



**Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 5, 2020**

SB 817 Inmates - Life Imprisonment - Parole Reform

SUPPORT

We write with strong support for the legislation to remove the Governor from parole for people serving parole-eligible life sentences. Our members are personally impacted by this important legislation and the need to correct the decades of neglect of Maryland's parole system for people serving parole-eligible life sentences.

The Lifer Family Support Network is made up of family members of people serving life sentences. Collectively, our loved ones have spent centuries behind bars due to Maryland's broken parole system. We are mothers, wives, brothers, friends, or chosen family — people who happen to be the closest thing to a blood relative that someone serving a life sentence may have.

We provide moral, emotional and financial support. We endure dehumanizing and humiliating policies on visiting, expressing affection, and just trying to stay in touch. We help our loved ones try to stay connected in some way with hope, with the outside world, and with the will to do good and be good. We help them process the consequences of their actions, and to take responsibility, and to grieve when they lose people they love. We are their proxies in the outside world, for better and for worse.

We deal every day with our loved ones. We accept — as we should — that our loved ones have hurt others, sometimes irreparably. And we do their time with them, day for day, as they try to atone for those wrongs, to develop themselves, and to progress despite being housed in a system with less and less actual programming and more and more absurd rules.

What we cannot accept is how the State can impose a sentence that pretends to offer the possibility of parole, but in reality, makes it so that almost no one can obtain it. Every day that a person who has turned him or herself around is a day that they cannot be contributing to their family or their community. It is a day that they cannot spend making change in their community or proving what they know to be true: that they are not the same person they were decades ago.

Most importantly, each of those days is something taken from us, the people who need them home the most for our lives to feel truly complete.

We will not recite all the facts and statistics that support this legislation — you have them. But we hope our testimony helps you understand how urgent this issue is for the thousands of family members of lifers across Maryland, all of whom are your constituents.

Respectfully,
Martina C. Hazelton
Lifer Family Support Network
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