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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB608**

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

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

**FROM:** Toby Ditz

I am Toby Ditz, and I live in Baltimore City in District 40. This testimony is in support of HB608.

The simple proposition that there should be a pre-release unit for women as well as men should not be controversial. Gender equity is at stake. I was on a tour of the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women two years ago and was very surprised to learn that so few resources were devoted to women's transition programs compared to men's. As a university professor who worked for years to try to advance gender equity at my workplace, I had assumed, perhaps naively, that equitable treatment of men and women in the state prison system would at least be a working principle. Yet, incarcerated men receive the lion's share of programming resources, while women are neglected. That men have multiple stand-alone pre-release facilities, when women do not have even one is a stark example. It is unsafe, and it is just wrong.

People who know the prison system in Maryland better than I do say that men are advantaged partly because of economies of scale. Because there are so many more incarcerated men than women, a new program for men stretches a dollar further than a comparable program for women. From the vantage point of budgeting, it is an understandable temptation to focus on men. But, again, it is unjust.

Cutting corners on the needs of women in transition is also upside down from the perspective of family policy. Over the last several decades two-parent households have declined sharply in all ethnic and racial groups, and women are still primarily responsible for the daily care of children. This is especially true among lower income families. As a result, incarcerated women are providers and caregivers for children at three times the rate of incarcerated men. When mothers and grandmothers are in prison, the effects on the family are immediate and often devastating, as when children are placed in foster care. If we want to support families, we must treat women equitably.

A pre-release unit and adequate resources for women in transition is in accord with the principle of gender justice, and it will enhance the well-being of families and children. **I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 608.**