

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

**House Judiciary Committee
March 28, 2024**

FAVORABLE with AMENDMENTS

Submitted by: **John Ristick**

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

I, John Ristick, am testifying in support of SB 123, the Maryland Second Look Act. I am submitting this testimony as a previously incarcerated person who served 38 years in MD prisons. At 15 years old, I was arrested and given a life sentence plus 20 years.

In 1986, I was one of the few incarcerated people who had access to therapy, through the programming at Patuxent Institution. There, I had individual therapy twice a week, and group therapy once a week. I was finally able to answer questions like “Was I the victim?” “How did this contribute to my crime?” and “How can I change this?” During my incarceration, I received only 4 minor infractions. By 20 years in prison, I was a far different person than when I entered at 15 years old, but I did not have the opportunity to go before a judge for a second look at my sentence then.

Instead, even given my record, I still was denied parole multiple times over decades. It wasn't until finally, in 2020, the parole board approved me for parole, but because I had a life sentence, my parole also had to be approved by the governor. While in the hospital with COVID, feeling I was on my deathbed, I was denied parole by the governor.

Then, in 2021, something unexpected happened, and the legislature removed the governor from the parole process for lifers. With this change, on June 12, 2022, I was approved for 6 month delayed release. After 38 years, I came home on January 18, 2023.

Since coming home, I have been successful in finding work and am so grateful to be reunited with my fiancée and family. But I know it should not have taken this long for me to come home. I had demonstrated my rehabilitation 20 years after being incarcerated, but it took 38 until I finally got my second chance. The crime never changes, but people do.

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 ask you to resist any amendments that exclude certain people from being given the opportunity to petition the court for a second look, including the amendment that was added to exclude those sentenced under Criminal Law Article 3-303. While the nature of the offense will never

change, a judge in the original sentencing court will decide if given that offense AND the person's rehabilitation, if they have done enough for a possible change in sentence. People should not be excluded from that opportunity.

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

Thank you.