



www.marylandwomen.org

Maryland Commission for Women

A Commission of the Maryland Department of Human Services

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www.marylandwomen.org

March 9, 2022

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The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
The Honorable Jeffrey Waldstreicher, Vice Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Wing
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401 – 1991

RE: SB 0776 - Prevention of Forced Separation Act

Dear Senators Smith and Waldstreicher and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Commission for Women (MCW) urges support of Senate Bill 0776 which would permit an incarcerated woman who is either pregnant or recently gave birth to transfer to the prerelease unit for women, and will establish the Healthy Start Bonding Program to promote the development of healthy relationships between incarcerated women and their children.

The MCW was established in 1965 and was set in state law in 1971. An office of the Department of Human Services, the Commission is a 25-member advisory board whose duties outlined in its enabling legislation include:

- Study the status of women in our state.
- Recommend methods of overcoming discrimination.
- Recognize women's accomplishments and contributions.
- Provide informed advice to the executive and legislative branches of government on the issues concerning the women of our state.

It is to fulfill this mandate that the Commission writes to you today. Please note that the positions expressed in this letter are those of the Commission for Women and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Governor or the Department of Human Services.

An average of 4-8% of incarcerated women are pregnant during their incarceration. Incarcerated pregnant women are at a higher risk for prenatal complications and preterm births. Additionally, pregnant women often enter our correctional system with multiple sociocultural factors that contribute to detrimental social and health outcomes for themselves and their babies upon release.

During the period of incarceration, Maryland's correctional system has a unique opportunity to address issues, including facilitating strong bonding of the infants with their mothers and incentivizing the mothers to comply with requirements to remain with their child in the prerelease unit. This bill requires the Division of Correctional Services to allow liberal visitation for the father or secondary caretaker with a pregnant incarcerated woman or a woman in post-delivery. In addition, this bill will give our state correctional system the means to provide services aimed at improving potential mental health issues that can arise from the separation of mother and child during periods of incarceration.

This bill will undoubtedly improve health and mental health outcomes when new mothers leave prison and re-enter society. Therefore, we strongly urge your support for SB 0776.

With very best regards,



Yun Jung Yang, Chair
Maryland Commission for Women