

February 3, 2021

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB202/HB3
Correctional Services - Parole - Life Imprisonment

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

FROM: Carol Stern

My name is Carol Stern from Chevy Chase, state district 16. **I am providing this testimony in support of SB202/HB3, Correctional Services - Parole - Life Imprisonment.**

In Jewish tradition, *teshuvah*, repentance, is a core principle. Jews believe that people can always repent from their mistakes and bad choices, and that society should be structured to encourage that process. Mass incarceration reform including parole reform and eliminating life without parole for juveniles are part of asking how our government can facilitate *teshuvah* and healing, rather than perpetuating cycles of incarceration.

In Maryland, the Governor has ultimate power in parole decision-making and it appears that juvenile lives have been used as political pawns by Governor's, who show their "tough on crime" credentials by never approving any juvenile lifers for parole. The fact that only three juvenile lifers have been paroled in over twenty-four years highlights the deeply flawed system Maryland currently has in place.

As a mother and grandmother, I am horrified at the idea of any juvenile being locked up without the possibility of rehabilitation, or *teshuvah*, repentance. Juvenile lifers should be allowed the possibility of rehabilitation because as mothers we know and have seen how decision making skills in our children increases with age. The possibility of rehabilitation should be provided from the Maryland Parole Commission, not from political calculations.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB202/HB3, which will be a step toward that more perfect world we must create together.