



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of Senate Bill 774
- Correctional Services – Medical Parole – Life Imprisonment-
Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
On March 9, 2022**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

Senate Bill 774 completely removes the Governor from the medical parole decision-making process, repairing a technical oversight in Senate Bill 202 from the 2021 session. With the passage of SB202, the legislature intended to remove the Governor from all involvement in parole verdicts, and this bill does that.

In 2021, not only did the legislature vote to reform the parole process, but we overrode Governor Hogan's veto of the bill later that same year, further solidifying our stance. Until the passage of this bill, Maryland was one of only three states that still involved the Governor in the parole process. This reform exclusively left the power to review and grant parole for life sentences to the Maryland Parole Commission, a nonpartisan board composed of law and social services professionals.

Senate Bill 774 addresses medical parole. I believe that, based on the General Assembly's vote in the 2021 Special Session, we should also leave the absolute power to review and grant medical parole to the aforementioned commission. Senate Bill 774 would altogether remove

the Governor’s authority to approve, disapprove, or consider the Parole Commission’s decision in medical parole cases.

Medical parole was established in 2008 because the General Assembly recognized that incapacitated inmates posed no threat to society. Having served a certain amount of their sentence, individuals with extreme mental or physical health conditions were deemed eligible for parole consideration. It was not until 2017, that this body carved the Governor a role in the process. Out of the 2,000 people serving life sentences in Maryland prisons, only 34 individuals applied for medical parole in 2018.¹

Senate Bill 202 removed whispers of partisan politics when deciding a convicted person’s fate, and Senate Bill 774 furthers that intent. Maryland Governors have notoriously adopted a “tough on crime” mentality, disproportionately sentencing Black and Brown people to stricter and more prolonged punishments. The lack of parole considerations hardened the inmates’ will and worsened their behavior while in jail. In March 2021, former Governor Parris Glendening admitted the cruel nature of life sentences when he said, “... people whose sentences promised a chance at parole were denied it for decades, regardless of how thoroughly they worked to redeem themselves and make amends to those they harmed.”²

When enacting Senate Bill 202, I do not believe the General Assembly intended to bifurcate the determination of medically-eligible inmates between the parole commission and the Governor.

The cross-file to this bill, House Bill 920, had a seamless hearing on February 22. Considering this body’s prior actions and the limited

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/01/28/maryland-parole-life-criminal-justice-politics/>

²

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/01/i-made-serious-mistake-maryland-governor-we-need-parole-reform/>

number of opponents to this bill, I humbly request a favorable report on Senate Bill 774.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jill P. Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jill P. Carter, Esq.