

**Voices of Maryland Women Listening Tour**  
**Maryland Correctional Institute for Women (MCIW)**

Jessup, Maryland

April 8, 2017 ♦ 9:50 – 10:50 a.m.

The ninth annual Women Moving Forward Reentry Conference was held at the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women (MCIW) on April 8. The goal of the conference is to provide resources and information to support incarcerated women's transition back into their communities, the work place, and their families. The conference is organized by the National Association of Women Judges, in partnership with a number of other state-wide and local organizations and volunteers. At least 24 seminars on a variety of topics were offered. One of those seminars was a session of the Voices of Maryland Women Listening Tour.

Eighteen women participated in the session, which was co-sponsored by Out For Justice, an "ex-offender, member led organization that promotes ... reform of policies that adversely affect the ex-offender re-entering into society successfully. Out For Justice strives to change the perception of the ex-offender by promoting the 3 Es, education, empowerment, and engagement. Out For Justice educates the community and its member base on the legislative process. (It) empowers ex-offenders by urging them to use the legislative process to lead the change they want to see. Community members are engaged by OFJ members by supporting ex-offender friendly legislation and participating in OFJ sponsored community events." (<http://www.out4justice.org/>)

The attendees in the Listening Tour Seminar at the Women Moving Forward Conference identified a range of issues and challenges for incarcerated women in this state, selected those they thought were most important, and discussed possible remedies.

A total of 10 challenges facing the women in the MCIW were listed. Each participant was given five "votes" to place beside the issues they thought were most important. From that vote, the five "top" issues were identified. The group then discussed actions that could be taken to address those top five issues:

- 1. Need for a pre-release/work-release facility and services for women, separate from the prison. (The participants told us that there are residential pre-release centers for male re-entry residents where they are housed separately from the other residents, can participate in occupational training, live in a less-restrictive environment, take public transportation to work, etc. They said there is no such facility for women.)**
  - a. Raise awareness of the unequal facilities and services for incarcerated, transitioning women, compared to those available for incarcerated men.
  - b. Provide more comprehensive job training and job placement for women including apprenticeships and internships.
  - c. Eliminate policies and laws that are barriers to finding employment for convicted felons.

- 2. Re-entry services are centered in Baltimore – women who will be returning to other communities around the state have less access and there are few, if any services, offered to them elsewhere.**
  - a. Advocacy for state and local funding for re-entry services in local communities
  - b. Hold organizations accountable for the effectiveness of the services delivered
  - c. More staff “on the inside” dedicated to helping with re-entry issues such as finding housing and work in home communities
  
- 3. Need for affordable transitional housing – especially immediately following release when re-entry women are likely to have no resources for deposits, rent, etc.**
  - a. Prohibit barriers for convicted felons seeking rental housing
  - b. Provide funding grants for the first six months of housing
  - c. More state and local funding for transitional housing
  - d. Hold transitional housing providers accountable
  
- 4. Need for transitional housing for re-entry women with children.**
  - a. Establish shelters and long-term housing for re-entry women with children
  - b. Provide comprehensive wrap-around services at these facilities
  
- 5. Domestic violence victims who fight back may be charged with and convicted of a crime, even when they were in fear for their lives.**
  - a. Enact improved self-defense protections for victims of domestic and intimate partner violence who fight back.

The chart on the next page lists all the issues that were identified during the course of this forum and shows the number of votes each one received from those in attendance as they considered the priority level of each issue in comparison to the others.

| Number of Votes | Issue   |
|-----------------|---|
| 15              | Need for a separate pre-release/work-release facility and services for women.   |
| 11              | Re-entry services are centered in Baltimore – women who will be returning to other communities around the state have less access and there are few, if any services, offered to them elsewhere. |
| 8               | Need for affordable transitional housing – especially immediately following release when re-entry women are likely to have no resources for deposits, rent, etc.                                |
| 8               | Need for transitional housing for re-entry women with children.   |
| 6               | Domestic violence victims who fight back may be charged with and convicted of a crime, even when they were in fear for their lives.   |
| 3               | Need for more transitional/re-entry services “on the inside” prior to release   |
| 2               | Restitution requirements  |
| 2               | Need for connection to community organizations that will help “make our voices heard  |
| 1               | Minors charged as adults are incarcerated with adult offenders  |
|                 | While on “house arrest” still may only use DPSCS medical services which are all in Baltimore  |
| 56              | 10 Issues   |