

To the members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am a resident of District 21, a Christian, and a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. I am testifying **in support of HB00249, Wrongful Convictions - Investigations**, which would allow a person indicted for a crime to file a petition for writ of actual innocence, if additional evidence that might have led to a different outcome was found at a later time. In addition, the bill provides compensation to those who were found to have been erroneously convicted of a crime.

According to the Innocence Project, an organization that works to free innocent people, prevent wrong convictions, and create fair, compassionate, and equitable system of justice, there are six common causes of wrongful conviction: jailhouse informants, inadequate defense, misused forensic science, access to post-conviction DNA testing, false confessions, and eyewitness misidentification. This bill would work to address a number of these causes.

First, this bill acknowledges that due to the advent of technology, new information related to past cases can be found that show that previous testimony was found to be invalid. Those convicted should be able to have their case heard if new findings are revealed that would have likely changed the outcome of their hearing. In addition, there are times when new information is found that invalidates a previously-received guilty plea. This bill would provide a new venue for those who plead guilty under duress to bring new evidence showing they aren't guilty and would allow them to withdraw their plea.

If a person follows the process established in this law and it is found that they have been erroneously convicted, this bill then requires that the state compensate the individual in a number of ways. This is important as convictions and time spent in prison often result in individuals being seen as pariahs by society who are unable to find well-paying jobs and adequate housing. In order to right this wrong, this bill would enable the person to receive financial compensation, a state ID card, housing accommodations, as well as education and training relevant to life skills, job and vocational training, and financial literacy. Although these things are not truly an adequate replacement for time lost in our carceral system, it is a first step towards enabling innocent people to re-enter society and move on from a traumatic time of their life.

Hebrews 13:3 states: "Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." Imagine what it must be like to be falsely imprisoned. Do the right thing. Support HB0249.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

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