

Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Friday, February 2nd, 2024

SB 132 - Correctional Services - Medical Parole - Life Imprisonment

Favorable

Hello Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and committee members,

We write to you to express our unwavering support for Senator Carter's legislation, Senate Bill 132 (SB 132S), on behalf of the Maryland Lifers Coalition. We are a grassroots coalition of directly impacted formerly incarcerated Maryland citizens, who advocate for legislation and systems that not only provide opportunities for citizens to return home from lengthy sentences but also support returning citizens with pathways to reintegrate into society, and organizers around the state.

There are countless, predominately Black, Marylanders who are currently incarcerated with life-debilitating illnesses, amputees, advanced stage cancer diagnosis, and worse, who are unable to receive the level of care needed to live out their remaining years in peace. While incarcerated it is impossible to access treatments, security, and a level of comfortability needed to recover or have dignity in their final years.

Members of our coalition have direct experience working in prison hospitals and helping people get out of bed, clean themselves up, exercise, and other basic needs, especially when nursing staff refused and ignored patients. Even though life threatening illnesses mostly effect seniors, people of all age groups have and continue to suffer from debilitating mental health issues, such as dementia, Alzheimer's, and more, which become more severe each day they are not given proper treatment. These individuals are of no harm to Maryland residents or themselves and by allowing the parole commission to release people suffering from said illnesses, their families will have peace-of-mind knowing they can spend time with their loved ones and make their end-of-life as comfortable as possible.

There have been countless times where previous Governors have ignored the recommendation of the parole commission and refused to release people, even after it was found that the individual had a life-threatening illness. Since the Governor has been removed from all other aspects of parole, except medical, it is incumbent on Maryland to extend the same rights to those who deserve to live their final years in peace not incarceration. We urge the committee to provide a favorable report on SB 132.

Respectfully,

Maryland Lifers Coalition