
BILL NO: Senate Bill 683
TITLE: Correctional Services – Women’s Prerelease Unit – Requirements (Women’s Prerelease Equity Act)
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: February 26, 2020
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

Senate Bill 683 would require that any prerelease unit be a separate stand-alone structure. The Women’s Law Center supports SB 683 as good public policy in preparing people to reenter society after a period of incarceration. The bill also provides that adequate consideration be given to safety issues in light of the characteristics of those entering a prerelease program.

SB 683 would require that any prerelease unit be a separate structure from any prison or facility. Further, it provides that appropriate security features be developed for participants who present the least risk of violence, the least risk of escape and who have a record of satisfactory institutional behavior. Clearly, prerelease is for inmates who have earned the ability to be placed in such a program.

Over the past quarter century, there has been a profound change in the involvement of women within the criminal justice system. This is the result of more expansive law enforcement efforts, stiffer drug sentencing laws, and post-conviction barriers to reentry that uniquely affect women. The female prison population stands nearly eight times higher than in 1980. More than 60% of women in state prisons have a child under the age of 18¹. Women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug or property offense, yet less is being done to address their unique needs.

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland supports the rights and dignity of all women, including those who are currently incarcerated. Therefore, the Women’s Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 683.

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women’s Law Center operates two hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County and the statewide Collateral Legal Assistance for Survivors and Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Projects.

¹ The Sentencing Project, Incarcerated Women and Girls: 1980-2016, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls-1980-2016.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=12d509dd-a247-4f77-a4f8-6d0fdbe0cd6e>