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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB797
**Compensation to Individual Erroneously Convicted, Sentenced, and Confined or
Whose Conviction or Adjudication Is Reversed**

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Carol Stern on behalf of Jews United for Justice

I provide this testimony in favor of SB797 as co-chair of the Equal Justice under the Law team of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes 5,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

As Jews, we are tasked with carrying out the directive issued in Deuteronomy 16:20, “*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof* - Justice, justice shall you pursue.” The Jewish sages explain that the word *tzedek* is repeated not only for emphasis but to teach us that in our pursuit of justice, our means must be as just as our ends. This helps to shape my religious and moral conviction that Maryland’s laws should automatically give fair compensation to anyone wrongfully convicted and imprisoned. The Union for Reform Judaism Resolution on Criminal Justice Reform stated that **“Preventing and punishing criminal conduct are among the primary obligations of government at all levels. But it is also the obligation of the government to ensure that no one is unjustly accused, convicted, or punished.”** When we are working to reform our criminal justice system, we must demand that it operates in accordance with these deeply held beliefs.

It is hard to imagine that the State of Maryland does not have compensation standards for the Board of Public Works so it can swiftly act on exonerees’ requests. The status quo consists of years worth of unanswered petitions before the state Board of Public Works. It is not surprising that in recent years exonerees just stopped requesting compensation.

Maryland should not allow this unjust situation to continue. This bill adds much needed reforms to expedite compensation for wrongfully convicted Marylanders. This bill will also greatly enhance the justice system so that exonerees can be given the chance to resume a normal life.

On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB797.