



## **SB0821 - Correctional Services – Prerelease Unit**

Presented to Hon. Bobby Zirkin and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
February 21, 2019 12:00 p.m.

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### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the House Judiciary Committee a favorable report on SB0821, Correctional Services – Prerelease Unit, sponsored by Senator Mary Washington.**

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. It is important that incarcerated women have access to prerelease units that are clearly defined, and equal to those that are offered to men. This bill seeks to ensure that all prerelease centers meet a certain standard so that female inmates are not left without adequate support upon release. This should include support in managing their interpersonal relationships with existing or future partners, as well as those returning to re-establish connections and/or parenting roles with children left behind.

SB0821 defines prerelease centers as separate facilities that must have security suitable for inmates who are least likely to attempt escape, have the least risk of violence, and have a record of good behavior. This means that only those inmates who would actually make the most effective use of the facilities can use them. SB0821 also specifies giving inmates access to extended family leave, educational programming, and vocational training. These opportunities will maximize successful rehabilitation both socially and economically. Having the skills and experience to get a job after being released is incredibly valuable as the unemployment rate for returning citizens is 27%<sup>1</sup>. Being able to build a resume and perhaps even have a recommendation letter from a supervisor will help women in situations where finding employment can be hard. Being linked to the community lessens feelings of isolation and makes it easier for returning citizens to have active and enjoyable lives while also contributing to their communities. Having these opportunities specifically required at all prerelease centers means that SB0821 ensures that inmates at one specific center do not get significantly worse benefits than those at another, meaning that all have a similar chance at success.

We cannot stress enough the importance of access to mental and physical healthcare for female inmates prior to and after release. Prerelease centers are required to assist those with recovering from addiction and other issues through counseling and treatment. We strongly recommend that not only all the women 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 services 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. We strongly support SB0821 as it ensures that all returning citizens at prerelease centers have access to a high standard of support and can navigate re-entry with dignity and success. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable report on SB0821.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahearn, T. (2018). *Low Unemployment Makes Employers More Willing to Hire Ex-Offenders with Criminal Records in 2019 - Employment Screening Resources.* [online] Employment Screening Resources. Available at: <http://www.esrcheck.com/wordpress/2018/12/21/low-unemployment-makes-employers-willing-hire-ex-offenders-criminal-records-2019/> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2019].