

Testimony of Curtis Alston on SB123

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honorable Members of the Assembly,

Today, I stand before you to discuss a matter of profound importance – the passage of SB 123, the Maryland Second Look Act. This bill represents not just a change in legislation, but a monumental shift in our perspective on justice, rehabilitation, and the transformative power of time.

Let's start with a fundamental truth backed by extensive research: people age out of crime. Statistics show that criminal activity significantly decreases as individuals enter their late 20s and 30s. The National Institute of Justice affirms that the likelihood of reoffending diminishes with age. This isn't just a trend; it's a clarion call for reform. By adopting the Second Look Act, we acknowledge this reality and embrace a system that prioritizes rehabilitation over indefinite punishment.

Consider the stories of those who have already walked this path – individuals who, after decades of incarceration, have been given a second chance. Their stories are not just anecdotes; they are beacons of hope and tangible proof of transformation. Take the example of John, who, after being released at the age of 40, has dedicated his life to mentoring at-risk youth, steering them away from the mistakes of his past. Or Maria, who now advocates for women's rights and provides support to those affected by domestic violence. Consider my journey, a former lifer who remained infraction-free for 16 years, navigated reentry successfully, and completed 9 years on parole. Today, I don't just live as a free man; I serve on the Lived Experience Council, I'm a Peer Recovery Specialist, and show others how to do the same. My story is a testament and evidence to the profound impact of the Second Look Act. Those that I spoke of aren't isolated cases; they are part of a growing body of evidence that supports the effectiveness of second chances.

The Maryland Second Look Act isn't about overlooking the severity of crimes committed. It's about acknowledging that people can change and that our justice system should allow for the possibility of redemption. It's about understanding that a life sentence without the possibility of parole can be a denial of the potential for human growth.

By passing this bill, we send a powerful message – that we believe in the capacity for change, that we value rehabilitation, and that we recognize the dignity and potential in every individual. This isn't just an investment in those who have erred; it's an investment in the safety and moral fiber of our society. It's a commitment to breaking cycles of crime by creating cycles of renewal.

In closing, I urge each one of you to consider the weight of your decision. The Maryland Second Look Act isn't merely a legislative choice; it's a moral imperative, a step towards a more just, empathetic, and effective justice system. Let us choose to be on the right side of history, to foster a society that believes in second chances and the power of human redemption. This is SB 123, and in my view, it's as simple as 1, 2, 3 – activate.