

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: Samantha Blau, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUF)

My name is Samantha Blau and I am a resident of Baltimore City in the 46th district. I am also a member of Jews United for Justice's (JUF) Baltimore Leadership Council. JUF organizes more than 5,500 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice. I write to you to ask for your support of SB202/HB3, Correctional Services - Parole - Life Imprisonment.

Similar to law in The United States, Jewish law is a living document in which scholars are constantly trying to interpret and illuminate passages for meaning. Rabbi Yom Tov Asevilli left us commentary on the Talmud, our book of rabbinic laws, including his understanding of parole. He said that by lifting the sentence placed upon a person you allow them to do teshuvah, that is to turn to what is right. Teshuvah is an action that a person may take to choose what is right and good for themselves and others, and Rabbi Asevilli recognized that while under restriction or punishment a person was limited in that action. Teshuvah is a central tenet of Judaism - it is an action we are asked to take every year at Yom Kippur when we atone for our transgressions. People should have the opportunity to do the right thing.

Requiring the governor to issue final approval in the parole process is cruel and unusual, turning a person's opportunity for teshuvah into a political calculation. The decision to grant parole should only be determined by the Maryland Parole Commission. That way a thoughtful, justice and safety centered process could be conducted, rather than one which includes the political future of the governor in the calculation. **We respectfully urge the Judicial Proceedings Committee to offer a favorable report on SB202, so that it may become law.**