



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 08, 2022

HB 454

Correctional Services – Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act)

House Judiciary Committee

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch)dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

The Conference supports House Bill 454. This bill would require the Department of Correction to allow certain pregnant women and certain women who have recently given birth to transfer to the prerelease unit for women for a certain period of time in order to facilitate strong bonds between incarcerated women and their children.

The Conference supports programming focused on children and families impacted by incarceration and believes these specialized programs can make a positive impact in the lives of families as they face challenging times. The United States is just one of four countries in the world that routinely separate incarcerated moms from their newborn babies. The trauma of such a separation is profound and harms the health of both the mother and baby. Women in prison tend to be younger, have completed less education and are more likely to have experienced physical or chemical abuse. Since 1980 the number of women incarcerated in Maryland has increased over 3-fold and this increase disproportionately affects women of color.

Moving women and their children from traditional prison settings to a prerelease setting, as called for in this legislation, can improve birth outcomes for Moms and babies. Allowing parents to bond during the first year of life can improve the health outcomes for children during this first year and for the remainder of their lives. A positive, healthy relationship with a parent or caregiver is the most important factor for successful development in early life. These relationships not only provide a safe and healthy environment for growth, but also positive interactions that support healthy emotional and social development and learning.

The Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act is an opportunity to revise ineffective public policies to positively impact two generations at a time and help make Maryland a leader in prison reform for pregnant women.

It is for these reasons that the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **HB 454**. Thank you for your consideration.

