

**Testimony of Veronica DeRamous**  
**Submitted to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**  
**Hearing on SB632-The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act**  
**February 13, 2025**

I am writing to address the pressing need for a dedicated pre-release center for women, as they currently face inequities compared to their male counterparts. For instance, at MCIW, which is classified as a maximum-security facility, women on work release do not receive the same \$50 allowance for work-related expenses that men do.

Currently, MCIW offers only five work release job locations, limiting women's options because they are not permitted to use public transportation to get to their jobs. The existing policy restricts them to a 30-mile radius, but thanks to Project Fresh's partnership with Charm Cards, women can obtain bus passes to facilitate their travel. Unfortunately, administrative issues have led to unreliable transportation, leaving women arriving late or missing work altogether. This undermines the fundamental goal of work release, which is to secure employment post-release and reduce recidivism. Alarmingly, 85% of women who participated in work release were unable to retain their jobs due to the distance from their residences after release—many are commuting from Baltimore to Bethesda, for example.

Additionally, Project Fresh initiated a clothing closet for women, but recent administrative changes have hindered access to suitable interview attire. While men can wear jeans, women are restricted to wearing gray sweats and are prohibited from donning blue, black, or gray dress pants for interviews or work. Furthermore, there are not enough bottom bunks available for pre-release, further complicating the situation.

This treatment is neither fair nor impartial. Women are paying to share prison cells, yet they lack the necessary resources and support that should be available to them. It is imperative that Project Fresh establishes its own dedicated pre-release housing building to ensure that women can benefit from the programs they need.

Lastly, I urge you to consider the implementation of the CARES Act Home Confinement at the pre-release center. This would allow women to avoid returning to unstable or potentially dangerous environments upon release, enabling them to secure jobs close to their new residences and fostering their independence. The CARES Act home detention program has demonstrated a remarkably low 0.22% three-year recidivism rate, allowing individuals to reintegrate into their communities effectively.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I hope for your support in advocating for a more equitable system for women in our correctional facilities.

Sincerely,  
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