



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 1198- Comprehensive Rehabilitation Pre-Release Services- Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Pre-Release Act)

TO: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee
FROM: Karen "Candy" Clark, Criminal Justice Lead Advocate
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
DATE: March 4, 2025

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) asks for a favorable vote for **HB 1198- Comprehensive Rehabilitation Pre-Release Services- Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Pre-Release Act)**.

This bill is a descendant of her first bill - BAN the BOX and others. Monica grew up in Baltimore, emerging as a strong advocate for justice; many energetic similarly-committed women have joined her. This bill calls for a comprehensive program to prepare our incarcerated women for reentry.

Our men's prisons release about 70,500 men yearly and 16,000 women. BOTH deserve reentry preparation. Currently, our Correctional system offers 9 male facilities for reentry, but women have a patchwork network of programs.

The bill gives step-by-step directions for completion of a building by July 1, 2026.

Some of the bill's major requirements:

- Availability for women close to reentry who demonstrate low violence and escape risk tendencies and have acceptable institutional behavior
- A Baltimore location, as selected by the Commissioner, where the largest percent of women will be returning; the facility site design to be completed by Dec 31, 2025, with the final completion by July 1, 2026
- A new facility providing a broad range of evidence-based programs to help improve the women's level of education and upgrade workforce training for job placement.
- Opportunities to strengthen family relationships, parenting workshops, and extended family leave
- Access to health care, including medical and gender-responsive treatment, mental health, trauma, and substance abuse care
- Comprehensive reentry plans pertaining to the individual's needs including: child care, housing, and documentation (medical records, birth certificates, etc)

Without a building, many of these services are being offered under project FRESH and by supportive non-profits.

Our Maryland women are long over due for the opportunities this bill provides, enabling them to be strong, confident, and looking forward to their new life.

I once was at a gathering of a small group of women who had recently been released from prison. One young mother of three shared her story, as she walked quickly around the room. 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 for us to be together. I mean anything!!!!"

We can—and should—do better.

UULM-MD asks for your support for **HB 1198**.

Thank you,

Candy Clark

Karen "Candy" Clark

Criminal Justice Reform Lead Advocate for UULM-MD