



February 3, 2021

Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB202 – Correctional Services - Parole - Life Imprisonment

Dear Chair William C. Smith, Jr. and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 202 entitled Correctional Services - Parole - Life Imprisonment. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

Maryland is one of only three states in the country that grants **sole authority** to the Governor to make the decision on whether to approve parole for eligible Marylanders. Our state also leads the country in incarcerating African Americans. In 2018, the [Justice Policy Institute reported](#) that African Americans make up more than 70% of Maryland's prison population, but only 31% of the state's population. They also make up 82% of people who have served the longest prison terms.¹

These staggering statistics illustrate the problematic notion that certain groups of people do not deserve compassion, aren't worthy of redemption and deserve to be isolated from society permanently.

The Maryland Parole Commission was established under the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and charged with deciding whether Marylanders serving sentences of six months or more in state or local facilities, are suitable for release under supervision on a case-by-case basis.

The Commission looks at multiple factors when conducting an initial parole grant hearing, including the nature and circumstance of the offense; victim input; history and pattern of offenses; prior incarcerations; institutional adjustment; rehabilitation; programming needs; home plans and employment readiness. These decisions are not taken lightly.

Appointments to the Parole Commission are made by the Governor. The Governor should demonstrate trust in officials appointed under his authority. They are more familiar with circumstances and can better evaluate readiness for release.

But as of yet, for over a decade now, the State of Maryland has treated life sentences with possibility of parole the same as life sentences without parole. In addition to ethical and practical considerations, the incarceration of Marylanders serving life with parole sentences costs more than \$70 million tax dollars annually.

It's time to take the politics out of the decision to grant parole. This will ensure Marylanders who have demonstrated rehabilitation a fair, non-politicized parole granting process; restore trust in the Parole Commission; and enable our state to spend our tax dollars more efficiently.

For these reasons, CAIR strongly supports SB202 and urges a favorable report. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D.
Director, CAIR Office in Maryland
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Email: zchaudry@cair.com

1. *[POLICY BRIEFS 2019] Rethinking Approaches to Over Incarceration of Black Young Adults in Maryland.* November 6, 2019. **Justice Policy Institute.** Accessed February 1, 2021