

I, Michele Kennedy Kouadio, support SB 0123 to effectively give people in prison a Second Look at their initial judgment and sentencing. Here are various reasons that legislators should give the bill a favorable report.

People sentenced over 20 years ago, when sciences either were not fully evolved or fully employed to determine cause or guilt, often deserve a second look.

Furthermore, some politicians took a tougher stance a few decades ago through Get Tough on Crime initiatives that resulted in longer sentences than may have been warranted starting in the 1990s.

Another important factor is this: Prisons in Maryland are unstable and dysfunctional as the prison population to corrections' officers is 100:1. AFSCME Council 3 that represents DPSCS staff reported in April 2023 in Maryland Matters that DPSCS prisons (19 plus 6 Detention units) are 3500 staff short due to a cumbersome hiring process and lack of pay and incentives comparable to other MD State Law enforcement officers. As soon as DPSCS hires, either an officer retires or quits, putting DPSCS at just below 5,000 employees compared to the 9,200 level of employees reported in 2023 on the DPSCS website.

People in prison can earn credit to work down their initial sentence time through jobs or programs if they are available, but the majority of people in prison do not have this option. The limiting factors are insufficient staffing and dependable 3rd party service providers.

Parole is another avenue for earlier release than the original sentencing date that sentencing judges originally may have expected. However, most people serving time beyond 20 years are effectively disregarded by the Commissioner's Board that may be influenced politically. According to a DPSCS caseworker, she's never seen a person released on parole with a sentence remaining beyond 10 years or more. Monitoring, if released, is limited to 5 years. Parole releases continue to decline, contributing to the expanding prison population.

In fact, the prison population in Maryland has climbed to 15,900 in 2024 compared to 15,500 in 2023. It costs the Maryland Taxpayer \$45,000 per person in prison to house and feed them.

According to a study sponsored by the American Bar Association in 2023, the brains of people under 25 years old are not physically fully developed when they commit youthful crimes. As people in prison age, and with programming early in their incarceration, these people are less likely to recidivate when released to the community and, in fact, often become productive, helpful members of their families and communities.

Consider this, instead of the Maryland Taxpayer supporting an individual in prison at \$45,000 a year for 40 years or more. That same individual released through Second Look, Parole or Earned Credit after serving 20 years could start work, contributing more than \$45,000 in high demand trade jobs, as an example, rather than costing taxpayers the same amount.

Through the Justice Reinvestment Act established in 2016 a stated goal is to reduce the prison population.

The JRA Board is not transparent to the public in how it articulates and measures its goals and milestones to DPSCS or other influencers. There should be a plan over the next few years to get a ratio of prisoners to corrections officers at 15:1, an optimal ratio for rehabilitation programming as remarked by the Bureau of Prisons.

The Second Look is an effective way to help bring the prison population down and to put taxpayer resources at the Front Door of intervention in Maryland communities for addiction and mental health counseling, and to modify sentences when other criteria are prudently examined by a Judge, perhaps with a new lens.

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