



MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM
Citizens working to reform criminal justice in Maryland



www.MA4JR.org

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House Judiciary Committee

Testimony in Support of HB185 – Correctional Services – Medical Parole – Life Imprisonment

My name is Judith Lichtenberg. I am testifying on behalf of the [Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform](#) (MAJR), where I serve on the executive committee and co-chair its Behind the Walls Workgroup. I'm also on the executive committee of Prepare, a nonprofit Maryland organization that helps incarcerated people make their best case for parole and successful reentry. I have lived in Hyattsville/University Park (District 22) for more than forty years and am professor emerita of philosophy at Georgetown University. Since 2016, I've been teaching, tutoring, and mentoring at Jessup Correctional Institute, Patuxent Institution, and the DC Jail, where I have gotten to know many incarcerated people as students in my courses. Many of these students have been incarcerated for twenty or more years.

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform supports a favorable report on HB185. The bill would repeal a provision requiring gubernatorial approval of medical parole for those serving life sentences. Anyone who is so chronically debilitated by a physical or mental health condition as to be incapable of endangering society should be considered for parole release. The Maryland Parole Commission, which bears the responsibility for making parole decisions in the state, must be authorized to consider parole release for medically compromised individuals without political interference.

Men and women serving life sentences are well-represented among those with severe, chronic medical conditions in prison, and should not be excluded from the opportunity for medical parole. If you walk through the prison yards you will see people on crutches or in wheelchairs; you don't see those who cannot get out of bed. These people often have to rely on the generosity and humanity of their fellow prisoners to help them with daily functions because the nursing staff cannot meet their needs for constant care.

Maryland is experiencing growth in our aging prison population; naturally, people grow sicker as they age. Not surprisingly, healthcare costs greatly increase for older prisoners. The [Justice Policy Institute estimates](#) that Maryland imprisons approximately 3,000 people over age 50, and nearly 1,000 who are 60 or older. [JPI also reports](#) that people over 60 are paroled at a

rate of only 28 percent. This contradicts everything we know about trends in criminal offending in older people.

A fiscal analysis concluded that continued confinement of people in this age group for an additional 18 years (based on the expected period of incarceration) would amount to nearly \$1 million per person, or \$53,000 a year. Compare this to the [\\$6,000 a year](#) needed to provide the kind of intensive reentry support that has proven successful in reintegrating returning citizens back into the community.

This bill will provide meaningful parole opportunities for people serving life sentences who suffer from debilitating medical conditions. We urge a favorable report.

Respectfully,

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