



SB0419 - Correctional Services – Prerelease Unit for Women – Requirement to Operate
Presented to the Hon. Bobby A. Zirkin and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.
February 21, 2019 12:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee a favorable report on SB0419**, Correctional Services – Prerelease Unit for Women – Requirement to Operate, sponsored by Senator Mary Washington.

There are currently nine prerelease services operated for men transitioning out of the state prisons in Maryland, and yet no comparable service for women. This bill mandates that the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services establish prerelease units for women that offer reentry services, counseling, and other programming to give women their best chances at successful reintegration into the community.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. This includes the rights of incarcerated women. Our hope is that the prerelease center will not only provide equal services as the centers for men, but also address the needs of women returning to their sexual lives and for many, the children they left behind. Many women report not having access to sexual and reproductive healthcare prior to incarceration. We strongly recommend that not only each be enrolled in healthcare plans such as Medicaid prior to release, but that they will be offered free methods of contraception, condoms, and/or dental dams to prevent unintended pregnancy or sexual transmitted infections. For those with children, we urge that the services provided include free legal information assistance and referrals for legal services so that mothers can better understand their custody and visitation rights to effectively prepare for returning home or creating new homes. For those that are pregnant, there should be a set number of beds in the facility with access to the proper care and services that will promote positive pregnancy outcomes. Approximately 65%¹ of those incarcerated meet the criteria for being diagnosed with a substance use disorder and it is likely that this will not be fully treated by the time someone is released. In order to ensure that treatment is continued and given the best chance of success inmates need to have help and resources for securing continuing support and healthcare.

The services provided by prerelease centers set the stage for a returning citizen towards self-sufficiency post-incarceration. By having stable work, healthcare, and family ties, women are less likely to engage in recidivism. This system of prerelease centers has effectively worked in Maryland for male inmates. With this bill, the system could also benefit Maryland's female inmates and give them an equal chance at success post-incarceration.

We strongly support this effort to help women rebuild their lives after incarceration. The great benefits given by prerelease centers to male inmates should also be available to female inmates. **For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable report on SB0419.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Drugabuse.gov. (2017). *Treating Opioid Addiction in Criminal Justice Settings*. [online] Available at: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/treating-opioid-addiction-in-criminal-justice-settings/treating-opioid-addiction-in-criminal-justice-settings> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2019].