

SUPPORT SB 202 - GOVERNOR OUT-OF-PAROLE BILL

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM
Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



351 Dubois Road, Annapolis, Md. 21409

Feb. 3, 2021

Testimony of Phil Caroom for MAJR [exec.com](http://www.ma4jr.org).

For more than 20 years, Maryland governors refused over 2,000 inmates another chance, although Parole Commissioners recommended parole for many, although many such inmates were sentenced as juveniles, and although many such inmates now are frail and elderly. See <http://www.abell.org/publications/still-blocking-exit>. Several reasons support a change:

- 1) Governors in 47 other states do not have veto power over the parole process (the other two are California & Oklahoma);
- 2) **Life sentences with possible parole, under Maryland statutes, legally and morally are different than “life without parole” sentences—but Governors’ actions for years nullified the statutory difference by fiat;**
- 3) Removal of Maryland’s Governor from parole decisions will immunize him from political, *Willie-Horton*-based concerns;
- 4) Maryland parole commissioners-- mostly with law-enforcement background and all appointed by the Governor-- are carefully trained and make appropriate parole decisions without political pressure through applying scientific analysis and professional discretion to permit supervised parole-release only for parolees who will pose no risk to public safety;
- 5) **Elderly life-sentenced inmates cost two to three more than the normal \$40,000 per year per person due to extensive medical costs – and these taxpayer funds that better could be used to treat and rehabilitate youthful offenders who otherwise may continue to pose a risk to our communities without treatment;**
- 6) Juvenile-offense life-sentenced inmates, under U.S. Supreme Court decisions, neurological-science, and common sense, deserve to be judged under a different standard than mature adults;
- 7) Although the current Governor has approved a handful of paroles for those with life-sentences (as a “lame-duck Governor”), current Maryland law would permit any future Governor again to cancel all hope for thousands of legally-eligible parole candidates.
- 8) As demonstrated by Maryland’s Unger population and national statistics, the likelihood of recidivism for elderly inmates drops to approximately 1% so no real public safety issue would be posed by this legislation, particularly with the scientific-screening now used by Maryland’s Parole Commission.
- 9) Most important, this moral reason: Governors’ uniform parole rejection of every individual with a life sentence deprives every individual of hope. **David Blumberg, chair of Md.’s Parole Commission has stated that such absence of hope may increase the “threat of violence” to correctional officers as young lifers have no incentive to behave.**

--

Please note: This testimony is offered for Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (www.ma4jr.org), not for the Md. Judiciary.