



Testimony - HB 853, Post Conviction Review - Procedure to Reduce Duration of
Sentence

(Maryland Second Look Act)

Favorable with Amendments

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

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Honorable Chairman Smith & Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

SEIU Local 500, as one of Maryland's largest public sector unions representing over 23,000 workers, expresses our support for House Bill 853, the **Maryland Second Look Act**. This landmark legislation represents a significant step toward meaningful criminal justice reform. Its passage will go a long way in correcting institutional bias and harsh sentencing indicative of the past century by providing individuals who have served a significant portion of their sentence with the opportunity for a second review of their case.

HB 853 offers a fair and meaningful opportunity for individuals who have demonstrated rehabilitation and personal transformation to have their sentences reconsidered. The idea of providing a "second look" is rooted in the belief that the criminal justice system should be just, equitable, and responsive to the individual's rehabilitation efforts. By allowing individuals to petition for sentence reductions after serving a substantial amount of time, this bill recognizes that time served, coupled with evidence of positive changes, should be considered in the decision-making process.

Many individuals in Maryland prisons are serving sentences imposed under laws that are now considered overly harsh or disproportionate. The Maryland Second Look Act provides an avenue for these individuals to present their case to the court, demonstrating how they have changed and their readiness to reintegrate into society as productive, law-abiding citizens. However, we believe that amendments in the final house version differ so much from its original draft that many people who may have been unduly inflicted with harsh sentences are ineligible under this current version and

would ask that much of the original language be reinstated so that the ultimate decision of reviewing sentences remain with the judge reviewing their case.

Moreover, the bill establishes a thoughtful process that balances public safety with the opportunity for redemption. Courts will carefully review each petition, taking into consideration the individual's growth, behavior, and potential for reoffending. This ensures that only those who have shown genuine progress are given the chance for a reduced sentence.

Support for second chance legislation is not just rooted in fairness—it is also rooted in the principle of rehabilitation. The criminal justice system must be about more than just punishment; it should also be about helping individuals rebuild their lives and find ways to contribute to the community. HB 853 aligns with this vision, offering an opportunity for reform without compromising public safety.

The Second Look Act also aligns with the broader movement towards sentencing reform across the United States. Several states have adopted similar measures, and research has shown that individuals who are given the chance for sentence reconsideration, particularly after demonstrating rehabilitation, are less likely to reoffend and more likely to successfully reintegrate into society.

This bill represents a commitment to fairness, justice, and the belief that people can change. It is a necessary and compassionate step towards reforming our criminal justice system, providing those who have turned their lives around with an opportunity to rejoin society and make a positive impact.

We urge all members of the House to support HB 853, and we thank Delegate Pasteur for her leadership on this issue. We ask you to pass this bill out of committee with a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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