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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB0003/SB0202
Correctional Services - Parole - Life Imprisonment

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Vanessa Atterbeary, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Carol Stern

My name is Carol Stern from Chevy Chase in District 16. I am providing this testimony in support of Correctional Services - Parole - Life Imprisonment, HB0003/SB0202.

I am an active member of the Jewish community and in Jewish tradition, teshuvah, repentance, is a core principle. Jews believe that people can always repent from their mistakes and bad choices, and that society should be structured to encourage that process. A critical element of mass incarceration reform including parole reform for those serving life sentences is about asking how our government can facilitate teshuvah and healing, rather than perpetuating cycles of incarceration.

In Maryland, the Governor has ultimate power in parole decision-making for “lifers” and it appears that lifers have been used as political pawns by Governor’s, who show their “tough on crime” credentials by rarely approving any lifers for parole. For instance, the fact that only three juvenile lifers have been paroled in over twenty-four years highlights the deeply flawed system Maryland currently has in place.

As a mother and grandmother, I am horrified at the idea of anyone being locked up without the possibility of rehabilitation, or teshuvah, repentance. Especially anyone convicted as a young adult should not be considered as culpable because they lack a full adult level of maturity. Young adult lifers should be allowed the possibility of rehabilitation because as mothers we know and have seen in our own young adults how decision making skills increase with age.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB0003/SB0202, which will be a step toward the more perfect world we must create together.