



## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB682, SB683, & SB684**

**To: Chairman William Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**From: Monica Cooper Maryland Justice Project, Founder**

**Date: 2/26/2020**

Dear Chairman and members of the committee

The Maryland Justice Project would like to ask for your support in creating equitable, gender-responsive pre-release services for women in Maryland. Our organization work with Women and Girls Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated, in fact many of us are directly impacted and once found ourselves on the opposite end of this issue awaiting re-classification and transfer to the Baltimore Pre-release Unit for Woman located at 301 Calverton road. As a former resident at MCIW I can recall how as we approached our classification date to Pre-release status we would hear stories about BPRU-W, stories of week-end visit with your children and family, we would hear stories about the many training programs that was offered as we contemplated our career goals and what types of training would lead us to that path. I can recall the stories about how you could just walk into the Doctors office without having to wait weeks or months to be seen, which I found fascinating and welcoming. Speaking from my experience being incarcerated and having basic every day freedoms taking from me causes one to think about all the things you would do if you only had a second chance. Things like taking better care of yourself, getting a good full-time job, finally going to college to pursue your dream career, opening your own business. For most of us Women exiting MCIW and returning home these were the things we looked forward to at the Pre-release Unit. Now that the Pre-release Unit has been shut down and moved inside of a maximum-security facility. The overwhelming number of women eligible for Pre-release status, which last we checked was around 260 most of which are refusing to participate in the pre-release program because the institution offers absolutely nothing especially in comparison to what it used to offer when it was at 301 Calverton road. The women refuse to pay MCIW \$1,000 dollars a month to be dropped off in front of a fast food

restaurant in a prison van. The women are refusing to participate in a program that does not encourage family reunification not being able to get weekend passes. One of the greatest tools of behavioral modification inside the penal system is the classification instrument. Inmates are fully aware of the importance of not getting into trouble getting a G.E.D getting involved in therapeutic classes and other things that will assist them in getting out of prison. Again, from my personal experience, I stayed out of trouble participated in self-help groups therapeutic groups workshops with the intention of making parole, and reaching my last 24 months with an outstanding record so I could be transferred to the PRE-RELEASE UNIT FOR WOMEN. My experience was almost 12 years ago. Currently MCIW don't even have a social worker to ensure the women have their social security cards and identification before they exit. There have been at least 3 suicides in the last few years. In recent months a 19-year-old resident who was screaming out for mental health attention manage to set her cell on fire injuring herself and a few correctional officers. These incidents are a clear sign that the women are not getting the help they need, and it is an even bigger sign that when women leave that so called pre-release program they are most definitely not equipped or prepared to cope with the road ahead of them. I urge you to put your support behind this bill and all efforts to ensure women are given the tools they need to return home and be better mothers and daughters.

Thank you,  
Monica Cooper, Executive Director  
Maryland Justice Project