

House Bill 985 Favorable
Fixing Maryland's Exoneree Compensation Law
Alfred Chestnut, *Baltimore Exoneree*
House Judiciary Committee
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My name is Alfred Chestnut. At the age of 16 my friends Ransom Watkins, Andrew Stewart and I were wrongfully convicted of shooting another teenager. After spending 36 years in prison, we were finally exonerated on November 29, 2019 by the Baltimore City State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby.

Ransom, Andrew and I were sent to adult prison when we were just kids. Being behind bars when you are innocent is hard enough. Being the youngest inmates was hell. Think about everything that happened in your teens, 20's, 30's and 40's. That was all taken away from us. We were forced to grow up in prison.

For decades I focused on proving my innocence and going home. I didn't know how difficult it would be once I was exonerated. Most people my age have built careers, bought houses, and saved for retirement. I am just beginning my adult life with almost no financial resources. I thought that I would get compensated right after I got out of prison. I was surprised to learn that other exonerees had waited for over a year.

If I didn't have my fiancé to support me, I don't know what I would do. I don't want to be a burden on my family. My dream is to start my own business in the food industry. I love to cook and want to open a restaurant, but that takes money. I applied for state compensation but haven't gotten a dime yet, and I don't know what to expect.

The state failed exonerees, not the other way around. The state should take responsibility by compensating innocent people quickly and fairly. There is no way to give me back the time that I lost, but there is a way to improve the law so that exonerees can have a better future.