

SUPPORT SB 683 & SB 684 - Women's Prerelease

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM
Working toward unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



To: Chair Will Smith & Senate Judicial Proceedings Com.
From: Phil Caroom
MAJR Executive Com.
Date: February 26, 2020

Md. Alliance for Justice Reform ([MAJR-www.ma4jr.org](http://www.ma4jr.org)) supports SB 683 and 684 to correct a gap in services created when the last women's prerelease center was closed due to budget cuts more than 10 years ago.

SB 684 calls for evidence-based gender-responsive rehabilitative services directed to mental health, child care, child welfare, and family reunification, as well as traditional rehabilitative services.

SB 683 calls for establishment of a new prerelease program for women inmates who present low risks for violence and escape with good institutional behavior. The bill reasonable calls for the program to be located in the geographic area of highest need.

Notably, our state's Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) recently responded to this need by partitioning a men's pre-release facility in Jessup, Anne Arundel County, Md. This is inadequate because, as DPSCS itself reports, more than 30% of women inmates come from the Baltimore City / Baltimore County region. Yet the only prerelease opportunities currently offered to these women inmates are located in Jessup, Anne Arundel County, nearly 20 miles from the City and functionally disconnected from the City's public transportation system. Job opportunities and services available in Anne Arundel County cannot possibly meet the needs of all the Baltimore residents and of women residing in other parts of the State.

SB 683 offers another good resolution to this problem by asking local detention centers to establish robust women's prerelease programs. How would this help? Ideally—as now being demonstrated in a few counties—women inmates from state prison could be transferred to local prerelease programs in the final year or so of their sentences. There, they would be able to participate in work-release to get jobs they would be able to continue upon eventual parole. And, they could better reestablish their support networks with local family members, treatment programs, etc. See [MAJR's 2019 Reentry Roundtable report](#).

Why do prerelease and reentry programs matter? Nationally-recognized programs that provide substantial reentry services including transitional employment can reduce recidivism from the average 40 to 60 percent return to prison within 3 years down to only about 10 percent. [Id.](#) Particularly, studies show that well-paid employment within the first 90 days after release results in a major reduction in recidivism. [See, e.g., Greater Baltimore Committee - "Opening Doors to Second Chances" \(2016\) report, citing 3-state longitudinal study by Urban Inst.](#)

Please note: Phil Caroom provides this testimony for MAJR and not for the Md. Judiciary.