

SB-128 Geriatric and Medical Parole

Favorable

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This bill would incur little to no risk to public safety, with large budgetary savings.

Inmates have a lower life expectancy than the comparative U.S. population. Older inmates have high levels of chronic disease,¹ such that prison health experts, as cited in a piece in JAMA, estimate that an older inmate may have a physiological age that is 10-15 years older than his chronological age.² Even among younger men who had served 10 years or less in state prisons, there was a 2-year decline in life expectancy for each year served in prison.³ Inmates over age 60 have long since aged out of violent crime, which peaks at ages 18-20.^{4,5} And, although the average price tag to incarcerate someone in Maryland prisons is about \$60,000 per year,⁶ this is an underestimate for older inmates. For the more than 1100 Maryland inmates over age 60,⁷ with health care costs for older inmates estimated at 2-3 times that of younger inmates,² Maryland taxpayers likely incur an expense of \$70,000 per year per older inmate. Thus, their continuing incarceration costs \$8 million per year, with no benefit to public safety.

This bill would greatly improve the process of parole hearings for older inmates.

Currently the Parole Commission is not held accountable for holding timely parole hearings. They commonly delay parole hearings up to 6 months after the month when the hearing should be held, and evidently answer to no one for these delays.

Currently, the Parole Commission is *not required to report its reasons for denial of parole.*

Current Maryland Code Section 7-307 specifies only that "If parole is denied, the Commission shall give the incarcerated individual a written *report of its findings* within 30 days"

This 'report of its findings' is not required to be more than the word "DENIED". No reasons for the denial are required and no reasons for the denial are given. The Parole Commission is not held accountable for its decisions.

The bill before your committee, SB-128, corrects this lack of accountability. Page 9, Section E, reads:

"Every year the parole commission shall report to the Justice Reinvestment Board on the outcomes of parole considerations made under this section, including:

3) the reason for each decision to deny parole.

5) The average time between when an incarcerated person becomes eligible for parole consideration under this section and when the incarcerated person actually received their first hearing required by this section. "

6) The average time between parole hearings for incarcerated individuals subject to this bill."

This increased accountability for the Parole Commission in its treatment of older long-serving inmates is reason enough to pass this bill. This bill will improve the functionality of our parole system. I urge your favorable vote.

References

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7. Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, July 2022 Inmate Characteristics. Available at: <https://dpscs.maryland.gov/publicinfo/publications/pdfs/Inmate%20Characteristics%20Report%20FY%202022%20Q4.pdf> Accessed 21 Dec 2023.