

**TESTIMONY ON SB 123
MARYLAND SECOND LOOK ACT**

**House Judiciary Committee
March 28, 2024**

FAVORABLE with AMENDMENTS

Submitted by: **Magdalena Tsiongas**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I, Magdalena Tsiongas, am testifying in support of SB 123, the Maryland Second Look Act. I am submitting this testimony as the convenor of the Maryland Second Look Coalition and the family member of an incarcerated person. I urge your favorable report on this bill, without any exclusions as to who is eligible to petition for the opportunity for a second look.

I started convening the Maryland Second Look Coalition with other impacted family members, previously incarcerated people and advocates to create a pathway for hope and reunification for families. 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. After 20 years of incarceration, my own family member, John, will have been in prison longer than he was free, the equivalent of his entire lifetime before prison, behind bars. A lifetime is enough to be a different person. It is the difference between a teenager and a 40 year old.

While watching someone you love dream of a life you don't know if they will ever reach is painful, seeing their growth is amazing. During his 17 years of incarceration, I have seen the leadership in John that drives him to support others in rehabilitation. Being given the opportunity to get therapy while behind bars has given him a chance to finally unpack the first 19 years of his life, where he often experienced things no child should have to experience, that contributed to his incarceration. It's also allowed him to address the harm that he has caused and to gain the wisdom to know where he wants to go. Our dream is to have our family whole.

A second look through SB 123 is not a guarantee for anyone to come home, but it is hope. Hope that a judge will see what decades worth of growth has amounted to and grant some the opportunity to finally come home and bring that hard work to the community with them.

I know many more men and women serving decades-long sentences who have worked hard, hoping for their chance to reenter and succeed in their communities, and finally get the chance to fully be sons, daughters, parents, spouses and siblings to their families again. Nothing has brought me more joy in this fight than seeing other coalition members who have come home after decades in prison, now reunited with their wives, children and parents.

The current version of the bill now includes a harmful amendment that makes people incarcerated for first degree rape ineligible for a second look, and I ask you to amend that language out of the bill. The nature of the offense is already a factor that a Judge shall consider in making their decision, and it should not exclude an individual from the opportunity for a hearing to demonstrate their rehabilitation. I am also asking that you resist any further amendments that exclude certain people from being eligible to petition the court for a second look. I truly believe, from the dozens of people I know personally having served decades behind bars, that we are so much more than the worst thing we have done.

For these reasons, I encourage you to vote **favorably with amendments** on the **Maryland Second Look Act SB 123**.

Thank you.