



**February 18, 2025**

**House Bill 837**  
**Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation From Incarcerated Individuals**  
**House Judiciary Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

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.

**House Bill 837** would establish the Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation From Incarcerated Individuals to study and make recommendations regarding methods to reduce forced infant separation in the State and facilitate bonds between postpartum incarcerated individuals and their children; and requiring the Task Force to report its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly on or before December 1, 2025.

The Conference supports programming focused on children and families impacted by incarceration and believes these specialized programs can make a positive impact in the lives of families as they face challenging times. The United States is just one of a few countries in the world that routinely separate incarcerated moms from their newborn babies. The trauma of such a separation is profound and harms the health of both the mother and baby. Women in prison tend to be younger, have completed less education, and are more likely to have experienced physical or mental abuse. Since 1970, the number of women in U.S. jails has increased 14-fold and this increase disproportionately affects women of color.<sup>1</sup> In Maryland, women make up 53% of the state's prison population.<sup>2</sup>

Moving women and their children from traditional prison settings to a pre-release setting can improve birth outcomes for mothers and babies. Allowing parents to bond during the first year of life can improve the health outcomes for children during this first year and for the remainder of their lives. A positive, healthy relationship with a parent or caregiver is an important factor for successful development in early life. These relationships not only provide a safe and healthy

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-maryland.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2023/102523.pdf>

environment for growth, but also positive interactions that support healthy emotional and social development and learning. This legislation is an opportunity to study the importance of physical bonding in the postpartum period. This legislation would positively impact two generations at a time and help make Maryland a leader in prison reform for pregnant women, especially women in marginalized communities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **HB 837**.

Thank you for your consideration.