



INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE

February 27, 2024

Maryland Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland General Assembly
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 East
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Letter in support of Senate Bill 728

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of SB 728. My name is Alasdair Whitney, and I am Legislative Counsel at the Institute for Justice. The Institute for Justice is a nonprofit public interest law firm that works to protect civil liberties. For years, we have researched and advocated for states to reduce or eliminate excessive fines and fees.

The Institute for Justice encourages the committee to support SB 728, which would eliminate the \$50 supervision fee that parolees must pay every month in order to comply with the terms of parole supervision. Supporting this bill is critical for three reasons:

First, it would help ensure parole compliance. Research has consistently shown that onerous fees imposed on individuals involved in the criminal justice system can have detrimental effects on their ability to successfully reintegrate into their communities.¹ Fees, like this one, can lead to increased financial instability, exacerbate stress and anxiety, and undermine efforts to rehabilitate and support individuals as they work to rebuild their lives. These difficulties, in turn, make it more difficult for folks to comply with the terms of their parole supervision, and often result in recidivism.²

Second, and relatedly, many folks transitioning back into society post-incarceration lack stable employment, secure housing, and durable social networks.³ Parole-related financial burdens—which, on average, costs a parolee in Maryland over \$740 over the course of his or her parole term—only serve to exacerbate these challenges, particularly for those who may already be struggling to make ends meet.⁴

¹ Ruhland, E., *The Impact of Fees and Fines for Individuals on Probation and Parole*, Robina Institute of Criminal Law and Criminal Justice, Univ. of Minnesota (May 2023), available at <https://robinainstitute.umn.edu/articles/impact-fees-and-fines-individuals-probation-and-parole>.

² Harding, D., et al., *From Supervision to Opportunity: Reimagining Probation and Parole*, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Sept. 2022), available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00027162221115486>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Diller, R., et al., *Maryland's Parole Supervision Fee: A Barrier to Reentry*, Brennan Center for Justice (Mar. 2009), available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/marylands-parole-supervision-fee-barrier-reentry>.

Third, this bill would help create a more equitable and just criminal justice system. As it stands today, imposing a fee for parole supervision creates a system where individuals with financial means are better positioned to comply with the terms of parole while those without are disproportionately penalized. This exacerbates socioeconomic disparities and perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality within the state.⁵ Eliminating this fee would help ensure that parole remains focused on its intended goals of rehabilitation and reintegration, rather than retribution and punishment.

Abolishing this fee is one step the general assembly can take to help folks comply with the terms of parole supervision and make it easier for them to reenter society and stay out of trouble. We urge your support for this bill.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Alasdair Whitney
Institute for Justice
901 North Glebe Rd., Suite 900
Arlington, Virginia 22203
awhitney@ij.org
www.ij.org

⁵ Harris, A., *et al.*, *Drawing Blood from Stones: Legal Debt and Social Inequality in the Contemporary United States*, *American Journal of Sociology* (May 2010), available at <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/651940>.