



**PREPARE**  
PREpare for PARole and REentry

March 14, 2023

Re: Testimony in Support of SB0771  
Criminal Procedure - Petition to Modify or Reduce Sentence  
(Maryland Second Look Act)

Dear Members of the Judiciary:

As a registered voter, a parole advocate, and a returning citizen, I support SB0771 sponsored by Senator Benson. I believe in redemption and second chances; and I applaud continued efforts to enact a Second Look Act in Maryland for offenders who were emerging adults. Additionally, I ask that a favorable vote be rendered.

I am a beneficiary of the Juvenile Restoration Act (JUVRA) which became effective in October 2021. I was convicted for violent crimes committed as a fifteen year old in 1979. Consequently, I was sentenced to a congregate parole eligible life sentence. Despite becoming eligible for parole in 1992, having parole hearings in the double digits, amassing a strong record of accomplishments, demonstrating remorse, maturity and rehabilitation, I still did not know when or if I would ever be paroled nor what was expected of me to obtain release after forty-two years of imprisonment. With the sentencing Court no longer having jurisdiction and exhausting all legal remedies, the probability of living any of my life beyond prison walls seemed bleak.

No legal presumption that any prisoner should be released upon reaching parole eligibility in Maryland is a sadly perplexing reality. Courts are aware of parole eligibility dates when imposing sentences, may make recommendations regarding parole, and have reasonable expectations for convicts to be released from a term of confinement. Factors of parole consideration are legislated for the Parole Commission (MPC), too. However, the lack of statutory and regulatory provisions regarding the exercise of MPC discretion allows it to render decisions in any manner without explanation.

Fortunately, the legislature gave the Court jurisdiction to review my case. Considering the outlined criteria, including low risk assessments by the MPC and a private psychologist, the Court suspended my sentence enabling my release. Since that time I completed a transitional reentry program, continue involvement with support groups, gained meaningful employment with a nonprofit providing parole and reentry services, joined

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the lobbying effort for criminal reform, and engage in other community services. I am making a positive difference in the lives of others which would not have been possible without the JUVRA.

Though I am deeply sorry for the tragic crimes fifteen year old me committed and spend everyday trying to atone for my actions, I question the justice of holding a juvenile or emerging adult in prison for ten, twenty, thirty years beyond his parole eligibility date once maturity and rehabilitation has been demonstrated. So, parole is the only avenue of release for those who have exhausted appeals and post-convictions and/or have pleaded guilty. And that's only for those who are eligible for parole. Then, there are those who are sentenced to non-parolable terms.

Some of these men and women who have committed violent crimes, accepted responsibility for their transgressions, worked hard to improve their social functioning, become model prisoners, and would be productive citizens do not have a realistic opportunity of release. I believe that this segment of Maryland's population should have an opportunity for a second chance. The Second Look Act restores hope in the criminal justice system by providing a badly needed opportunity for Court intervention. Therefore, I urge this honorable committee to vote favorably for SB0771.

Truly yours,

Gordon R. Pack, Jr.

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