

CLINICAL LAW PROGRAM

Testimony in Support of House Bill 935
Correctional Services - Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services - Female
Incarcerated Individuals
Position: Favorable

To: Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair, and the Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Allana Thomas, Student Attorney, Racial Justice & the Law Clinic, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law (admitted pursuant to Rule 19-220 of the Maryland Rules Governing Admission to the Bar).

Date: February 27, 2026

I am a student attorney in the Racial Justice and the Law Clinic ("Clinic") at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law. The clinic engages matters that examine, address, and aim to redress racial inequities and other harms experienced by historically racially marginalized groups. The Clinic supports House Bill 935, which mandates the construction of a dedicated pre-release facility for women in Baltimore City. If enacted, this bill will help prepare women to reintegrate into their communities and help close the gap in a longstanding disparity.

Maryland currently operates six pre-release facilities for men but zero for women, a disparity that has persisted since December 2009.¹ The absence of a pre-release facility disproportionately harms Black women, who comprise 53% of women imprisoned in Maryland despite being only 16% of the state's population.² Without a dedicated women's pre-release facility, these women (and all women preparing for release) lack access to the community-based reentry supports that are essential for successful reintegration.

Pre-release facilities are designed to serve as a bridge from prison to community. However, since 2009, Maryland has not provided this bridge—in the form of a stand-alone, community-centered pre-release facility—to women. Instead, women classified as minimum or pre-release status are housed inside the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women ("MCI-W"), a maximum-security prison.³ As a result, women nearing release

¹ *Correctional Services – Comprehensive Rehabilitative Prerelease Services – Female Incarcerated Individuals, Hearing on S.B. 187 Before the S. Comm. on Judicial Proceedings*, 2026 Leg., 449th Sess. (Md. 2026) (Sponsor Testimony of Sen. Mary Washington) (Jan. 28, 2026).

² Wambui Kamau, *Report produces 18 ways to reduce mass incarceration of Black Marylanders*, WYPR (Mar. 13, 2025), <https://www.wypr.org/wypr-news/2025-03-13/report-produces-18-ways-to-reduce-mass-incarceration-of-black-marylanders>.

³ Maryland General Assembly, Department of Legislative Services, Fiscal and Policy Note for Senate Bill 187, at 5 (First Reader Jan. 26, 2026), https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2026RS/fnotes/bil_0007/sb0187.pdf.

remain in a high-security environment designed for maximum-security classifications.⁴ A formerly incarcerated resident of MCI-W, who was classified as pre-release, explained that

[t]he ladies that are in the work-release program, they're double-bunked . . . We have what looks like a pre-release unit, but it's just another housing unit. Those ladies will never be able to have pre-release opportunities inside of a correctional facility. It's not possible.⁵

Many women at MCI-W report fearing for their safety,⁶ and their concerns are supported by the data: "MCI-W has a recent assault rate of 1 in 16, which is higher than the assault rate at both of the state-run pre-release facilities for men."⁷ Keeping women who are eligible for step-down placement in a maximum-security environment does more than expose them to heightened risk; it undermines the purpose of pre-release itself.

Additionally, the location of the facility matters. Therefore, Baltimore City is the right location for the pre-release facility. Located away from existing correctional facilities and with access to public transit, such a facility would place women within reach of what they need most during the pre-release period: access to employment opportunities and community-based services via public transportation, and beginning the process of social reintegration.⁸ Thus, HB 935 would ensure that women, like men, have access to a comprehensive pre-release facility designed to support safe and successful reentry.

For these reasons, the Clinic respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 935.

This written testimony is submitted on behalf of the Racial Justice & the Law Clinic at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, and not on behalf of the School of Law or the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Mansa Musa, *The 'Women's Cut—Maryland's Only Women's Prison*, THE REAL NEWS NETWORK, Apr. 22, 2024, <https://therealnews.com/the-womens-cut-marylands-only-womens-prison>.

⁶ Out for Justice, *Women's Pre-Release*, <https://www.out4justice.org/women-s-pre-release>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ The Council of State Governments Justice Center, *Beyond Recidivism: Redefining Measures to Understand Reentry Success 7* (June 2025) ("Successful social reintegration involves rebuilding relationships, fostering social support, and actively participating in community life to promote stability and engagement in prosocial behaviors."), <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Beyond-Recidivism-Redefining-Measures-to-Understand-Reentry-Success-2.pdf>