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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: HB1198 Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female Incarcerated Individuals (The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act)

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: March 4, 2025

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 1198.

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

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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 House Bill 1198 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 House Bill 1198.

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

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