



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 4th , 2025
HB1198

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

Judiciary Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of **House Bill 1198**. 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.”¹

¹ 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 **House Bill 1198** *The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act* and ensure that incarcerated women are given the tools and resources they need to build new lives.