



Marjorie Cook Foundation

Domestic Violence Legal Clinic

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILLS 801 AND 828**

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The House of Ruth Maryland is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House Bill 828 defines the term “prerelease unit for women.” House Bill 801 would require the Commissioner of the Division of Correction to provide a comprehensive rehabilitative prerelease facility for female inmates that matches their security level on a validated gender-responsive risk measure. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 801 and HB 828.**

Under current law, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) may operate a prerelease unit for women. Until FY 2017, DPSCS operated a stand-alone prerelease unit for women in Baltimore City; however, the facility is now closed. Since the closure of the facility, all prerelease programming for women has been transferred to the Maryland Correctional Institution-Women in Jessup, where the women are housed throughout the prison. As a result of being housed in a correctional institution, women on prerelease cannot avail themselves of certain opportunities, including work release, making plans for successful re-entry, and reconnecting with family and community resources. These opportunities are currently available to men on prerelease, as the men’s prerelease unit is a stand-alone facility.

House Bill 828 defines the term “prerelease unit for women.” House Bill 801 would require the Commissioner of the Division of Correction to provide a comprehensive rehabilitative prerelease facility for female inmates that matches their security level on a validated gender-responsive risk measure. If we want incarcerated women to thrive in society after they are released, the State needs to prepare them to reintegrate into the community before they are released. Providing incarcerated women with support to find jobs, housing, drug treatment, and mental health services will reduce their chances of recidivism.

In an effort to provide incarcerated women with evidence-based and innovative programs and practices, **the House of Ruth urges a favorable report on House Bills 801 and 828.**