

# **Testimony of Veronica DeRamous JPR.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ameena DeRamous

Position: FAV

**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,  
Veronica Deramous  
ameenaderamous@gmail.com

**SB632\_CarolStern\_JUFJ\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: CAROL STERN

Position: FAV

February 13, 2025

Carol Stern  
Chevy Chase, MD 20815



**TESTIMONY ON SB 632 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)**

**TO:** Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee; Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

**FROM:** Carol Stern on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Carol Stern, and I live in Chevy Chase in District 16. I am submitting testimony as a member of the Maryland Core Team of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) in support of SB632. Despite being required by law, there has been no progress in building the Women's Prerelease Center since the Maryland General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto to pass the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act (the Act) in 2021. JUFJ is a member of the Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition and organizes more than 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice inspired by Jewish values.

The Jewish text that shapes my religious and moral conviction that the legislature must build and fund the Women's Prerelease Facility is from Genesis Chapter 1, where we learn that humans are created in God's image - *B'tselem Elohim*. We all contain the divine spark, and we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. This applies to all people, whether they have been incarcerated or not. When we are working to reform our justice system, we must demand that it operate in accordance with these deeply held Jewish beliefs.

SB632 remedies the deficiencies in the current Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) plans for the women's prerelease center, now known as the "Life Skills and Re-Entry Center for Women" (LSRCW) by:

- 1) Requiring DPSCS to select a new site anywhere in Baltimore City that is at least 3 acres in size.
- 2) Requiring the LSRCW to accommodate no fewer than the highest number of women in prerelease status in 2023, as reported by Secretary Scruggs in August 2024. This number, 91, should accommodate the ADP of women in prerelease status and allow for an increase in population or episodic population spikes. If there is any extra capacity, women in minimum and work release status may also be housed there, as they are in the men's facilities.
- 3) Defining the gender-responsive services that women in prerelease should be receiving and setting July 1, 2026, as the deadline by which those services will be provided.
- 4) Requiring DPSCS to provide gender-responsive prerelease services at the LSRCW and prohibiting DPSCS from requiring women to receive those services at a facility serving men, at a facility that houses prisoners who are not eligible for prerelease status, or at a different facility for women.
- 5) Requiring the operation of the LSRCW by June 1, 2027.
- 6) Authorizing up to \$500,000 from the Performance Incentive Grant Fund to be used for women's prerelease services.

A woman's pre-release center will better prepare women for re-entry while equipping them with the necessary resources and tools they need to provide for themselves and their families.

**On behalf of JUFJ, I join other members of the Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition to respectfully urge that you pass and fully fund SB632.**

# **SB 632 Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehab**

Uploaded by: Catherine OMalley

Position: FAV

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BILL NO: Senate Bill 0632  
TITLE: Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services  
Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)  
COMMITTEE: Judiciary  
HEARING DATE: February 13, 2025  
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

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The Women's Law Center of Maryland is dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women throughout the State. It is with this mandate that we strongly advocate for the favorable report of Senate Bill 0632, and the end of Maryland's 16 years of illegal discrimination against women offenders in the state.

Since December 2009, when the Maryland Department of Corrections closed the Baltimore Prerelease Unit for Women, Maryland has denied equal facilities and services to incarcerated women in "prerelease" status. Prerelease programs provide housing and job search assistance, guidance on connecting with local support services, therapeutic programs for mental health and trauma, and most importantly, successful reunification of incarcerated individuals with their children and families. Good prerelease programs reduce recidivism, which is why Maryland currently operates several standalone prerelease and minimum-security facilities - *for men*. SB 0632 will end this inequity and provide equal access to these same opportunities for incarcerated women.

Incarcerated women in Maryland are returning home without jobs and housing, without learning or re-learning basic life skills, disconnected from their communities, and most importantly, without having laid the groundwork for successful family reunification. Two-thirds of incarcerated women are mothers, and close to half of those incarcerated mothers are single heads of households. When the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act was passed into law in 2021, it should have been the end of this shameful disparity. However, it is now four years later and DPSCS has missed every deadline including for site selection, facility construction, and facility operation. What we do have is a revised project plan that falls short of the need and legal requirements established by the original pre-release bill.

SB 0632 addresses these issues including mandating an adequately sized site (not less than three acres with capacity for all women eligible for prerelease – not just the 64 beds slated in the current DPSCS plan) and requiring that prerelease services be both "gender-responsive" and available onsite, so incarcerated women are not exposed to potentially dangerous populations including non-prerelease eligible women or mixed-sex facilities.

Incarcerated women in Maryland who have earned prerelease status deserve equal facilities and programs as men, as required by both the U.S. Constitution and the Maryland Equal Rights Amendment. The Women's Law Center strongly supports the advocacy of the Women's Pre-Release Equity Coalition and the original sponsors Senator Mary Washington and Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield's efforts to redress this crisis in a manner that is sensitive to both the unique trauma and criminogenic risks faced by incarcerated women seeking successful reentry, recovery, and recidivism reduction. The Women's Law Center therefore vehemently urges our legislature to pass SB 0632.

*The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.*

# **LWVMD\_2.13.25\_ Testimony in Support of SB 632 Cor**

Uploaded by: Cynthia Boddie-Willis

Position: FAV





## **TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE**

### **SB 632 – Correctional Services – Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services – Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President**

**DATE: February 13, 2025**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) strongly supports SB 632, The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act, which seeks to ensure that incarcerated women have access to comprehensive, gender-responsive prerelease services. This bill is a necessary step toward equity in the criminal justice system and will help reduce recidivism, improve reentry outcomes, and strengthen communities across Maryland.

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) has long advocated for a criminal justice system that prioritizes rehabilitation, reentry support, and alternatives to incarceration when appropriate. As formalized in its national position, the League believes that effective reentry programs—including access to education, vocational training, mental health services, and housing assistance—are critical in reducing recidivism and improving public safety. Furthermore, the League is committed to eliminating systemic racial, ethnic, and gender biases within the criminal justice system, recognizing that marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by incarceration and lack of reentry services.

Currently, Maryland lacks a dedicated prerelease facility for women, despite the existence of such programs for men. This systemic gap places formerly incarcerated women at a significant disadvantage, often releasing them without the structured support necessary for a successful transition back into society. SB 632 addresses this inequity by ensuring that incarcerated women have access to the same comprehensive prerelease services that are available to men.

[Studies](#) show that when individuals receive adequate prerelease support, they are significantly less likely to reoffend. Providing structured reentry programs for women will not only benefit them and their families but will also enhance public safety and reduce the financial burden associated with reincarceration. Ensuring equitable access to prerelease services is a fundamental step toward a fairer, more effective criminal justice system.

LWVMD urges a favorable report on SB 632.



# **Ilethea Murdough Testimony-JPR.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ilethea Murdough

Position: FAV

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

My name is Ilethea Murdough, and for 17 years, I was an inmate at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women. During my last year in the prison, when I was in pre-release status, I saw case management's team deprive women of appropriate pre-release security status. I have seen case management deprive the women of job opportunities by not classifying them in a timely fashion. They have sent women on job interviews with prison uniforms on and with prison staff in the interview room. I have seen case management delay classification into pre-release so that the women were not there long enough to qualify for educational benefits and get their GEDs.

There were women who were classified into pre-release, but they lost that status because of a dirty urinalysis test. I saw 10 women thrown out of pre-release because of dirty urine even though the prison signed a contract with them saying they would not be thrown out of pre-release for a failed urine test. There has not been a therapeutic treatment program at MCI-W for women with drug issues since 2016.

The women in MCI-W are in dire need of a real pre-release program outside of MCI-W. In 2023 alone there were at least 30-35 drug overdoses in the prison and at least 10 deaths from drugs that were covered up by Margaret Chippendale, the former warden.

MCI-W is in need of help and a full investigation.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my testimony to the Committee.

Ilethea Murdough

# **MLAW Testimony - SB632 - Correctional Services - C**

Uploaded by: Jessica Morgan

Position: FAV



Bill No: SB632  
Title: Correctional Services-Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services-Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)  
Committee: Judicial Proceedings  
Hearing: February 13, 2025  
Position: FAVORABLE

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The Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW) is a statewide coalition of women’s groups and individuals formed to provide a non-partisan, independent voice for Maryland women and families. MLAW’s purpose is to advocate for legislation affecting women and families. To accomplish this goal, MLAW creates an annual legislative agenda with issues voted on by MLAW members and endorsed by organizations and individuals from all over Maryland. **SB632 - Correctional Services-Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services-Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)** is a priority on the [2025 MLAW Agenda](#) and we urge your support.

SB632 requires Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to correct several critical deficiencies in its current plans for the Life Skills and Reentry Center for Women (LSRCW) and to implement comprehensive, “gender-responsive” rehabilitative services to women classified in the prerelease status.

In 2021, the Maryland General Assembly passed, over Governor Hogan’s veto, the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act, which required DPSCS to construct a free-standing prerelease center for Maryland’s incarcerated women. Prerelease facilities are community-based facilities operating at the lowest security level and to provide “gender-responsive” programs and services designed for women at the end of their sentences to aid their transition back into their communities. The statute required the facility to begin operation in June 2023. Unfortunately, DPSCS has delayed progress on the facility, and the current plans are unacceptable, will not facilitate the women’s successful transition home, and the programming does not meet the statutory requirement that DPSCS provide “gender-responsive” programming designed for the needs of returning women.

This bill will make the following changes to the original law: 1.) Requires DPSCS to select a site that is at least 3 acres in size; 2.) Increases the bed size from 64 to at least 91; 3.) Locate the facility anywhere in Baltimore City; 4.) Specifically defines what constitutes “gender-responsive” programming and services; 5.) Requires all programming to be provided at the LSRCW and not at other facilities.

We urge you to support of **SB632**.

## MLAW 2025 Supporting Organizations

The following organizations have signed on in support of our 2025 Legislative Agenda:

1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East  
AAUW Anne Arundel County  
AAUW Garrett Branch  
AAUW Howard County  
AAUW Kensington-Rockville Branch  
AAUW Maryland  
Anne Arundel County NOW  
Bound for Better, advocates for Domestic Violence  
Calvert County Democratic Womens' Club  
Charles County Commission for Women  
Child Justice, Inc.  
City of College Park MD  
Court Watch Montgomery  
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority North Arundel County Alumnae Chapter  
FinnCORE, Inc.  
Frederick County Commission for Women  
Interfaith Action for Human Rights  
Kids for Saving Earth  
Maryland Chapter, National Organization for Women  
Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence  
Montgomery County Commission for Women  
Montgomery County, MD, NOW  
National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc., Anne Arundel County Chapter  
NCBWSOMD  
Salam Sudan Foundation (SSF)  
ShareBaby, Inc.  
Stella's Girls Incorporated  
SUB&S LLC  
The Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) Center of UMB  
Trans Maryland  
Unrooted Culture  
Women of Honor International  
Women's Equality Day Celebration across Maryland Coalition  
Women's Equity Center and Action Network (WE CAN)  
Women's Law Center of Maryland  
Zonta Club of Annapolis

### **Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women**

102 W. Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 100 • Towson, MD 21204 • 443-519-1005 phone/fax  
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# **SB- 632- Monica Cooper Pre-Release Act-UULM-MD-Sup**

Uploaded by: Karen Clark

Position: FAV





## Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

### Testimony in Support of SB 632- Comprehensive Rehabilitation Pre-Release Services- Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Pre-Release Act)

TO: Senator Will Smith, Jr., Chair  
Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee  
FROM: Karen "Candy" Clark,  
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland Criminal Justice Lead  
DATE: February 13, 2025

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry (UULM-MD) asks for a favorable vote for **SB 632- Comprehensive Rehabilitation Pre-Release Services- Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Pre-Release Act)**.

I once was at a gathering of a small group of women who had recently been released from prison. One young mother of three was walking quickly around the room as she shared her story. When she was released she was not told where her children were; she had to do the footwork to locate them (each in a different place), with no transportation, food, etc. She stopped and looked intently at us and said—"I don't care what I have to do to provide for my children. I will do anything to be together. I mean anything!!!"

We can—and should—do better.

Navigating reentry from prison back into one's former environment is a challenging process. Both genders are challenged and traumatized while navigating their re-entry process. However, to aid and support their re-entry, the men are afforded 9 facilities with training programs in education, personal growth, cultural changes, and other opportunities to help them successfully transition.

Women do not.

In the women's prison there are only a few scant service programs in place just before release. Upon a woman's release, there are only a few advocacy groups—like "Women Moving Forward" to help.

Several years ago, a bill was passed to create a women's rehabilitation center. Three million dollars was specified to help build the facility. Unfortunately, nothing has happened!! Since no movement has occurred, this bill **SB 632** has been introduced to alter the required location and timeline for the creation of this life-saving program.

**UULM-MD c/o UU Church of Annapolis 333 Dubois Road Annapolis, MD 21401 410-266-8044,**

[www.uulmmd.org](http://www.uulmmd.org) [info@uulmmd.org](mailto:info@uulmmd.org) [www.facebook.com/uulmmd](https://www.facebook.com/uulmmd) [www.Twitter.com/uulmmd](https://www.twitter.com/uulmmd)

This bill sets some ground work to reactivate the creation of the Rehabilitation Center.

This legislation would require:

- A larger facility to accommodate the greatest number of women.
- The purchase of three acres of land.
- The location, property, and site plan would be finalized before December 31, 2025
- The Center would begin Construction on the Center by July 1, 2026, and be fully operational by June 1, 2027

The facility will offer the latest up to date services for the women such as:

- Gender-responsive services,
- Educational programs - including possible community college credits or vocational skills, workforce training, and job placement
- Counseling - trauma, mental health, and substance disorder treatment
- Developing individualized and comprehensive reentry plans involving community connections to reduce barriers to obtaining housing, education, jobs, child care and welfare, legal advocacy, transportation and other needs...

UULM-MD asks for your support for SB 632

Thank you,

***Candy Clark***

Karen "Candy" Clark

Criminal Justice Reform Lead Advocate for UULM-MD

**UULM-MD c/o UU Church of Annapolis 333 Dubois Road Annapolis, MD 21401 410-266-8044,**

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# **Maryland Catholic Conference\_FAVSB632\_.pdf**

Uploaded by: Michelle Zelaya

Position: FAV



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

February 13, 2025  
SB632

**Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female  
Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)**

**Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 632**. The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

The Catholic Church has long upheld the belief that our justice system must serve not only to hold individuals accountable but also to offer them opportunities for rehabilitation and restoration.

The principles of Catholic social teaching emphasize the inherent dignity of every human person, regardless of past mistakes. This dignity calls us to advocate for a criminal justice system that is rehabilitative rather than merely punitive. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), in its document *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, calls for policies that “...ensure community safety, and attack the leading contributors to crime, which include the breakdown of family life, poverty, the proliferation of handguns, drug and alcohol addiction, and the pervasive culture of violence. We should also encourage programs of restorative justice that focus on community healing and personal accountability.”

By mandating the establishment of a prerelease facility specifically for women, this bill acknowledges that incarcerated women have unique needs that must be met to foster successful reintegration into society. Women in correctional facilities often face distinct challenges, including histories of trauma, family separation, and limited access to gender-responsive rehabilitative services. Many are also mothers, and ensuring their successful transition back into society directly impacts the well-being of their children and families. As Pope Francis has emphasized, “A just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Address to United States Congress, September 24, 2015.

*The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act* rightly requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to ensure that these services are in place by July 1, 2026. This timeline provides the necessary structure and urgency to implement programs that can make a meaningful difference in the lives of incarcerated women. Access to education, vocational training, mental health support, and family reunification services are crucial elements in reducing recidivism and breaking cycles of poverty and incarceration.

As Catholics, we believe in the redemptive power of God's mercy and the importance of second chances. The Gospel calls us to visit and care for the imprisoned (Matthew 25:36), reminding us that their well-being is a moral responsibility shared by society. Establishing a dedicated prerelease facility for women is not merely a policy choice—it is a recognition of human dignity and an investment in restorative justice.

For these reasons, I urge you to support **Senate Bill 632** *The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act* and ensure that incarcerated women are given the tools and resources they need to build new lives.

# **2025 MOPD Fav HB 632 Correctional Services.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mwuese Igyor

Position: FAV



**NATASHA DARTIGUE**  
PUBLIC DEFENDER

**KEITH LOTRIDGE**  
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

**HANNIBAL KEMERER**  
CHIEF OF STAFF

**ELIZABETH HILLIARD**  
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**BILL:** Senate Bill 632 Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Servi  
(The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)

**FROM:** Maryland Office of the Public Defender

**POSITION:** Favorable

**DATE:** February 12, 2025

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**The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the  
Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 632.**

It has been 6 years that Maryland has not had an adequate response to the lack of a Pre-Release Program for women who are returning home to the community. In 2020, then Governor Larry Hogan vetoed the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act. In 2021 the Maryland Legislature overrode the Governor's veto. The FY2021 budget for DPSCS designated \$1.5 million to begin planning for a facility, but DPSCS returned the funds unused. There does not appear to be a commitment to providing adequate re-entry services designed for women.

There are numerous pre-release programs for men and none for women who are returning to their communities. There is no transition for women to enter the community after serving their sentences in Maryland. The current location recommended by the DPSCS does not have adequate space, it is located in an area that is counter productive for women in recovery, insufficient outdoor space for programming to assist women with experiencing success in their re-entry journey to their families and community. The gender disparity in Maryland has existed for several years with women being given aging facilities after men are relocated to newer and modern buildings. Over 15 years ago the Baltimore City Female Juvenile Task Force held a symposium for Girls titled "Don't Just Paint it Pink" in recognition of the fact that women and girls were being housed in facilities that were deemed no longer appropriate for boys and men at that time the Waxter Center for Children and the

Baltimore City Detention Center. Women have needs that are unique and different from their male counterparts to them as mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and caregivers.

The services should be responsive to the uniqueness of women and be housed in order for them to be safe, physically adequate, and accommodate the number of women who are reentering the community. The current proposed facility is inadequate for the number of women who are expected to enter the community setting that is conducive to rehabilitation and integration, and successfully meeting goals.

**The Maryland Office of the Public Defender requests a favorable report for Senate Bill 632 for the women of this State.**

**For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 632.**

**Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.**

**Authored by:  
Mwuese Igyor,  
Vanita Taylor Esq.  
Shannice Anderson**



# **Testimony in support of SB0632 - Correctional Serv**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

02/13/2025

Richard Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON SB#0632 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female  
Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)**

**TO:** Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

**My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB0632, Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)**

This bill will accelerate the process in Maryland to provide the rehabilitative pre-release services that are lacking for female incarcerated individuals.<sup>1</sup>

Women need reentry support for the sake of their families: As many as 75% of incarcerated women are primary caretakers of children, and 42% of mothers in state prisons nationwide may be single parents. Pre-release facilities can prepare women to reintegrate back into society by providing access to job training, employment, community resources, and comprehensive re-entry planning assistance within a less restrictive and safe environment.

The Baltimore Banner reported on December 17, 2024:<sup>2</sup>

Last year, as a new law went into effect requiring Maryland's corrections department to build a center for incarcerated women nearing release from prison, attorney Bob Burgoyne was hearing from advocates that it wasn't happening... The corrections department declined to comment ... [on] whether it has created the pre-release center for incarcerated women as required by state law.

The law requiring the corrections department to build a pre-release unit called for a "comprehensive rehabilitative pre-release facility for female inmates" and that the facility would be located in "an area, defined by the zip codes where the largest percentage of inmates will likely be released," according to a legislative synopsis. It also required the department to complete certain phases of the project by certain dates.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://gallery.mailchimp.com/41429e61f7520af42e24f6fb0/files/943f4c94-a53c-43e7-8181-fb36a358a224/Women\\_s\\_Prelease\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_For\\_Legislators\\_Public.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2RzAI88vZa5DBvtitgyBLV Sqzmt-bi\\_kh6f2xDWxRaTWnE6wJSUY0WjLc&fbclid=IwAR0AQw8ps4Sq7zB-tBIHuPggKuTj80nuhb3o1xtEJXPCX-COJK8\\_TsWM-60](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/41429e61f7520af42e24f6fb0/files/943f4c94-a53c-43e7-8181-fb36a358a224/Women_s_Prelease_Fact_Sheet_For_Legislators_Public.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2RzAI88vZa5DBvtitgyBLV Sqzmt-bi_kh6f2xDWxRaTWnE6wJSUY0WjLc&fbclid=IwAR0AQw8ps4Sq7zB-tBIHuPggKuTj80nuhb3o1xtEJXPCX-COJK8_TsWM-60)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/community/criminal-justice/maryland-prison-public-records-lawsuit-LKRYH74NABFTTOEYW4MWXB127A/>

## SB0632\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV

Pre-release status is defined as “the lowest security level for inmates who present the least risk of violence or escape and have established an excellent record of acceptable behavior.” Individuals granted pre-release status may have access to the community for work release, special leave, compassionate leave, and family leave.

Currently, in the state of Maryland, men have NINE separate pre-release and minimum-security facilities while women have ZERO. At the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCI-W) in Jessup, Maryland, as many as 1 in 10 women have achieved pre-release status. However, as many as 30% of the women on pre-release status have not been assigned to a work opportunity.<sup>3</sup>

This bill will work to make this mandated action by the DCC happen in an accelerated manner. It will accomplish that by altering the required location and timeline for a certain prerelease facility for female incarcerated individuals. It will create a strong requirement for the Commissioner of the Division of Correction to make certain services available to certain female incarcerated individuals. The accelerated process will require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, by July 1, 2026, to implement certain comprehensive rehabilitative prerelease services.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0632.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/06/reduce-plastic-pollution-unep/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/12/1015296355/zero-waste-single-use-plastic-trash-recycle>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.out4justice.org/women-s-pre-release>

# **Women's Prerelease Coalition Testimony JPR- B&T (v**

Uploaded by: Roberta Olson

Position: FAV

# WOMEN'S PRE-RELEASE EQUITY COALITION

## Hearing on Senate Bill 0632 – Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)-February 13, 2025

**FAVORABLE**

**TO:** Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

**TO:** Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

**FROM:** Maryland Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony urging a Favorable report on SB632, The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act. This testimony is submitted on behalf of the **Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition** (the Coalition), which is comprised of justice-focused organizations and directly impacted individuals who have been working since 2018 to ensure that Maryland's incarcerated women receive equitable prerelease services at a prerelease facility dedicated solely to the needs of incarcerated women who are preparing to re-enter society.

In 2021, the Maryland General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto to pass the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act (the Act), which required the DPSCS: 1) to open and operate a pre-release center for women, 2) to do so in or adjacent to the zip code where most released women would be returning, and 3) to provide educational, occupational, parenting/family reunification, and therapeutic and substance use programming that is gender-responsive, trauma-informed and evidence-based. Adjusting for the delay attributable to the veto override, the Act required DPSCS to open the women's pre-release center by the end of 2023. Citing unspecified delays, DPSCS has indicated that construction will not begin until FY2028 and the facility will not open until FY2030.

In addition to the construction delays, DPSCS's plans for the women's prerelease center, now known as the "Life Skills and Re-Entry Center for Women" (LSRCW), are entirely unacceptable for the following reasons.

- 1) The selected site for the pre-release center is too small.** By letter dated July 29, 2022, former DPSCS Secretary Robert Green requested that DGS procure a **2-4 acre site** for the women's prerelease center. Correspondence between DGS and DPSCS personnel and the outside project architect confirmed that "ideally" the site would be 4-5 acres, and that a site smaller than 2 acres could not accommodate the project. In December 2022, DGS identified a 3.6-acre site for the project (1624 Eutaw Place, Baltimore), but in September 2023, changed the site to a **.97-acre site** located at 717 Forrest Street, Baltimore. This site, which is just over 41,000 square feet, cannot accommodate the 61,700 square foot buildings and 35,000 square foot outdoor areas called for in the Project Plan. Moreover, veteran Corrections Officers described the site as "drug-infested" and "unsafe for family visitation." They further indicated that the site is too small to accommodate a safe transition space between the street and the facility, and there will not be enough green space for the women. In their opinion, locating the LSRCW at 717 Forrest Street will doom the women to fail.

# WOMEN'S PRE-RELEASE EQUITY COALITION

- 2) **The planned 64-bed capacity is not adequate.** DGS determined that the capacity of the LSCRW should be 64 beds. This is less than half the number of the 144-bed capacity of the Baltimore Pre-Release Center for Women that DPSCS closed in December 2009. DGS based its projection on population data and usage assumptions that are contradicted by current Average Daily Population (ADP) numbers for women in prerelease status and prison population projections. If the LSCRW is too small, women in pre-release status who would otherwise be eligible to transfer to the LSCRW will remain in MCI-W in contravention of the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act.
- 3) **The proposed prerelease programming does not meet the requirements of the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act.** DPSCS selected the 717 Forrest Street site for the LSCRW because it is in the Baltimore detention center and prison complex. DPSCS's plans call for the women to obtain their counseling programs at the yet-to-be-built Baltimore Therapeutic and Treatment Center (BTTC), a "secure detention housing" facility designed to house 900, overwhelmingly male, residents who are entering the criminal system because of serious mental health and substance use issues and are expected to be housed on a short-term basis. Treating women from the LSCRW at the BTTC clearly does not meet the requirements of the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act.

In sum, in the four years since the Maryland General Assembly passed the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act, DPSCS has located the women's pre-release center on a site that is too small and unsafe, with a bed capacity that is inadequate, with non-compliant programming, and which misses the statutory deadline for operation by seven years.

SB632 remedies these deficiencies by:

- 1) Requiring DPSCS to select a new site anywhere in Baltimore City that is at least 3 acres in size.
- 2) Requiring the LSCRW to accommodate no fewer than the highest number of women who were in prerelease status in 2023, as reported by Secretary Scruggs in August 2024. This number, 91, should accommodate the ADP of women in prerelease status and allow for an increase in population or episodic population spikes. If there is any extra capacity, women in minimum and work release status may also be housed there, as they are in the men's facilities.
- 3) Defining the gender-responsive services that women in prerelease should be receiving and sets July 1, 2026, as the deadline by which those services will be provided.
- 4) Requiring DPSCS to provide gender-responsive prerelease services at the LSCRW and prohibits DPSCS from requiring women to receive those services at a facility serving men, at a facility that houses prisoners who are not eligible for prerelease status, or at a different facility for women.
- 5) Requiring the operation of the LSCRW by June 1, 2027.
- 6) Authorizing up to \$500,000 from the Performance Incentive Grant Fund to be used for women's prerelease services.

The Coalition urges a Favorable report on SB632. While the Coalition recognizes that the State Budget is in difficult straits, this facility should have been open and operating by now, and DPSCS must not be permitted to further delay this project. The plans to use the 717 Forrest Street site will require DPSCS to construct a multi-story building, which will increase the cost.

# WOMEN'S PRE-RELEASE EQUITY COALITION

Furthermore, based on the latest Capital Improvement Plan, delaying the construction will increase the costs by \$8 million. Finally, the lack of a women's prerelease center in Maryland is an ongoing violation of the guarantees of Equal Protection set forth in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to United States Constitution as well as the Maryland Equal Rights Act. As Supreme Court case law makes clear, the cost of remedying an Equal Protection violation does not excuse a state from remedying the violation. Since it closed the Baltimore Pre-Release Unit for Women at the end of 2009, DPSCS has been saving money off the backs of women in prerelease status. It is time that money was reinvested in them.

Like the Corrections Officers with whom we have spoken, we believe that the current plans will doom the women to failure, and will be a colossal waste of taxpayer money. SB632 ensures that this facility for women will be done right, something DPSCS has proven it will not do on its own.

The Women's Pre-Release Equity Coalition is grateful for the Committees' continued support of this important project.

Respectfully submitted,

**Maryland Justice Project**

**Jews United for Justice**

**Maryland Center for Economic Policy**

**Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club**

**Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women**

**AFSCME, Council 3**

**Women's Law Center of Maryland**

**Life After Release**

**ACLU of Maryland**

**Maryland NOW**

**Professor Leigh Goodmark and the University of Maryland Carey School of Law Gender, Prison, and Trauma Clinic (testimony submitted on behalf of the Clinic and not the Francis King Carey School of Law or the University of Maryland Baltimore)**

**Baltimore County Commission for Women, Cherie Peay, Committee Chair**

**Crystal Jackson Parker  
North Avenue and Hilton Street Business and Community Task Force**

**Public Justice Center**

**Maryland Catholic Conference**

**Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle**

**Calvert County Democratic Central Committee**

**Montgomery County (MD) Chapter, National Organization for Women**

**Calvert County Democratic Women's Club**

**Women's Equity Center and Action Network**

**Lykinda Camper, The Greater Mount Holly Community Development Corporation**

**Maryland Office of the Public Defender**

**Justice Policy Institute**

# **WOMEN'S PRE-RELEASE EQUITY COALITION**

**American Association of University  
Women (AAUW)-Maryland  
Progressive Maryland**

**Rhonda Hall, Baltimore**

**Vonunette Allen, Baltimore**

**Carol Elder Bruce, Esq., President, Talbot  
County Democratic Women's Club**



# Montgomery County Commission for Women\_Testimony o

Uploaded by: Tonja Paylor

Position: FAV



## MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

February 13, 2025

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 632 Correctional Services-Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services–Female Incarcerated Individuals

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Chairperson Smith and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women to express our strong support for SB632, the Correctional Services-Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services–Female Incarcerated Individuals bill. This legislation is a crucial step forward in addressing the unique needs of women in Maryland’s correctional system, and we believe it will have a transformative impact on their successful reentry into society.

### **Background and Urgency:**

Currently, prerelease services for women are provided in a Department of Corrections parking lot in Baltimore, an area notorious for human trafficking. This environment is not only unsafe but also wholly unsuitable for the rehabilitation of individuals who are working to heal from past trauma. We cannot expect women, many of whom are mothers and heads of households, to prepare for a fresh start in such a place. It is unacceptable that we continue to fail the very individuals who need our support the most.

Around 170 women are currently in prerelease status in Maryland, and most of these women are mothers with families that depend on them. Empowering these women with the right tools for reentry is not just about helping the individual—it’s about supporting their children and families as well. When these women succeed, it creates a ripple effect that strengthens entire communities, and that is why it is critical to provide them with comprehensive services designed to ensure success.

### **The Life Skills and Reentry Center for Women (LSRCW):**

The Life Skills and Reentry Center for Women (LSRCW) proposed in this bill is an essential solution. The plan includes a 90-bed facility, with an estimated cost of \$33 million. Importantly, funding for the design and site selection has already been secured, and Delegate Crutchfield is working diligently with the Appropriations Committee to ensure the necessary resources are allocated for the completion of this project.

We fully support the establishment of this center, which will provide a safe and nurturing environment for women to receive the critical services they need to successfully reintegrate into their communities.

These services include:

- **Job skills training** to help women secure stable employment,
- **Drug treatment programs** to support their recovery,
- **Mental health services** to address underlying trauma and challenges,
- **Child bonding classes** to help mothers reconnect with their families.

These services are tailored specifically to the needs of women and will provide them with the tools they need to build a stable and fulfilling life after incarceration.

#### **Location and Equity Considerations:**

The proposed facility is most likely to be located in Baltimore City, home to many women who would benefit from the center. Locating the facility near their communities is crucial—it will provide easier access to resources, maintain essential family connections, and ease reintegration.

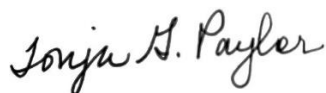
Moreover, we cannot ignore the racial inequities that persist in our correctional system. The majority of women in prerelease status at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW) are Black women. This legislation represents an opportunity to address these disparities by providing a targeted, systemic solution to uplift and empower these women.

#### **Conclusion:**

We urge all Senate members to support SB632 and its companion bill in the House. This legislation is not just an investment in women—it is an investment in families, communities, and the future of our state. By providing the right services and support, we can empower women returning to their communities after incarceration to thrive and contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We look forward to working together to ensure this bill's success and create a brighter future for women in Maryland.

Sincerely,



Commissioner Tonja Paylor  
Member, Policy & Legislative Committee  
Montgomery County Commission for Women

**SB0632-JPR-SWA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FWA



**BRANDON M. SCOTT**  
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations  
88 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

**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.<sup>i</sup> 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.

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

**MEJC Testimony Written INFORMATIONAL SB632.pdf**

Uploaded by: MECJ Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative

Position: INFO



## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**BILL:** Senate Bill 632 – Community-Based Reentry and Prerelease Services

**FROM:** Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC)

**POSITION:** INFORMATIONAL (SUPPORT IN CONCEPT)

**DATE:** February 13, 2025

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The Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC) supports the goals of Senate Bill 632, which addresses a critical and long-overlooked issue: the systemic challenges faced by incarcerated women, particularly women of color, as they transition back into their communities. This legislation is vital to closing reentry service gaps, reducing racial disparities, and fostering sustainable reintegration that benefits individuals, families, and communities.

### **About the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative**

The Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC) was established by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) and the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) to address racial disparities in mass incarceration in Maryland. This initiative is the first of its kind. It was developed based on listening sessions the Attorney General and Public Defender held with impacted people, advocates, and other community members. Academic partners, including the Judge Alexander Williams Center for Education, Justice & Ethics at the University of Maryland at College Park and the Bowie State University Institute for Restorative Justice, were brought in to ensure the work is evidence-based and data-driven statewide.

The MEJC comprises over 40 representatives from state agencies, community groups, subject matter experts, and people directly impacted by the system. Its initiatives are organized into workgroups focusing on various factors influencing incarceration rates. Each workgroup is led by a staff member from the Office of the Attorney General, a staff member from the Office of the Public Defender, and a community advocate with relevant expertise. Community voices and public input have shaped the recommendations developed under the direction of the OAG and OPD. In December 2024, the MEJC approved 18 recommendations for legislative and agency reforms, program development, data collection, and other measures designed to reduce the mass incarceration of Black men and women and other marginalized groups in Maryland prisons and jails. Recommendation #12 urges expanding and improving community-based reentry programming by: creating a protocol to share specific service needs of people who are incarcerated; collecting and publishing data on the effectiveness of reentry services; ensuring that all state facilities offer reentry services; increasing funding for successful reentry programs; and expanding community-based reentry programs' access to incarcerated people at least 180 days before their reentry date.

## Unique Challenges Faced by Incarcerated Women

Women leaving incarceration encounter a variety of challenges that are often different from those of their male counterparts, making gender-responsive reentry services essential. A significant proportion of incarcerated women have experienced trauma, substance abuse, and mental health issues. Women involved in the criminal legal system report greater instances of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as childhood abuse, neglect, family instability, and exposure to domestic violence, than both justice-involved men and women outside of the system.<sup>1</sup> Many of these experiences of trauma often lead to co-occurring disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance use disorders, and depression, making successful reintegration more difficult without adequate psychological support. Women who do not receive appropriate trauma-informed care are at higher risk of relapse, recidivism, and instability post-release.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, incarcerated women are disproportionately impacted by the lack of adequate healthcare services during their incarceration. In Maryland, incarcerated women report significant difficulty in accessing medical services specific to their gender, such as reproductive healthcare and prenatal support.<sup>3</sup> These issues compound upon release, as women often face delays or obstacles when trying to reconnect with medical providers in their communities. Compounding these health-related challenges, the majority of incarcerated women are family caregivers. In Maryland, 75% of incarcerated women have children who rely on them for day-to-day needs.<sup>3</sup> Upon release, many of these women struggle to regain custody of their children due to barriers to securing suitable housing or steady employment.<sup>4</sup> Housing instability is another key barrier for formerly incarcerated women. Without sufficient reentry programs focused on securing long-term, safe housing, many women either experience homelessness or return to unsafe environments. Without stable housing, their ability to regain custody of their children and provide a stable home environment is significantly compromised.<sup>5</sup> Without sufficient support, women are often forced to choose between meeting their family's needs and fulfilling court-mandated obligations such as probation requirements or attending mandated treatment programs.<sup>6</sup> These challenges demonstrate the necessity of comprehensive, gender-specific reentry programs. Without interventions addressing mental health, housing, employment, family reunification, and trauma-informed support, women leaving prison are set up for continued struggles that contribute to ongoing economic instability.

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<sup>1</sup> Lehrer, D. (2021). Trauma-informed care: The importance of understanding the incarcerated woman. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 27(2), 121–126. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jchc.20.07.0060>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Women in Prison: Issues and Challenges Confronting U.S. Correctional Systems*, 1999, 12, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles/171668.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, *Reproductive Healthcare Behind Bars: Maryland's Urgent Need for Reform*, 2021, <https://www.aclu-md.org/en/publications/reproductive-healthcare-behind-bars>.

<sup>4</sup> Amy E. Lerman and Emily Schneider, *Female Offenders, and Reentry: Pathways to Success* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2019), 15, [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/female\\_offender\\_reentry.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/female_offender_reentry.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Goshin, Lorie S., and Mary W. Byrne. "Reentry and Reunification: The Experiences of Mothers and Their Children After Incarceration." *Health & Social Work* 37, no. 1 (2012): 36-48. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7449251/>.

<sup>6</sup> Wendy Sawyer, "Who's Helping Incarcerated Mothers Reunite with Their Kids?" Prison Policy Initiative, July 2020, [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/incarcerated\\_mothers.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/incarcerated_mothers.html).



## **Racial Disparities Impacting Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women of Color**

Studies reveal that formerly incarcerated women of color face additional barriers to securing stable employment and housing upon their release.<sup>7</sup> Racial disparities are evident in the statewide unemployment rates of formerly incarcerated Black women, which rank among the highest in the nation, exceeding 43%.<sup>8</sup> The Prison Policy Institute reported in 2018 that formerly incarcerated Black women face exceptionally high unemployment rates, whereas white men enjoy the lowest. Specifically, Black women endure the highest “prison penalties,” which elevate unemployment rates by 14 percentage points for white men and as much as 37 percentage points for Black women compared to the general population peers.<sup>9</sup> For Black and Latinx returning citizens, incarceration constructs an almost impenetrable barrier to employment and economic stability.

## **The Current Landscape of Reentry Services for Women in Maryland**

In Maryland, the disparity in reentry support between incarcerated women and men is stark. In 2020, the ACLU of Maryland highlighted that while there were nine pre-release centers available for men, the absence of any pre-release centers for women leaves incarcerated women without access to essential services such as job training, employment opportunities, and comprehensive reentry planning that facilitate successful reintegration in a supportive environment.<sup>10</sup> The lack of gender-responsive reentry services exacerbates the challenges faced by women upon release. Without access to tailored support, these women are at a heightened risk of recidivism.

## **Senate Bill 632: A Path Toward Equitable Reentry Support**

Senate Bill 632 aims to bridge this gap by establishing comprehensive, gender-responsive prerelease services for incarcerated women. It does this by mandating comprehensive reentry planning that begins 180 days before release. These plans include access to stable housing, employment readiness programs, and mental health services designed to support successful reintegration.

The bill also prioritizes expanding partnerships with community-based organizations, many of which are embedded within communities of color and have the cultural competence to provide effective support. By fostering collaboration between correctional facilities and these organizations, the legislation bridges the gap between incarceration and community reintegration, ensuring continuity of care for women of color who have historically been underserved.

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<sup>7</sup> Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, *Maryland Reentry Roundtable Report*, 2019, 25, <https://www.ma4jr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-Reentry-Roundtable-Booklet.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, "Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among Formerly Incarcerated People," *Prison Policy Initiative*, July 2018, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, “Men Have Nine Pre-Release Centers. Women Have Zero,” ACLU of Maryland, accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.aclu-md.org/en/news/men-have-nine-pre-release-centers-women-have-zero>

Furthermore, the bill's requirement for outcome-based monitoring and data collection is vital. Collecting disaggregated data on reentry outcomes by race and gender will enable Maryland to pinpoint areas for improvement and customize future initiatives to tackle ongoing disparities. This aligns with the goals of MEJC, emphasizing the importance of employing evidence-based strategies to enhance reentry programming and mitigate the disproportionate effects on marginalized communities. Maryland's recidivism rate of over 31% highlights the urgency of these needed reforms.<sup>11</sup>

Without targeted intervention, the cycle of reincarceration will persistently harm women of color and the communities they return to. By investing in comprehensive reentry services, Senate Bill 632 empowers formerly incarcerated women to better navigate structural barriers, thereby fostering their long-term success and alleviating pressure on the state's criminal justice system.

### **Conclusion**

The MEJC strongly urges the Committee to advance Senate Bill 632's goal of closing reentry service gaps for incarcerated women and affirm Maryland's commitment to justice and equity for all citizens by focusing on equitable access, tailored services, and community-based collaboration. Maryland can and must do more to ensure that incarcerated women receive the necessary support to rebuild their lives and care for their families.

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**Submitted by: Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative**

**Anthony Brown, Co-Chair  
Maryland Attorney General**

**Natasha Dartigue, Co-Chair  
Maryland Public Defender**

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<sup>11</sup> Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. "2022 Recidivism JCR." Accessed February 11, 2025. [https://dpscs.maryland.gov/publicinfo/publications/pdfs/2022\\_p157\\_DPSCS\\_Recidivism%20Report.pdf](https://dpscs.maryland.gov/publicinfo/publications/pdfs/2022_p157_DPSCS_Recidivism%20Report.pdf).