

**TESTIMONY ON HB 853  
MARYLAND SECOND LOOK ACT**

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
March 25, 2025**

**FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Submitted by: **Shabree N McDonald**

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

**I, Shabree McDonald am testifying in support of HB 853, the Maryland Second Look Act. I am submitting this testimony as my husband **Diontre Lamont Stanton is my incarcerated family member.****

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 after having served decades of incarceration, all individuals should have the ability to demonstrate their growth and rehabilitation.

I am grateful for the opportunity this bill creates for those eligible for a second look. However, to achieve real change, more must be done. Maryland leads the nation in sentencing young Black men to the longest prison terms, including Life Without Parole (LWOP), at a rate 25% higher than the next nearest state, Mississippi. This disproportionate sentencing reflects systemic issues that must be addressed through legislative action.

I urge you to vote **favorably with amendments**. As currently written, **the bill excludes individuals serving life without parole and those over 24 at the time of their offense. This exclusion denies a second chance to people who have demonstrated growth and rehabilitation. When a loved one goes to prison, the impact extends beyond the incarcerated individual—entire families suffer. True justice must include an opportunity for redemption, regardless of the severity of the original sentence.**

The Juvenile Restoration Act, which HB 853 builds upon, banned Life Without Parole (LWOP) for minors sentenced as adults and gave individuals convicted as adults for crimes committed under 18 the chance to request a sentence reduction after serving 20 years, including those originally sentenced to LWOP as minors. Excluding LWOP from the Second Look process while allowing it under the JRA just doesn't make sense. Research consistently shows that brain development continues into the mid-to-late 20s, with the prefrontal cortex, the part responsible for decision-making, among the last to fully mature. Emerging adults still share many of the same risk factors as youth, such as increased impulsivity, greater risk-taking, poor decision-making, and difficulty with long-term thinking<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Lally & Suzanne Valentine-French [Lifespan Development: A Psychological Perspective](#) (2025)

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- *Whether a life without parole sentence is imposed depends significantly on the jurisdiction and who was in office at the time, leading to jurisdictional disparities in Maryland.*
  - *Studies show very low recidivism rates for individuals released from decades-long sentences, including for violent crime. This has been seen with the Ungers, 200 Marylanders serving life sentences, who were released after the landmark case Maryland v Unger, who have a less than 4% recidivism rate<sup>2</sup>.*
  - *The Act would require the judge to consider the victim's input, should the victim or the victim's representative choose to offer a statement. Victims, too, prefer, by 2 to 1, a criminal legal system that focuses more on rehabilitating people who commit crimes than punishing them.<sup>3</sup> —by a margin of 2 to 1.*
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For these reasons, I strongly encourage you to vote **favorably with amendments** on the **Maryland Second Look Act, HB 853**. Expanding eligibility to include individuals sentenced to LWOP and those over 24 at the time of their offense is necessary to ensure fairness, equity, and a justice system that values rehabilitation and second chances.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> Justice Policy Institute [Fact Sheet: The Ungers](#) (2018)

<sup>3</sup> Alliance for Safety and Justice: [Crime Survivors Speak 2022: National Survey Of Victims' Views On Safety And Justice](#) (2022)