

Testimony by Jamel Freeman, Intern for Delegate N. Scott Phillips

The requirements under the proposed legislation have merit but lack some key elements to achieve success in preventing recidivism. A social worker, a case manager, and a certified peer recovery specialist through the Maryland Department of Health should be assigned to everyone as part of a parole release plan prior to a parole hearing. This is a new way of life for parolees, and they will need professional guidance from the above individuals who can provide structure, guidance, and support. The elements of the release plan under current law are general, lack specificity, and leave a lot of discretion to the Maryland Parole Commission to decide what provisions will be made for the incarcerated individuals once they are released from prison. One example is the regulations related to employment. The current regulations discuss the parolee's providing information on employers without addressing the critical issues: How do you obtain employment or find employers willing to hire a person who has a criminal background? Where do you get skills and training? What happens to individuals who lack resources or contacts that will direct them to obtain the skills they will need to be employable? The current regulations discuss getting evidence that "a parolee is legitimately employed" following release, without requiring the Maryland Parole Commission or any other agency of the State to assume the role of directing them to jobs, employers, programs, and skills. Current regulations also provide unrealistic solutions for housing options following incarceration. Returning home or to environments where individuals lack structure and negative influences that encourage harmful behaviors. These are recipes for re-incarceration. These are just some of the elements that need to be paid close attention to as well. The new legislation tackles many of them, but more is needed in terms of social services as a critical element of any change.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my experience, strength, and hope.

Jamel Freeman