

Support HB 608 and HB 658 - women and prerelease

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee

DATE: February 18, 2020

Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR-www.ma4jr.org) supports HB 608 and HB 658.

HB 608 reasonably calls for re-establishment of a dedicated pre-release center for Maryland's population of approximately 800 women inmates since the last such dedicated prerelease center was closed due to budget cuts more than 10 years ago.

Notably, our state's Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) recently responded to this need by partitioning a men's pre-release facility in Jessup, Anne Arundel County, Md. This is inadequate because, as DPSCS itself reports, more than 30% of women inmates come from the Baltimore City / Baltimore County region. Yet the only prerelease opportunities currently offered to these women inmates are located in Jessup, Anne Arundel County, nearly 20 miles from the City and functionally disconnected from the City's public transportation system. Job opportunities and services available in Anne Arundel County cannot possibly meet the needs of all the Baltimore residents and of women residing in other parts of the State.

HB 658 offers another good resolution to this problem by asking local detention centers to establish robust women's prerelease programs. How would this help? Ideally—as now being demonstrated in a few counties—women inmates from state prison could be transferred to local prerelease programs in the final year or so of their sentences. There, they would be able to participate in work-release to get jobs they would be able to continue upon eventual parole. And, they could better reestablish their support networks with local family members, treatment programs, etc. See [MAJR's 2019 Reentry Roundtable report](#).

Why do prerelease and reentry programs matter? Nationally-recognized programs that provide substantial reentry services including transitional employment can reduce recidivism from the average 40 to 60 percent return to prison within 3 years down to only about 10 percent. [Id.](#) Particularly, studies show that well-paid employment within the first 90 days after release results in a major reduction in recidivism. [See, e.g., Greater Baltimore Committee - "Opening Doors to Second Chances" \(2016\) report, citing 3-state longitudinal study by Urban Inst.](#)

HB 608 and HB 658 would help the women in Maryland prisons benefit greatly from employment and reentry services. In turn, these services would save Maryland taxpayers and communities greatly via reduced recidivism. For all these reasons, Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) urges a favorable report on both women's prerelease bills.

PLEASE NOTE: Phil Caroom offers this testimony for Md. Alliance for Justice Reform and not for the Md. Judiciary.