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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB608**

**Correctional Services - Prerelease Unit for Women - Requirement to Operate**

**TO:** Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbearly, and members of the Judiciary Committee

**FROM:** Mark Paster

My name is Mark Paster and I am a resident of Silver Spring (District 20) Maryland. I am writing in support of HB608.

“Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” Someday soon, hopefully, the Equal Rights Amendment will become part of US law. Many laws already exist that prohibit different treatment of men and women without sound reasons. And yet Maryland continues to have no pre-release facilities for women who are about to be released from incarceration, despite providing such programming for men. The legal justification for this lack of gender parity is non-existent and the State should not continue to assume that no one will sue the State for this obvious and indefensible discrimination.

I’m not a lawyer, but it’s hard to imagine how the State would defend itself in such a lawsuit. The only way that I can see is to pass legislation this session that rights this wrong. HB 608 is designed to provide women with the same kinds of services and facilities that Maryland has provided to men for years.

If Maryland is sued over this issue, the State will undoubtedly lose and will then likely be under court order to provide these facilities and services. In addition, there will be court costs, attorney fees and possibly damages to plaintiffs. It seems more cost-effective to get ahead of the issue (or at least not more behind) and be proactive now, rather than being forced to act, not to mention that it’s the right thing to do.

Pre-release facilities have been shown to help lower recidivism, smooth integration back into families and the community and help people who have been incarcerated become more successful in their lives.

A more just society includes treating everyone more justly and equitably. Providing women the same level of programming we currently offer men who are being released from incarceration is simple justice. **I urge you to issue a favorable report on HB 608.** Thank you.