

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee

****Support****

HB0191 - Correctional Services – Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act)

February 27, 2024

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC **supports** passage of SB71: Correctional Services – Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act).¹

HB0191 would allow a pregnant woman who is in prerelease status to relocate to the prerelease unit for women throughout the duration of pregnancy. It would also allow a pregnant woman in prerelease status who has recently given birth and her infant to reside in the prerelease unit for up to one year following the birth of the child. The legislation would require the establishment of this program at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women and would require that professionals with expertise in maternal and child health and well-being be consulted in the development of the program.

Mother infant bonding begins with the first contact between mother and infant following birth. Continued contact and interaction between mother and baby leads to long-term emotional attachment for mother and baby as well as infant social and emotional development. Separation between mother and baby inhibits this bonding process and increases the risk for insecure attachment. It also inhibits breastfeeding and all the benefits that come with breastfeeding. While we are not weighing in on the details or feasibility of establishing this program, we strongly support the concept and believe that whenever possible, we should find ways to keep infants with their mothers.

For these reasons we recommend a favorable committee report on HB0191: Correctional Services – Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act).

¹ Members of CMPC who support this legislation include Child Justice, Center for Hope, Fostering Change Network Foundation, Franklin Law Group, Maryland Children's Alliance, Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, MOMCares, National Association of Social Workers - MD, and Diana Philip.