

**Testimony on SB 123  
Maryland Second Look Act  
House Judiciary Committee  
March 28, 2024**

**Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Submitted by: **Serena Lao**

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

**I, Serena Lao, am testifying in support of SB 123, the Maryland Second Look Act.** I am submitting this testimony as a longtime Maryland resident with a loved one who is incarcerated. As you know, 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 am urging you to see this bill through to its passage, without any exclusionary amendments.

My loved one is serving a life sentence and has now been incarcerated for 35 years, with no infractions for over three decades. Life doesn't slow down on the outside—he lost his father in 2016 and his mother last year. He spent his entire time incarcerated trying to achieve as much as he could in hopes that he would one day be able to care for them. Having to grieve in prison is an incredibly isolating experience. Inmates cannot hug their loved ones, attend funerals, or adequately provide support with their physical absence in the aftermath of loss. I felt the gravity and magnitude of that loss and can only imagine how many others have been impacted in this way. Time is of the essence for those serving long sentences.

The point of this bill is to give ALL a second look. It is an opportunity to push against what the legal justice system encourages- lumping together all criminals and treating them as the same. Victims are not monoliths, and neither are prisoners. To exclude anyone from this bill based solely on the crime they were charged with goes against the very intent of the Second Look Act, and I ask you to resist any amendments that would do so. The nature of the offense is already one of the factors that the Court must consider in making their decision. The language of the bill implies that every offense has its own circumstances beyond the charge itself. Having a hearing before a judge is meant to allow individuals the opportunity to be viewed and evaluated holistically.

Serious crimes obviously hold psychological and physical weight for victims and their loved ones. It is a sad reality of crime that a victim and offender are forever associated around a traumatic event. But if healing requires that there is improvement over time, how can true healing take place for any party without the acknowledgement of an offender's growth? Without seeing that their healing is intertwined? It baffles me that there are state's attorneys out there, such as the one in my loved one's case, who have led victims and their loved ones to believe that the offender is still a danger to society and has made no efforts to make amends or atone after decades—and making these claims without ever meeting or speaking to the offender. This is a grave injustice to those who have been trying to make progress in their healing from decades-long trauma.

As it currently stands, the system is not interested in rehabilitation or justice—only punishment. Second Look reforms are necessary, backed by research, and can make a meaningful difference. This bill is just a drop in the bucket. True systemic change would take an extended period of time, but it must start with hope. Passing this bill would turn on a light at the end of the tunnel. The infrastructure of the tunnel itself still requires massive amounts of work but having that light ahead would help illuminate what else needs to be done. The parole system has been dysfunctional for decades, and changes to the process are being discussed. *Every* effort is necessary and urgent.

Without the avenue that SB123 would provide, these individuals spend years wasting away in prison, far beyond the time necessary. Nothing about the current avenues in place consider their restorative and rehabilitative efforts. It doesn't make sense for many individuals to challenge their conviction, but those who have demonstrated their maturity and rehabilitation should be able to challenge their continued confinement in a system that has no interest in their growth.

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

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Serena Lao".

Serena Lao  
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