

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

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

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Submitted by: Magdalena Tsiongas

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

I, Magdalena Tsiongas, am testifying in support of HB 853, the Maryland Second Look Act. I am submitting this testimony as an impacted family member of John, who has been serving a Life Without Parole sentence since he was 19 years old and as the Convener of the MD Second Look Coalition. In John, I recognized his powerful growth from a 19 year old who caused harm, to a leader, and I vowed to make a pathway for him to demonstrate that rehabilitation when starting the coalition. I firmly believe that after having served decades of incarceration, all individuals should have the ability to demonstrate their growth and rehabilitation.

I urge you to vote **favorable with amendments**. As the current bill language stands, it excludes people serving Life Without Parole (LWOP) sentences. This includes people like my partner John, who has been incarcerated since he was 19. Like 40% of others serving LWOP, he was offered a plea for a lower sentence, but after choosing to go to trial, was sentenced to life without parole. As a survivor of sexual and gun violence as a child and teen himself, since his incarceration, he has worked to atone for the harm that he caused. Particularly thanks to the ability for him to participate in therapeutic programming, he was able to begin healing from his own victimization and support others in doing the same. In his own words John shares,

"My name is John. I am a college student, a partner, a son, a brother and an uncle. But for the past 18 years, I have been incarcerated on a life without parole sentence for murder, since I was 19 years old. At 19, I didn't see a future for myself, didn't have any drive, didn't have any purpose, I was just trying to survive. When I was sentenced, the judge didn't see a future for me either. But since then, I received my GED, I've become a college student, I've been attending therapy every week for at least an hour for the past 6 years. I now have the opportunity to look at the violence and abuse in my own life and past that put me on this trajectory, like surviving childhood abuse, attempted murder from my own mother, surviving being shot twice as a teenager, and the PTSD that came along with those traumas. On my own healing journey, I've been working to set others up for success who I see struggling around me with the same traumas, with addiction and hopelessness, depression. I hope for the opportunity to be able to show that I have healed and grown as a person and can thrive and be productive and positive in the community, if given the chance."

Maryland leads the nation in sentencing young Black men to the longest prison terms, which includes Life Without Parole Sentences, at a rate 25% higher than the next nearest state, Mississippi¹.

The Juvenile Restoration Act, which HB 853 builds upon, banned LWOP for those under 18 at the time of the crime and gave them the chance to request a sentence reduction after serving 20 years, including those originally sentenced to LWOP as minors. To now exclude others who also were teenagers when sentenced to LWOP, such as John, from even the opportunity for a second look hearing, while banning the use of LWOP for 17 year olds, is counter intuitive, and fails to recognize the ability for transformational change from a teenager to a man.

Thank you for the opportunity to share.

For these reasons, I encourage you to vote **favorable with amendments** on the **Maryland Second Look Act HB853**.

¹ Justice Policy Institute [Rethinking Approaches to Over Incarceration of Black Young Adults in Maryland](#) (2019).