



**Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee
March 13, 2018**

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PUBLIC POLICY DIRECTOR

HB 1160 Correctional Services - Prerelease Unit for Women

FAVORABLE

The ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 1160, which would require the Commissioner of Correction to operate a prerelease unit for women within the Division of Correction (DOC). The unit must have programming that provides women with a range and quality of services substantially equivalent to those offered to men, including a community-based correctional facility. The eligibility criteria for services and programs of the unit must be no more restrictive than the eligibility criteria for men's prerelease services and programs.

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As this body knows, the number of women and girls caught in the criminal justice system has grown substantially over the past few decades. Many women have been criminalized through the war on drugs and have been subjected to increasingly punitive sentencing policies for nonviolent offenders. In Maryland, women make up about 4% of the state prison population. The over-incarceration of women devastates their families and communities because of the barriers women face as a result of their criminal records. These barriers include challenges obtaining employment and exclusions from certain occupations and housing opportunities.

Even worse, women of color are incarcerated at disproportionate rates—nationally, the imprisonment rate for black females (96 per 100,000 black female residents) was almost double the rate for white females (49 per 100,000 white female residents).¹

With the rising proportion of women entangled with the justice system, it is imperative that appropriate re-entry services be offered to allow them to re-enter effectively. Moreover, there is no rational basis to provide men with services that are substantially better than that available to women. Currently, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) operates no dedicated lower-security facility for women preparing to return to the community from prison. DPSCS has nine facilities dedicated to preparing men who are returning to the community around the state. The re-entry services to women are inadequate as it is, but it is even more egregious in light of the services available to men.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 1160.

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 2016 (January 2018). Available at https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p16_sum.pdf.