

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 162

Earl Young

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Judicial Proceedings Committee

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 162. I am a Maryland resident and a returning citizen who served nearly 35 years in the Maryland prison system before Governor Larry Hogan commuted my life sentence to 49 years. Because of the diminution credits I earned, I returned home in 2019, prior to the passage of the Juvenile Restoration Act.

I entered prison in 1984 at the age of 17. At that time, I still had hope—hope that if I worked hard, stayed out of trouble, and focused on rehabilitation, I could one day return home through parole after serving 15 years. That hope was severely damaged in 1995 when Governor Parris Glendening implemented the “life means life” policy. Overnight, it became clear that no matter how much good I did, it would not matter.

Despite that reality, I continued to do good. I earned my GED, pursued college courses, and maintained trusted and preferred work assignments. Many others were not able to continue in the same way. When hope is removed, people give up. They lose motivation, purpose, and a reason to live. Hopelessness creates instability within prisons, requiring higher security and making institutions more dangerous for everyone—incarcerated people and staff alike.

Since returning home, I have continued the same type of service I committed to while incarcerated. I mentor youth in Baltimore City schools and now serve as a supervisor, hiring and overseeing individuals who mentor young people. I work with the Mayor’s Office of African American Male Engagement as a Credible Messenger and participate in the Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS) as a (Community Moral Voice) CMV partner. My work involves supporting individuals who have caused harm and those who have been harmed by violence.

I also share my lived experience as part of the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaboration, working alongside the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Public Defender. I am involved in multiple collaborative efforts, including law enforcement partnerships, youth justice reform initiatives, reentry-focused committees, and prison and detention center reform efforts. I have served as a Johns Hopkins youth coordinator, completed the Baltimore City Police Reentry Program, and spoken at numerous juvenile facilities and prisons across the state about reentry and transformation. I regularly return to the institutions where I was incarcerated, where people tell me that my story gives them hope.

Senate Bill 162 is a common-sense and necessary technical correction to existing law. Under the current statute, if a child under 18 and an adult under 25 were arrested today as co-defendants, the young adult would likely be eligible for sentence review after 20 years, while the child would not. This result is fundamentally unfair. Children are uniquely capable of growth, change, and rehabilitation. The October 1, 2021 date restriction undermines the purpose of the Juvenile Restoration Act and must be removed.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 162.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Earl Young