

House Bill 985 Favorable
Fixing Maryland's Exoneree Compensation Law
Eric Simmons, *Baltimore Exoneree*
House Judiciary Committee
February 26, 2020

My name is Eric Simmons and my brother JR McPherson and I spent almost 25 years in prison for a murder we didn't commit. Thanks to the Baltimore City State's Attorney we were exonerated on May 3, 2019.

I went to prison when I was 24 years old and now I'm 48. Time is something you can never get back. Since I was a little kid I've loved building things and hoped to become a carpenter. The chance to develop a career was taken from me. In prison I always wanted to take college courses, but with a life sentence I was always last on the list.

My wrongful conviction had a ripple effect on my family. My brother and I both had sons who we were forced to raise while we were behind bars. Now my son is in the system, and I feel like if I had been there things would have been different. My wife was forced to take care of our family without me. My mother passed away and I never got to say goodbye.

Money cannot make exonerees whole again, but it can help with the struggle of surviving in the real world. My plan when I got out was to become a personal trainer. Then I found out I had slipped disks in my back from the prison bunks and exercise equipment, so I had to give up that dream. My wife has been the breadwinner and I want to contribute to my family.

If this bill had passed a long time ago I could have already been compensated. I could have already started pursuing the things that I've had to put off for so long. Passing this legislation is the right thing to do, and I hope you will vote for it.