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February 4, 2020

Favorable
House Bill-323 in House Judicial Committee

Criminal Procedure- Petition to Modify or Reduce Sentence (Maryland Second Look Act)

The Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative supports this legislation. We advocate for sensible criminal justice policies, and this legislation addresses some of those concerns. Maryland certainly has a long way to go in correcting some of its mistakes in its criminal justice system, however this bill (HB-323) is in line with what other states are doing to deal with mass incarceration, and long term prison sentences.

An obvious paradigm shift has occurred in the criminal justice system; two significant incidents are note worthy to understand changes in the criminal justice system landscape: Willie Horton, responsible for derailing former governor Michael Dukakis presidential bid; and Rodney Stokes, responsible for former Governors Glendenning 'life means life' policy here in Maryland.

The changing landscape of our criminal justice system, and the reality of those changes, the Willie Horton syndrome, (that no political figure will admit) must be acknowledged.

An analogy of how the system operates today, is an individual goes to college, passes all the courses, gets an excellent grade point average, and then are told they cannot graduate because the rules has changed. That is not fair, it is not just, nor is it sensible.

We must acknowledge this paradigm shift; and start to reverse this course Maryland has taken with the criminal justice system. Maryland continues to spend millions of dollars to incarcerate individuals who are not a threat to public safety, and could live safely in the community. (as those released under the Unger decision have demonstrated) simply because of politics.

For the above reasons we support a favorable vote on HB-323

Sincerely,

Walter Lomax, Executive Director
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