

WOMEN'S PRE-RELEASE EQUITY COALITION

Hearing on Senate Bill 0187 – Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female Incarcerated Individuals January 28, 2026 FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Maryland Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition

Thank you for this opportunity for the **Women's Pre-Release Equity Coalition** to submit written testimony urging a Favorable with Amendments report on SB187. This Coalition, comprised of justice-focused organizations and directly impacted individuals, has been working since 2018 to ensure that Maryland's incarcerated women receive equitable pre-release services at a pre-release facility dedicated solely to their needs.

In 2021, the Maryland General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto to pass, on a bi-partisan basis, the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act ("the Act"), which required the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services ("DCSPS") to:

- open and operate a pre-release center for women;
- do so in or adjacent to the zip code where most released women will be returning; and
- provide educational, occupational, parenting/family reunification, and therapeutic and substance use programming that is gender-responsive, trauma-informed, and evidence-based.

Adjusting for the delay attributable to the veto override, the Act required DPSCS to open the women's pre-release center by the end of 2023. Citing unspecified delays, DPSCS has indicated that construction will not begin until FY2029 and that the facility will not open until FY2031.

As this Coalition testified last session on SB632 (The Monica Cooper Pre-release Act), DPSCS's plans for the women's pre-release center, now known as the "Life Skills and Re-Entry Center for Women" ("LSRCW") are unacceptable. Unlike during the process for drafting the filed version of SB632, the Coalition was not involved in drafting SB187. While SB187 contains some important provisions the Coalition supports, it also suffers from several deficiencies that must be remedied through the following amendments:

1. Remove the 1-mile radius restriction set forth in Section 3-301(b)(1)(II). This provision unnecessarily limits the possible locations for the LSRCW. DPSCS proposes locating the LSRCW at 717 Forrest Street, Baltimore, on a .97-acre site within the Baltimore Pretrial and Detention Center Complex. The site is much too small to accommodate the facility and adequate outdoor space, and according to veteran correctional officers, is unsafe for family visitation and for the women themselves, is plagued by drug trafficking, and will doom the women to failure. The Coalition suggests that the provision be amended to read "(II) NOT LOCATED IN OR ADJACENT TO THE AREA OF BALTIMORE CITY BOUNDED BY E. MONUMENT STREET, E. EAGER STREET, JONES FALL TRAIL, MCKIM STREET, AND HOMEWOOD AVENUE."
2. Add "MAXIMUM" between "1.25" and "TIMES" in Section 3-301(b)(2). The current "Program Plan Parts I and II" sets the LSRCW's bed capacity at 64. This is an

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insufficient number of beds. The Department of Legislative Services has questioned the 64-bed capacity in its Capital Budget Analyses for this project, noting that the number of incarcerated women has reached pre-COVID levels and is expected to rise. While Section 3-301(b)(2) helps remedy this insufficiency, it is ambiguous, since the cited report included monthly population statistics, rather than a single identifiable number. The Coalition stands by the principle that every woman in pre-release status who wants to live at the LSRCW should be able to do so. Using the 1.25 multiplier for the maximum number reported accounts for predicted future population growth and periodic population spikes. If the facility is too small, women in pre-release status who would otherwise be eligible to transfer to the LSRCW will remain in the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women ("MCI-W") in contravention of the Gender-Responsive Pre-release Act.

3. Add "AND SHALL BE FULLY TRANSFERRED TO SUCH FACILITY UPON COMPLETION OF FINAL CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION." to the end of Section 3-303(b)(2). This language will ensure that the pre-release services required to be provided at MCI-W before the final construction of the LSRCW are transferred to LSRCW once that facility opens. The Coalition fears that, without the mandatory transfer requirement, DPSCS will argue that no women's pre-release center is necessary because adequate services are provided at MCI-W. Indeed, DPSCS Secretary Scruggs has already begun lobbying Coalition and General Assembly members to this effect. Secretary Scruggs' assertions are countered by 198 women incarcerated at MCI-W (more than one-third of the population), who responded to a letter asking for their views on pre-release services at MCI-W. The respondents were clear that the pre-release services at MCI-W are not adequate, and they want the women's pre-release center built, although not in the Pretrial and Detention Center Complex. On this point, we also remind the Committee that throughout the Program Plan Parts I and II, and in deliberative documentation, DGS noted that prerelease cannot be effectively carried out from within a maximum-security prison. The recognition of this reality is the reason the Maryland General Assembly passed the Gender-Responsive Pre-release Act in 2021. We also remind the Committee that no men in pre-release status (or in minimum or work-release status, for that matter) are housed behind bars in a maximum-security prison, which allows men a range of opportunities that women in a maximum-security prison can never have.
4. Add a new Subsection 3-303(b)(3) to require DPSCS to provide gender-responsive pre-release services at the LSRCW and prohibit DPSCS from requiring women to receive those services at a correctional facility housing men, at a correctional facility housing incarcerated individuals who are not eligible for prerelease status, or at a different correctional facility for women. This is necessary because the current Program Plan Parts I and II call for therapeutic services for the women at the LSRCW to be provided at the proposed Baltimore Therapeutic and Treatment Center, which is completely inappropriate for a population of women in pre-release status and violates accepted norms of gender-responsive, trauma-informed programming. New Subsection 3-303(b)(3) should read: "(3) THE SERVICES REQUIRED UNDER THIS SUBSECTION SHALL BE FULLY PROVIDED AT THE FACILITY REQUIRED UNDER [SECTION] 3-301 OF THIS SUBTITLE, AND ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS SHALL NOT BE REQUIRED TO OBTAIN THOSE SERVICES AT ANY OTHER CORRECTIONAL FACILITY."
5. Restore the subtitle "The Monica Cooper Prerelease Act" that was included in the title of SB632. In 2016, Monica Cooper, a formerly incarcerated woman, initiated the effort to

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reopen a pre-release center for Maryland's incarcerated women and then, in 2018, she co-founded the Women's Pre-release Equity Coalition. Although many Marylanders have supported this effort since the Coalition's founding, the work began with Monica Cooper, and her efforts to right a glaring injustice should be recognized.

The Coalition urges this Committee to hold fast to the Maryland General Assembly's earlier commitment to ensure equitable women's pre-release services and facilities and report favorably on SB187 with the above amendments. This facility needs to be built, it needs to be built now, and it needs to be built right. Women in MCI-W have gone without adequate pre-release services for over 16 years. This facility will not require additional funding for at least two fiscal years because, in addition to passing the Gender-Responsive Pre-release Act, the Maryland General Assembly fully funded this project through the completion of design. DPSCS personnel testified in the 2025 session that those funds have not been encumbered or spent. Furthermore, we note that DGS selected a good site and completed the first Program Parts I and II for this facility within five (5) months of receiving a site-acquisition request from former DPSCS Secretary Robert Green. We are confident that, with diligent effort, it can do so again.

The lack of a women's pre-release center in Maryland is an ongoing violation of the Equal Protection guarantees set forth in the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, as well as in the Maryland Equal Rights Act. As Supreme Court case law makes clear, the cost of remedying an Equal Protection violation does not excuse a state from remedying the violation. Since it closed the Baltimore Pre-Release Unit for Women at the end of 2009, DPSCS has been saving money on the backs of women in pre-release status. It is past time for DCSPS to reinvest that money in those women.

Like the Corrections Officers with whom we have spoken, we believe that the current plans will doom the women to failure and will be a waste of taxpayer money. SB187, with the Coalition's proposed amendments, would ensure that this facility for women will be done right, something DPSCS has proven it will not do on its own.

The Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition is grateful for the Committee's continued support of this important project.

Respectfully submitted,

Maryland Justice Project

Women's Law Center of Maryland

Maryland NOW

ACLU of Maryland

AFSCME Council 3

Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club

Women's Equity Center and Action Network

North Avenue Task Force

Jews United for Justice

Progressive Maryland

National Council of 100 Black Women

Maryland Office of the Public Defender

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Carey School of Law Gender,
Prison, and Trauma Clinic
(testimony submitted on behalf
of the Clinic and not the
Francis King Carey School of
Law or the University of
Maryland, Baltimore)

State vs. Us Magazine

Montgomery County (MD)
Chapter, National

Harford County Chapter
American Association of
University Women

Maryland Center on Economic
Policy

Maryland Alliance for Justice
Reform

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Crystal Carpenter, Prince
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Gwen Levi, Baltimore

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American Association of
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Public Justice Center

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Catherine Thornton
Markeen Townsend
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Diandra Ward
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