



Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee
Testimony on SB123, Criminal Procedure – Petition to Reduce Sentence
February 1, 2024
SUPPORT
Andrea Cantora
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Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I, Andrea Cantora, am testifying in support of SB123, the Petition to Reduce Sentence (known as the Maryland Second Look Act). I am submitting this testimony as a faculty member in the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Baltimore. Passage of the Maryland Second Look Act would create a meaningful opportunity for sentence modification for incarcerated people after having served 20 years of their sentence. I firmly believe that those individuals who are able to demonstrate their growth and rehabilitation, such that they are no longer a threat to public safety, should have the opportunity for release.

In addition to my role as an associate professor, I am also the Director of the University of Baltimore's Second Chance College Program – a college program that operates at Jessup Correctional Institution. Since 2014 I have come to know many men serving very long sentences, including life. The group of men that I have come to know are the most motivated to succeed, most involved in prison programming, are mentors to younger men, and serve as facilitators in self-help and violence prevention programs. In my 23 years of experience working with incarcerated people I am most impressed by the persistence and accomplishments of those serving very long sentences. Over the course of our program, several of our incarcerated male students, who served over 20 years in prison, have been released. They have continued their education on our campus and several have already obtained their college degree.

Consistent with my own observations, research finds prisoners serving long sentences are the easiest population to manage, most compliant with prison rules, and most likely to mentor younger prisoners.¹ The recidivism research on lifers shows that once released they have very low rates of recidivism. Specifically, lifers who are paroled are one-third less likely to be rearrested within three years compared to all released prisoners.² In California, a 15-year longitudinal research study was conducted on 860 parolees sentenced to life. Within the 15-year study period only 5 of those

¹ Johnson, R., & Dobranska, A. (2005). Mature Coping among Life Sentenced Inmates: An Exploratory Study of Adjusted Dynamics. *Corrections Compendium*: 8-28.

² Mauer, M., King, R.S., & Young, M. (2004). *The Meaning of 'Life': Long Prison Sentences in Context*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

individuals (less than 1%) were convicted of a new felony.³ In Maryland, we can look to the Unger releases from 2012 and to date no one released under Unger has returned to prison.

Research also indicates that offenders “age out” of crime. As people age they are less likely to engage in risky behavior and more likely to conform to societal norms. Achieving life milestones (e.g., marriage, children, employment, etc.), and natural maturation, are often the factors that change the life course of someone engaged in criminal behavior. Unfortunately, the longer someone remains incarcerated the more likely they are to lose their social networks on the outside, and the less likely they are to get married and obtain a meaningful career.

This bill is an important tool in making meaningful opportunities for release happen. Currently, incarcerated people in MD can only petition the Court for modification within 90 days of sentencing, severely limiting any potential sentence modifications.⁴ This bill also has serious racial justice implications, given that of the 2,212 people serving life sentences in MD, 80% are Black,⁵ a huge disparity compared to the 31% of Black Marylanders in the general population.⁶

In 2021, the General Assembly made a positive step by passing the Juvenile Restoration Act [SB0494/HB0409](#) which allowed individuals who were minors sentenced as adults the ability to petition the Court for sentence modification after 20 years. SB123 would extend this ability both to youth sentenced after the JRA went into effect (who were excluded from the bill) and other incarcerated people in Maryland who committed a crime after age 18.

For these reasons, I encourage you to vote **favorably** on **SB123**.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Andrea Cantora, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, School of Criminal Justice
Director of Second Change College Program

³ Weisberg, R. Mukamal, D., & Segall, J.D. (2011). *Life in Limbo: An Examination of Parole Releases for Prisoners Serving Life Sentences with the Possibility of Parole in California*. Stanford University: Stanford Criminal Justice Center.

⁴ Maryland Rule 4-345

⁵ Maryland DPSCS FY 2022 Q4 Inmate Characteristics Statistics

⁶ US Census Data 2021