giving birth and possibly put into foster care. I cannot imagine the life-long impact on a child to be born into such uncertain conditions. Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote that “the degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.” Maryland cannot be judged well until it passes and enacts the Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act.

MLC supports this bill and recommends a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.