



Councilman Mark Conway
Baltimore City Council *Fourth District*

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TO: Chair William C. Smith, Jr.; Vice Chair Jeff Waldstreicher; members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Mark Conway (District 4, Baltimore City Council; Chair, Public Safety and Government Operations Committee)

RE: SB1098 (Correctional Services - Diminution Credits - Sexual Offenses)

POSITION: SUPPORT

I am writing in strong support of SB1098 (Correctional Services - Diminution Credits - Sexual Offenses), which would prohibit an incarcerated individual who is currently serving a sentence for first-degree rape or first-degree sexual offense from being entitled to diminution credits and the possibility of early release.

Last September, Pava LaPere, the 26-year-old CEO of a tech startup in Baltimore, was murdered and found on the roof of her apartment building. I had a chance to meet Pava just hours before at Artscape, where she was brimming with energy, excitement, and passion. Following a dayslong manhunt for her killer, Jason Billingsley, a previously convicted sex offender, was arrested and charged with first-degree murder, assault and using a brick as a dangerous weapon.

In 2013, Billingsley had been arrested and charged with rape after forcing a woman to perform oral sex on him at knifepoint. Billingsley pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of first-degree sex offense and was sentenced to 30 years in prison. Nine years later, he was released from prison early under Maryland's diminution credit system. Diminution credits can be earned by inmates and used to reduce their sentence and facilitate early release.

This legislation would restrict sex offenders' ability to earn diminution credits that reduce their sentence by restricting approval or denial of early release to a decision made through the parole commission. Sexual crimes are inherently violent, abhorrent, and beyond reproach at any level. Offenders who prey on their victims through the shame, humiliation, and indignity of sexual crimes should not be offered the option of early release without the approval of a parole commission. The decision to let violent sexual predators out early should not be made lightly, and those who would desecrate another in such a way should not be allowed to roam the streets again so easily.

Pava deserved better. I hope we can agree to take this commonsense step to protect our communities.

Sincerely,

Mark S. Conway, Jr.