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Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN SB 562- CORRECTIONAL SERVICES - GERIATRIC AND MEDICAL PAROLE

“Between 2015 and 2020, the Maryland Parole Commission approved 86 medical parole applications and denied 253. Further, the Governor granted nine medical parole requests from individuals serving life sentences and rejected 14 requests. Most notably, the lowest yearly approval rating occurred during the height of the pandemic in 2020 at seven percent”.¹

[SB562/HB 600 – Correctional Services – Geriatric and Medical Parole](#) enables inmates, attorneys, family members, and medical professionals to request medical parole from the Maryland Parole Commission.

This bill is meant to provide inmates protection and potential parole based on their age, medical condition, and moral qualifications.

“Currently, there are about 650 individuals over the age of 60 in Maryland’s prison system who have served at least 15 years.”² These individuals are eligible to be evaluated for release. However, Maryland seldom relies on these compassionate/Geriatric and Medical Parole release policies to release the elderly and infirm from prison, despite posing a minimal risk to public safety and a significant cost burden on the state budget.

The United States Prison System has experienced an excessive growth from an estimated 200,000 in the 1970’s to almost 1.5 million in 2019. Research shows that this growth is not due to crime, but by dramatic changes in policies that send people to jail for more time. In Maryland alone, 8 in 10 people who are serving the longest terms are Black.

Additionally, Maryland has one of the most daunting processes. There is no required medical examination for inmates and they never receive a hearing. Instead, a physician reviews medical records, designates a “Karnofsky” score measuring functional impairment and sends a recommendation to the Maryland Parole Commission. This is often in the form of an email or memo.

Therefore, due to the inflexibility and lack of compassion that impacts the Maryland Parole Commission many of these cases result in unwarranted deaths and grievances on family members.

With this I urge the committee to vote in favor of SB 562.

¹ <https://justicepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Maryland-Compassionate-Release.pdf>

² <https://justicepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Maryland-Compassionate-Release.pdf>