

Testimony on Maryland SB 0187

Submitted by Ann Jacobs

January 23, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 0187, and for the sustained work by legislators and advocates to address the longstanding inequities in pre-release services for women in Maryland.

I offer this testimony based on more than fifty years of working across the criminal legal continuum—beginning in halfway houses and jails in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, and extending to correctional facilities, alternatives to incarceration, and community-based reentry programs along the East Coast. My work with the Annie E. Casey Foundation focused on improving outcomes for children impacted by parental incarceration by building bridges between the child welfare and corrections systems. I led the Women’s Prison Association in New York as well as the John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity (formerly the Prisoner Reentry Institute).

My goal has always been the same—to aid people in moving beyond survival by building the skills, supports, and knowledge needed to lead stable, purposeful, and connected lives in the community.

I recognize the operational and political constraints under which Maryland is operating, and I believe this is a moment to do more than authorize a facility. It is an opportunity to set expectations—and to open the door to practices that will enable women to build robust lives for themselves in the community.

Location matters. Pre-release facilities work best when they’re situated in the communities to which women will return. That means access to services, transportation, and employment—and also accessibility for family and loved ones. Facilities should be designed to support visitation in safe, welcoming spaces, not as a privilege but as a core part of reentry preparation.

Successful reentry also requires active coordination with other systems. Women will need to navigate housing, health care, mental health and substance use treatment, child welfare, education, employment, and parole—often all at once. Facilities need to be accessible and welcoming to professionals from those systems, with streamlined entry protocols, designated meeting space, and a culture that recognizes this cross-system work as essential to success. The more those connections are built before release, the more stable the transition will be.

Digital access and fluency are essential. In today’s world, reintegration requires more than a release plan—it requires digital functionality. Women need to be able to apply for jobs, use email, manage appointments, access benefits, and navigate services online. Yet many have had little or no opportunity to develop or retain these skills in prison. A pre-release setting should provide access to computers and the internet, along with the structured support to help women

practice using these tools. Digital literacy is now as fundamental as budgeting or showing up for appointments—it's part of what makes independent life possible. Phone access at no cost to families and providers remains important as well, but it is not a substitute for full digital engagement.

Design matters. Even within a locked facility, pre-release must look and feel different than traditional incarceration. Design, staffing, daily routines, and technology policies all signal whether the goal is institutional compliance or preparation for real-world living. When done well, pre-release allows women to begin exercising autonomy—working, communicating, managing time, and reconnecting with their support networks—while still benefiting from guidance and accountability. Furloughs should be an integral part of the step-down process.

I appreciate Maryland's renewed commitment to establishing a pre-release facility for women. I encourage the Committee to view SB 0187 not only as a vehicle for construction, but as a statement of how we prepare people for return: by reconnecting them to the world they will reenter, and ensuring they have the relationships, tools, and experience to stay and succeed there.

Respectfully submitted,
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