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Ioana Stoica
5802 Holger Ct, Laurel, MD 20707
ioana.stoica@gmail.com / (240) 643-0059

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB682
Correctional Services - Prerelease Unit for Women - Requirement to Operate

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

FROM: Ioana Stoica

My name is Ioana Stoica and I have been a Maryland resident for twenty two of the past thirty years. I have resided in District 21 for the past 4 years. I am writing as a concerned citizen, and as a member of Bend the Arc's Moral Minyan and Oseh Shalom Synagogue in Laurel, MD. This testimony is in support of SB682, which would require Maryland to operate a pre-release center for women to help women transition back as productive members of our community.

It is unconscionable that our state has several pre-release facilities for men, and none for women. The Jewish tradition teaches us that we must pursue justice above all, (Deut 16:20), and this includes providing equity of treatment to all people, regardless of sex or gender. According to the Maryland Justice Project, women are twice as likely as men to be incarcerated for a non-violent offense, and almost three quarters of these women are primary caretakers in their families. These women, who have been incarcerated in many cases for outdated laws punishing poverty, such as drug offenses (which overwhelmingly punish women of color and low-income individuals) should be provided opportunities for rehabilitation so they can rejoin their families and be able to provide for their children.

Currently, all women are housed at the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women, where they report an alarmingly high rate of assault of 1 in 16 women, although certainly the actual rate is higher. We then expect these women to be released into the community without any transition period – without a job, cell phone, identification cards/driver's licenses, medical care, public benefits, and without any other supports to ensure a successful transition. How are we to expect they will transition successfully when we are setting them up for failure? I doubt that many of us much more privileged individuals would be able to “pull ourselves up,” were we to be placed in such a situation. By not funding a women's pre-release center, we are cementing the cycle of poverty, injustice, and discrimination against our most vulnerable citizens.

Another Jewish value is that of care and love for our neighbor (Lev 19:18). This is a value that I know we share with many other faith traditions: “love your neighbor as yourself.” It is our moral imperative to assist these women into transitioning back into our communities. A pre-release facility should ensure that women have the proper help in all areas – it should help women procure important documents they need to function such as IDs, it should assist women in finding jobs, applying for healthcare and other benefits, it should support reunification

of families, it should provide programming that is gender-based and that addresses the trauma that many of these women have faced, and that focuses on rehabilitation instead of punishment. Rabbi Hillel's teachings of two millennia ago, that we should not separate ourselves from our community, that we should share in our common tribulations, are why I support this bill that mandates a separate women's pre-release center. **I respectfully urge a favorable report.**