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SB0632

February 13, 2025

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 632 - Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)

POSITION: Support with Amendment

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) respectfully requests a **favorable with amendments** committee report on Senate Bill (SB) 632.

SB 632 alters the location and extends the timeline for which the prerelease facility for female incarcerated individuals must be established as enacted by the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act. SB 632 implements comprehensive, "gender-responsive" rehabilitative services to women classified in the prerelease status. The bill also requires that the prerelease facility ensure that, before release, the individual has been screened for public health benefits eligibility, has secured stable housing for at least one year, has pertinent personal documents, and has been engaged with activities that foster meaningful and self-sustaining income after release.

The proposed legislation addresses critical shortcomings in the implementation of the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act by offering a vital opportunity to support incarcerated women, particularly women of color, as they reintegrate into their communities. With the women's prison population ballooning by 264% since 1980, services have not kept pace, leaving women ill-prepared for successful reentry.ⁱ The original act, while well-intentioned, has been hampered by inadequate planning, including an undersized facility and a lack of robust gender-responsive programming. This bill rectifies these issues by mandating a larger facility with sufficient acreage, increasing bed capacity to meet the clear need, and specifying the location within Baltimore City. Crucially, it defines "gender-responsive" programming and requires its provision at the facility itself, ensuring that women receive the targeted support they need. Given the disproportionate number of Black women incarcerated and the stark disparity in services available to women compared to men, these changes are essential to break the cycle of recidivism. Reducing recidivism not only empowers women to rebuild their lives but also contributes to a healthier Baltimore economy and less strain on public budgets and services. This bill honors the legacy of Baltimore advocate Monica Cooper and offers a tangible path towards a more just and equitable system.

While the BCA supports the intent of the legislation, it would like the inclusion of an amendment that ensures the requirement for the prerelease program to ensure stable housing for at least one year after release. Otherwise, this may become a hurdle for the release of incarcerated women who have otherwise rehabilitated but not successfully obtained long-term housing due to external reasons.

Due to the above reasons, the Baltimore City Administration respectfully requests a **favorable with amendment** committee report on Senate Bill 632.

ⁱ Vera Institute of Justice. (2019, December). Incarceration Trends in Maryland. <https://vera-institute.files.svcdn.com/production/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-maryland.pdf>