

House Bill 742 Favorable
Fixing Maryland's Exoneree Compensation Law
Eric Simmons, *Baltimore Exoneree*
House Judiciary Committee
February 10, 2021

My name is Eric Simmons and my brother JR McPherson and I spent almost 25 years in prison for a murder we didn't commit. Thanks to the Baltimore City State's Attorney we were exonerated on May 3, 2019.

I went to prison when I was 24 years old, and now I'm 49. Time is something you can never get back. Since I was a little kid I've loved building things and hoped to become a carpenter. The chance to develop a career was taken from me. In prison I always wanted to take college courses, but with a life sentence I was always last on the list.

My wrongful conviction had a ripple effect on my family. My brother and I both had sons who we were forced to raise while we were behind bars. Now my son is in the system, and I feel like if I had been in his life on a day to day basis, things would have been different. My wife was forced to take care of our family without me. My mother passed away and I never got to say goodbye.

My brother and I were compensated in June of 2020. However, the process was flawed and I want to make sure that the law is fixed for other innocent people. The Board of Public Works sat on our application for months before we got a response, while other exonerees were approved within weeks.

We were lucky to have been exonerated through the writ of actual innocence law, which State's Attorney Mosby approved. That is the only way we could be eligible for compensation. It is not fair the innocent Marylanders who were exonerated through different laws cannot be compensated. It shouldn't matter HOW a person is exonerated, it should matter that he can prove he didn't commit the crime.

Money cannot make exonerees whole again, but it can help with the struggle of surviving in the real world. I am glad that I was able to receive state compensation, and I feel that I have an obligation to make sure the law is fixed for other wrongfully convicted people who went through what I did. I ask you to vote for House Bill 742 to do the right thing for the wrongfully convicted.

