



HB0560 – Human Relations--Discrimination in Housing--Reentry-Into-Society Status

Presented to the Hon. Kumar Barve and
Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee
February 9, 2021 1:30 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB0560 - Human Relations--Discrimination in Housing--Reentry-Into-Society Status**, sponsored by Delegate Diana Fennell.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we work to ensure every individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families, and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. Reproductive justice is defined as the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.ⁱ The ability to safely access housing, free from discrimination, is an important reproductive justice issue because it directly affects the way individuals are able to support and raise their families.

According to a study investigating the rates and correlations of homelessness among incarcerated adults, it was found that homelessness is 7.5 to 11.3 times more prevalent for formerly incarcerated or detained people than it is for the general public.ⁱⁱ HB0560 intends to expand the housing policy of our state to include providing fair housing to all citizens regardless of reentry-into-society status. In other words, individuals can no longer refuse to sell or rent a dwelling to any person because of their reentry-into-society status. Passing HB0560 is a critical part of reducing the rates of homelessness in Maryland and improving public safety efforts by supporting individuals in their transition back to society.

The term “reentry-into-society status” refers to the state of having completed a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment. Individuals who have been previously incarcerated or detained face significant barriers in their re-entry into society. Most individuals already leave prison with limited financial resources, but a lack of recent employment history can make it even harder to establish creditability with potential landlords. The stigma around incarceration alone is enough for many landlords to turn residents down, and without the passage of HB0560, those who are trying to reenter society are not protected from such discrimination. Individuals will have a difficult time reconnecting positively to a community without the ability to safely establish a residence.

1323 N. Calvert Street, Suite A, Baltimore, MD 21202 443-869-2970 www.prochoicemd.org

For pregnant and parenting people, housing insecurity can have adverse implications on the nature of the pregnancy, ultimately affecting the birth of the child. In a study conducted on the impacts of severe housing insecurity during pregnancy, it was found that there was a 73% higher risk of low birth weight or preterm birth among infants born to mothers who experienced severe housing insecurity during pregnancy.ⁱⁱⁱ Pregnant individuals who are working to reenter their communities after serving time are a particularly vulnerable population, as these individuals have the additional responsibility of finding stable income to secure their housing. It is clear that adverse birth and infant outcomes could be avoided by eliminating severe housing insecurity among low-income, pregnant women. These individuals do not need to be further burdened by being discriminated against in their search for housing after they have already served their time.

In 2017, our organization convened a coalition, [Reproductive Justice Inside \(RII\)](#), to collect stories from current and previously incarcerated or detained individuals of being denied, delayed, or provided poor sexual or reproductive healthcare while in the care/custody/control of the state. We want to continue emphasizing the needs of those who are reentering society and ensure that they have the resources they need to successfully reintegrate into society. Basic needs include food, water, and shelter, which brings to our attention the urgent need to pass HB560. Reproductive Justice Inside strived to eliminate barriers for incarcerated and detained individuals to receive quality and timely sexual and reproductive healthcare, institute appropriate and clear written policies in all correctional and detention facilities, and help more pregnant people learn about their rights to healthcare and services. This includes advocating for the safe transition of individuals reentering society after serving time with the state.

The passage of HB0560 will not only eliminate discrimination in housing for individuals re-entering society, but it will also reduce recidivism and improve public safety as these individuals will be better supported. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB0560**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ "Reproductive Justice." Accessed February 1, 2021. <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>.

ⁱⁱ Greenberg, G. A., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2008). Jail incarceration, homelessness, and mental health: a national study. *Psychiatric services* (Washington, D.C.), 59(2), 170–177. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.2008.59.2.170>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Leifheit, K. M., Schwartz, G. L., Pollack, C. E., Edin, K. J., Black, M. M., Jennings, J. M., & Althoff, K. N. (2020). Severe Housing Insecurity during Pregnancy: Association with Adverse Birth and Infant Outcomes. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(22), 8659. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17228659>.