



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Shared voices for liberal religious values in Maryland

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 817– Correctional Services Parole- Life Imprisonment

To: Senator William Smith, Jr. and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Karen Clark, Chair, Criminal Justice Task Force, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Date: March 5, 2020

I am Karen Clark, representing my state-wide faith group, the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of MD. We have supported this issue over the last several years because it aligns closely with our principles. When we say we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all people, we mean ALL including the incarcerated. Especially the ones who have been sentenced to LIFE in prison WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF PAROLE.

We urge you to support this bill, because it applies to a segment of the prison population that are not, for the most part, getting the opportunity for parole even when the parole board reviews their record and deems them qualified. This is already an injustice to their rights. However, when the governor is required to make that final decision, it adds an additional layer of politics, because they naturally consider how it may affect their ratings or next election. This should NOT be a factor in this type of decision.

The parole board (which is appointed by the governor) needs to be able to do their job and evaluate the qualifications of the person seeking parole. Parole boards are noted to do a thorough investigation in this evaluation. It also allows for victim input by personal appearances or written statements. Maryland is still only one of three states that has the governor involved in this process.

Last fall I attended a fundraiser by a Lobby group whose key -note speaker was MD US Congressman Jamie Raskins, who formerly served as a MD state Senator for nine years. While talking about the different types of legislation, he said that certain issues seemed **impossible** to change (like the death penalty and marriage equality) but as they linger in the legislative process over the years – they eventually become

inevitable. SB 817 Lifers Parole is such a bill. It has been kicked down the road for many years.

The time is past due to honor the inherent worth and dignity of those citizens serving LIFE WITH THE POSSIBILITY FOR PAROLE. It is time for it to be as Jamie Raskins says **INEVITABLE.** The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry asks for a **FAVORABLE vote.**

Thank you all for your service.

Karen "Candy" Clark
UULM-MD Criminal Justice Task Force Leader