



**SB0769 - Department of Juvenile Services - Juvenile Strategic Reentry Program**

Presented to the Honorable Will Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 3, 2020 12:00 p.m.

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**POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee a favorable report on SB0769 Department of Juvenile Services - Juvenile Strategic Reentry Program**, sponsored by Senator Obie Patterson.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We strive to ensure every child-bearing individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. Youth have the same rights as adults in choosing when to form their families. Among our campaigns to ensure reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we seek to help identify and create effective supports to help pregnant and parenting youth realize goals of self-sufficiency and economic security. We applaud the introduction of this legislation to find ways to strengthen the reentry programming for systems-involved youth. However, reentry case management can be drastically different when it comes to female and male juveniles, such as issues faced by pregnant and parent youth. These areas should be made priorities within the scope of programming provided and not ignored.

As advocates during the 2020 Maryland General Assembly are currently seeking to pass bills addressing the inequities of having nine prerelease centers open to men, while none provided to women, it will be important to ensure that issues of equity are also effectively addressed in SB0769. For example, there needs to be dedicated case management to assist pregnant and parenting individuals about healthcare access to ensure positive pregnancy outcomes, as well as ways to secure or maintain custody or visitation rights. There may be many barriers for younger individuals to successfully reintegrate into their communities and effectively care for their families. Females are three times more likely than males to head a single parent household and approximately seventy-five percent of women are primary caretakers of children<sup>i</sup>. Yet, the incarceration of women has increased since 1978 at a rate that is over twice the rate of men.<sup>ii</sup> The incarceration of females continues to escalate and if we do not offer adequate prerelease services, we will consequently see a rise in recidivism, and having more children left behind as their mothers are incarcerated<sup>iii</sup>.

Our organization, in alliance with the coalition Reproductive Justice Inside, is advocating for the passage of legislation introduced this session to improve access to pregnancy-related healthcare access upon release in HB0524/SB0255, and if needed, access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment. It is the intent of this legislation to also apply to pregnant youth in the care and custody of the Department of Juvenile Services. We strongly recommend that SB0769 contain language reflecting goals of HB0524/SB0255 to ensure parity, and we stand ready to assist the bill sponsor if requested. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable committee report on **SB0769**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>i</sup> "Women's Pre-Release Facility." mdjusticeproject. Accessed February 14, 2020. <https://www.marylandjusticeproject.org/women-s-pre-release-facility>

<sup>ii</sup> Initiative, Prison Policy. "The Gender Divide: Tracking Women's State Prison Growth." The Gender Divide: Tracking women's state prison growth | Prison Policy Initiative. Accessed February 14, 2020. [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women\\_overtime.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html)

<sup>iii</sup> Initiative, Prison Policy. "Who's Helping the 1.9 Million Women Released from Prisons and Jails Each Year?" Prison Policy Initiative. Accessed February 15, 2020. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/07/19/reentry/>