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February 5, 2020

Testimony:  
In Favor  
Senate Bill 591

Honorable Senators West, Hester, Lam, Smith, Sydnor, Waldstreicher and Young

I am Margaret Burns, a resident of Baltimore County MD who is here today to testify in favor of Senate Bill 591.

As a mother of 4 daughters, including a disabled adult, active in my faith community and Jacksonville neighborhood, and a criminal justice professional, who has spent over 40 years working in criminal justice prevention and rehabilitation, in Maryland and Massachusetts, I am testifying today in favor of the Maryland Second Look Act - a fair and equitable process to provide offenders who have served lengthy sentence an opportunity to seek judicial relief and fair opportunity to review their sentence for a "second chance" or sentence modification.

Throughout my career; I have worked as a juvenile and adult probation officer, an alternative sentencing program administrator seeking restitution and victim and offender reconciliation to rehabilitate and enhance sentencing reforms. I have worked for Prison Fellowship in MD and Delaware prisons, working in prison ministry and ex-offender re-entry and working with the splintered yet hopeful families of prisoners in their communities. I have worked for the MD Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and then as a government relations expert at the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention where I worked on national, federal, state and local grant funding to Baltimore City and Maryland. Most recently I served for almost 10 years in Patricia Jessamy's Baltimore State's Attorney's office, where I worked on government policy and legislation to reduce gun violence, assist witnesses to afraid to testify, and close loop holes in child abuse legislation as well as spokesperson.

Throughout my career, I have encountered the lone offender, living in silent obscurity behind prison walls, lacking the public defender tools and legal relief needed to seek an opportunity to turn over a "heart felt" new leaf. Longing to try again, many of these offenders have exhausted the legal processes afforded to them for violent crimes committed decades ago, often under the influence of drugs or alcohol that resulted in a split second tragedy for victim and their families and community. These offenders, perhaps small in number, seek hope. This is a bill with hope.

Words can't describe the loss of family and friends ripped from the fabric of communities. These criminal tragedies rip people apart. The losses are unfathomable. I witnessed it and felt it over and over again working in the State's Attorney's office. They whispers of victims too afraid to testify who lost children and teens. There is need for just and fair incarceration, and

I've observed swift and fair justice in the city court system. This bill doesn't say incarceration isn't an important element of building safe communities.

However, some of these offenders have aged, sometimes with the wisdom and guidance from prison ministry and prison visitation programs, educational and counseling programs as well as internal healing of heart and thought processes that bring grown men to redemption and the desire to seek a new path. These offenders have made decisions that cost a lifetime of incarceration and seek sunlight. Such is the case of Leonard Cirincione, Lenny Cirincione, who I have known for about 10 years who would benefit from this bill. That is why I am here today.

Lenny committed a terrible crime in the hot summer of 1986 outside of Memorial Stadium. Under PCP, the drug of choice so easily obtained on Baltimore Streets in those days, he lost his mind behind the wheel of a car and mowed down one of Baltimore's finest in a split second decision to escape. Lenny has been in prison about 35 years, serving a sentence of life plus 20 years, sentenced for first degree murder for killing a police officer – at one point his case was believed to be death penalty eligible. What Lenny did not know, and what a team of public citizens is seeking to expose, is that there was a collective public quest for a prison sentence that would send Lenny away for life, and he would die in prison—that was sought by a group of elected and appointed Baltimore criminal justice officials – who sought to profit from his case in an election year. Lenny's was charged with first degree murder, however his case is an automobile manslaughter, vehicle manslaughter case. If he had been charged appropriately, he would have received 10-15 years maximum. I believe things would have been different, if the political landscape was not united to put Lenny away forever, despite his young age, and despite the fact that the legal facts, would not adequately justify such an unjust sentence.

I am here today to testify for Justice for Lenny.

Lenny has exhausted appeals and has an expert childhood friend, who has gathered a village of interested citizens to shine a light on Lenny's case. Lenny is a model prisoner who has served his time. He is old and graying, he has worked in the prison print shop for years and know is overseer. He is a quiet prisoner who keeps to himself and visits with family and friends, and the chaplain programs. He has no infractions, and is a model inmate. He deserves an opportunity for a judge to reconsider his sentence. It happened all the time, when I worked in the SAO.

This bill is the right answer at the right time.

Sincerely,  
Margaret Burns