

**Testimony** of Monica Watkins, Past President of Baltimore Alumnae Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Chair The BRIDGE Project, Baltimore Alumnae Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc

**In support of:** [HB935/SB187 – Comprehensive Prerelease Services for Women – Female Incarcerated Women](#)

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am Monica Watkins, Past President of Baltimore Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and Chair of the BRIDGE Project, supporting justice-impacted women. I am here today in support of HB935, that has been before this body before. Consequently, it is my understanding that you are acutely aware of the lack of services available for women in Maryland. You also know that this bill was heard on the Senate Side SB187 with wide support, including the Maryland Catholic Conference, and the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women.

Women continue to have to beg for equal treatment, even in the area of Correctional Services and preparation for re-entry into **society**. The women of the BRIDGE Program, when they are matched with a mentor, enter the program demonstrating limited preparedness and requiring a host of needs and resources. We have worked with Maryland Correctional Enterprises and subject matter experts from the National Association of Public Defenders to prepare and train our mentors, but even with that training and ongoing training that we provide, we are ill-equipped to support the many services that they need. We, however, have learned to pivot and pull on the nearly 600 members of the Baltimore Alumnae Chapter to fill in the gap due to the lack of prerelease services and preparedness for women. The Prison Policy Initiative states “With [an incarceration rate of 49 per 100,000 residents](#), Maryland incarcerates women at a higher rate than most of our closest international allies.”

Justice impacted women, their families, their communities and the State of Maryland cannot kick this can down the road any longer. I urge your favorable report of HB935. It will help us better assist our mentees, their families, their communities and our state.