



Maryland

Board of Public Works

Public Comments

Meeting Date: May 21, 2025

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WOMEN'S PRE-RELEASE EQUITY COALITION

The Honorable Members of the Board of Public Works

Governor Wes Moore, President

Comptroller Brooke Lierman

Treasurer Dereck Davis

Dear Governor Moore, Comptroller Lierman, and Treasurer Davis,

The undersigned members of the Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition (WPEC) urge the Board of Public Works to **DISAPPROVE 56-GM, the General Authorization Bond Extension, and any additional funding for the current plan for the Life Skills and Reentry Center for Women (LSRCW)**. WPEC is comprised of justice-focused organizations and directly impacted individuals working since 2018 to ensure that Maryland's incarcerated women receive equitable prerelease services at a dedicated prerelease facility. DPSCS closed the Baltimore Prerelease Unit for Women, the sole women's pre-release center, in late 2009 to save money. The Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act, passed over Governor Hogan's veto in 2021, required DPSCS to operate a new center by the end of 2023. Men still have access to five pre-release centers.

The WPEC opposes the bond extension and any additional funding for the LSRCW because the plan accepted into the Governor's Capital Improvement Plan violates the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act and will poorly serve the women in prerelease status.

1. **Requiring the women to receive their therapeutic programming at the Baltimore Therapeutic and Treatment Center violates the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act.** The Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act states that DPSCS "shall" make evidence-based and gender-responsive services available to female inmates **at the prerelease facility required under [the Act].** Therefore, requiring the women at the LSRCW to receive therapeutic treatment at the BTTC does not comply with the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act. The BTTC is a huge jail, overwhelmingly male (creating the possibility of triggering trauma), and geared for the needs of a short-term population, not women who have been incarcerated for many years. Like their male counterparts, the women at the LSRCW should obtain their therapeutic treatment at their own center, with similarly situated peers, and with programming geared toward their needs, especially family reunification, after long incarceration.
2. **The bed capacity of the facility is too small to hold all women eligible for prerelease status now and in the future.** DGS set the bed capacity for the LSRCW at 64. This number of beds is artificially low because it used Average Daily Population (ADP) data for years when many women were released owing to Covid. In 2023, the number of women in prerelease status at MCI-W ranged from 73 to 91, and 104 women were released to Baltimore City and County alone. The Department of Legislative Services has also questioned the adequacy of the bed capacity, noting that the population of women at MCI-W has reached pre-Covid levels and is expected to rise. **If the LSRCW is too small, women in pre-release status will remain in MCI-W in violation of the Gender-Responsive Pre-Release Act.**
3. **The site selected for the LSRCW is too small and located in an area that is unsafe for women and families.** In July 2022, former DPSCS Secretary Robert Green requested that DGS find a site of 2-4 acres for the women's prerelease center. DGS staff agreed internally that the minimum size needed was at least 2 acres and a larger site would be preferable. 717 Forrest Street is .97 acres and cannot accommodate the

WOMEN'S PRE-RELEASE EQUITY COALITION

61,700 square-foot buildings and 35,000 square foot outdoor areas called for in the Project Plan without a more expensive, multi-story building. Moreover, the site is in the Baltimore Detention Center Complex, an area veteran Corrections Officers described as “drug-infested” and “unsafe for family visitation.” DPSCS’s plan to transport the women from the LSRCW to the BTTC by van although the facilities are only a few blocks apart confirms the safety concerns. The officers believe that the site is too small to accommodate a safe transition between the street and the facility, and there will not be enough green space for the women and their families. In their opinion, locating the LSRCW at 717 Forrest Street will doom the women to failure.

Governor’s staff indicated that 6 alternative sites were evaluated in connection with this project. This information has not been provided to the WPEC despite its request. The Program Plan Part I and Part II that selected this site did not contain these alternative site evaluations. Perhaps limiting the scope of site search, at DPSCS’s direction, DGS looked for sites within 3 zip codes, but the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act permits the facility to be located in any of 7 Baltimore City zip codes. The WPEC would consider any viable site in Baltimore City.

It is important to note that no directly impacted, formerly incarcerated women, or other stakeholders were involved in any of these decisions about the LSRCW. The WPEC is willing to work with DGS and DPSCS to find a location that offers the best opportunity for women to seek a new start in life with the support they need and want from their government and its institutions.

Maryland’s taxpayers should not be asked to pay nearly \$100 million for a facility that is statutorily non-compliant and likely to doom the women to failure.

Respectfully submitted,

Maryland Justice Project
ACLU of Maryland
Maryland Center for Economic Policy
Jews United for Justice
Women’s Law Center of Maryland
Public Justice Center
Women’s Equity Center and Action Network
Ms. Gwen Levi
Professor Leigh Goodmark (individually, and not on behalf of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law)
Montgomery County Chapter, NOW
Montgomery County Women’s Democratic Club



email bpw -BPW- <email.bpw@maryland.gov>

Fwd: Submission for BPW Consideration-Item 56-GM (Women's Prerelease Unit)

Monica Cooper <monica@marylandjusticeproject.org>
To: "email.bpw@maryland.gov" <email.bpw@maryland.gov>

Tue, May 20, 2025 at 2:58 PM

Dear Governor Moore, Comptroller Lierman, and Treasurer Davis,

Please find attached written comments for your consideration on Item 56-GM on the May 21, 2025, Board of Public Works agenda.

As a directly impacted, formerly incarcerated woman, a long-time advocate for a dedicated women's prerelease center, and a co-founder of the Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition, I respectfully urge the Board of Public Works to deny the General Obligation Bond Authorization Extension and any future funding for the Life Skills and Reentry Center for Women because the current plan for the facility violates the Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act of 2021 and is fiscally irresponsible. As someone who has been advocating for the re-opening of a prerelease center for women since 2016, I believe that nobody in the State of Maryland wants to see a women's prerelease center for Maryland's incarcerated women more than I do. However, the current plan suffers from serious statutory and planning deficiencies and must be amended before it is funded. To do otherwise would ill-serve Maryland's incarcerated women and taxpayers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on this item before the Board of Public Works. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if I can assist you in any way.

Sincerely,

Monica Cooper

Executive Director, Maryland Justice Project

Co-Founder, Women's Prerelease Equity Coalition



Coalition BPW Testimony (final).pdf
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