

Joanna Mupanduki, Deputy Director  
Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.  
Oral Testimony in Opposition SB 181

I have been an attorney for over 17 years, working as a prosecutor in Washington State, California, and Maryland. I also spent four and a half years as Senior Attorney at the California Department of State Hospitals, which provides psychiatric care for individuals in the criminal justice system.

I am honored to serve as a victim rights attorney at MCVRC and now as the Deputy Director. This role has been the most rewarding of my career, allowing me to support crime victims during their most challenging times.

Although the Maryland Parole Commission has existed since 1976, there is now a push to change its structure and statutes under Secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Carolyn Scruggs. This push focuses on releasing more violent offenders, which raises public safety concerns. Despite a 20% decrease in Maryland's prison population since 2003, this legislative proposal threatens the balance between rehabilitation and public safety.

A significant concern with the bill is its broad definition of "chronically debilitated or incapacitated," applying to individuals with medical conditions that impair daily activities. Such vague criteria could be exploited to justify parole for offenders who may still pose a danger to the community.

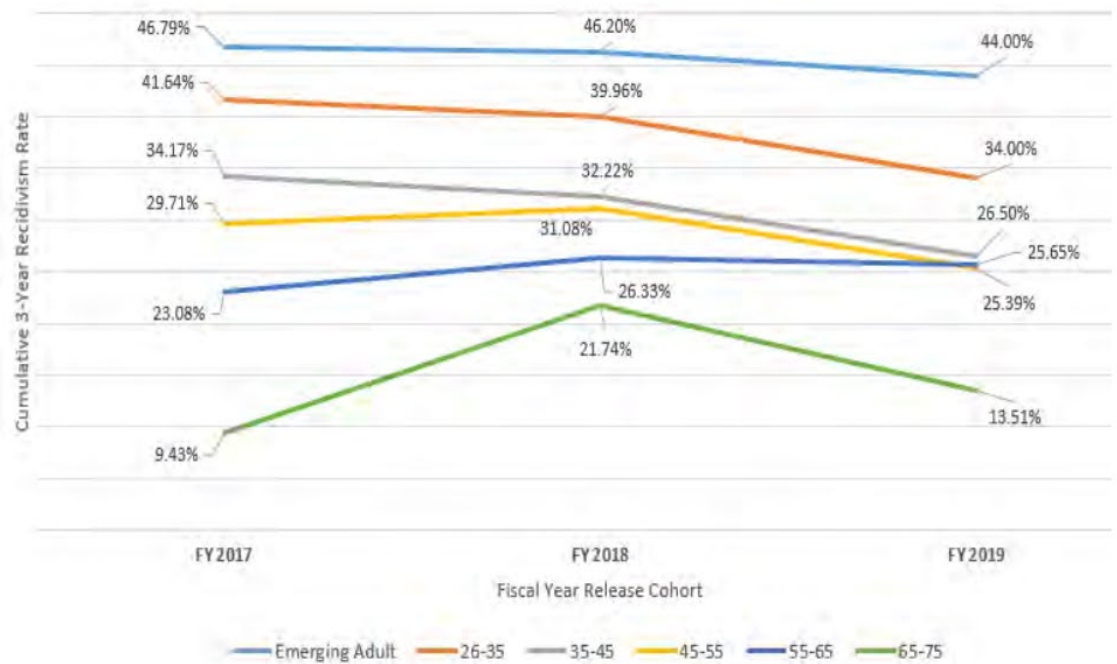
Additionally, the bill limits the Parole Commission's discretion by mandating hearings for certain individuals regardless of their circumstances and requiring equal weight to be given to doctors' reports. This approach undermines the Commission's ability to make informed, nuanced decisions, as expert opinions can vary widely.

The bill also requires automatic re-evaluation for offenders every two years, including those serving life sentences for violent crimes. This could indefinitely subject dangerous individuals to review, raising safety concerns for Maryland residents and their victims.

Each release could mean the threat of future violence, trauma for victims' families, and the erosion of public trust in our justice system. Rather than embracing a potentially dangerous approach to rehabilitation that could endanger lives, we should seek to implement comprehensive rehabilitation programs while keeping those who pose a significant risk to society incarcerated. The potential for re-offense, even at the lower end of the spectrum, is simply too great to ignore. It is crucial that we continually assess and prioritize the safety of our communities over opportunities for leniency in the justice system.

Please consider the graph below prepared by DPSCS showing recidivism rates for Maryland parolees:

**Figure 7: 3-Year Recidivism Rates by Age at Release**



In conclusion, I urge you to reconsider the implications of SB 181. The safety and well-being of victims must take precedence over the interests of those who have committed violent offenses. Our justice system should strive to protect those who have been wronged and provide them with the peace of mind they need to heal. In conclusion, while addressing the health and rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals is important, the bill's imprecise definitions and restrictions on discretionary authority pose serious risks. Prioritizing public safety alongside rehabilitation should remain central to any changes in Maryland's parole system. SB 181 does not address these concerns.