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TESTIMONY ON HB 1198 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the House Judiciary 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 HBI 198. 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.

HBI 198 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 HBI 198.