

Investing In Maryland Means We Invest in Returning Citizens

Position Statement in Support of House Bill 1198

Given before the House Judiciary Committee

Re-entry services are critical to support Marylanders who are returning to their communities following a period of incarceration. They provide returning citizens with an opportunity to begin reintegration into their communities with critical services in place to ease this transition. Services such as health care and drug rehabilitation, education, vocational training, and, critically, transitional housing away from prison and nearer to job centers and their community.

In 2021, the Maryland General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto to pass the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act, which required the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to open and operate a pre-release center for women, to do so in or adjacent to the ZIP code where most released women would be returning, and to provide educational, parenting/family reunification, and therapeutic and substance use programming that is gender-responsive, trauma-informed and evidence-based. Funding in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) was allocated only a recent as FY2023 and the FY26 CIP delays the funding for construction to FY28.

House Bill 1198 requires a new site to be selected anywhere in Baltimore City that is at least 3 acres in size, that no fewer than the maximum number of women eligible for pre-release are accommodated, updated gender-responsive programming and location requirements, and authorizing \$500,000 from the Performance Incentive Grant Fund for pre-release services.

The time to invest in our returning women is now. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the House Judiciary Committee make favorable report on House Bill 1198.**

Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 1198

Bill summary

As mandated by Senate Bill 684 of the 2020 legislative session, DPSCS must operate a comprehensive rehabilitative standalone prerelease unit for women in which specified services are provided, has security features for specified female inmates, and matches security level on a validated gender-responsive risk measure. Data on current prerelease programming is limited.

Background

While planning and constructing for the Women's Prerelease facility is currently delayed, DPSCS is still required to provide evidence-based and gender-responsive services to incarcerated women in its custody. Project FRESH is the

temporary prerelease program for women at MCI-W, but has lacked participation and is inadequately staffed to properly deliver services.

Equity Implications

Since the last prerelease center for women closed in 2010, incarcerated women have had no standalone prerelease center. Instead, these services are offered at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, or MCI-W.

- According to a report on gender-based equity in prerelease programming and facilities in Maryland by the commissioner, as of December 18, 2019, there were 1,913 males and 120 females assigned to prerelease. For the female population, 17.5% were assigned to work release, compared to 9% of the male population assigned to work release. Twenty-eight percent of male inmates and 4% of female inmates were assigned to supervised community-based work details. Men and women are eligible to participate in local reentry programs, but at the time of the report, **there were no women participating.**