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Judiciary Committee
100 Taylor House Office Building
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Friday, February 14, 2025

HB0837 – Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation From Incarcerated Individuals

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ronnie L. Taylor, and I serve as the Community Advocacy Manager at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing legal and systemic inequities affecting Maryland's LGBTQIA+ community. I am here to testify in strong support of **House Bill 0837**, which seeks to establish the Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation From Incarcerated Individuals.

Forced separation of infants from their incarcerated parents is a critical issue with profound implications for both the individuals directly affected and the broader community. Incarcerated parents, particularly mothers, often face the immediate removal of their newborns postpartum, leading to significant psychological distress and hindering the essential bonding process. This disruption not only affects the mental health of the parent but also has long-term developmental consequences for the child. Studies have shown that such separations can result in emotional and behavioral problems in children, including low self-esteem and difficulty coping with life stressors.

HB0837 proposes the creation of a task force to examine the prevalence and impact of forced infant separation within Maryland's correctional facilities. This initiative is crucial for several reasons:

1. **Data Collection:** The task force will gather essential data on the number of pregnant and postpartum incarcerated individuals in the state's prisons, providing a clearer picture of the issue's scope.
2. **Infrastructure Assessment:** By evaluating the Division of Correction's capacity to create spaces within prerelease units for pregnant and

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postpartum individuals, the task force can recommend infrastructural improvements that support parent-child bonding.

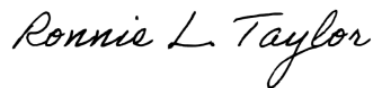
3. **Policy Review:** Examining best practices from other states will allow Maryland to implement evidence-based policies that mitigate the negative effects of forced separation.

Implementing such measures has been associated with reduced recidivism rates among mothers and better developmental outcomes for children.

As an advocate for marginalized communities, I have witnessed firsthand the compounded challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals within the criminal justice system. For incarcerated LGBTQIA+ parents, forced separation from their infants can exacerbate feelings of isolation and discrimination, further impeding successful reintegration into society.

In closing, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0837**. Establishing this task force is a vital step toward addressing the harm caused by forced infant separation and demonstrates Maryland's commitment to upholding the dignity and well-being of all its residents. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Best,



Ronnie L. Taylor

Sources:

1. [*Shackling and Separation: Motherhood in Prison / Journal of Ethics / American Medical Association*](#)
2. [*The Realities of Pregnancy and Mothering While Incarcerated / Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*](#)
3. [*Challenges Associated with Parenting While Incarcerated: A Review - PMC*](#)
4. [*Families Left Behind*](#)