

February 5, 2024

HB0264/SB0026 Witness Testimony

My name is James Szewczyk and I reside at 21949 Barkentine Ct., Great Mills, MD 20534. I can be contacted at 240.587.9555 or jayszewczyk@icloud.com. I am submitting this testimony in **Support** of HB0264/SB0026, Jamari's Law.

I wish to thank Delegate Brian Crosby for sponsoring the House Bill and Senator Jack Bailey for sponsoring the Senate Bill of Jamari's Law. I have been a MD resident my entire life and member of the St. Mary's County community since 1995. I am a husband and father of three (3) daughters all of whom were born and raised in St. Mary's County MD. I am the daughter of a law enforcement officer and raised to abide by the law and believe if the law is broken our justice system would provide the proper penalty. However, as I have come to witness that is not always the case. There are times when the punishment of the applicable law does not fit the severity of the crime as we find in the law for vehicular manslaughter where the maximum penalty is 10 years in MD allowing for an offender to be eligible for parole after only serving two and a half (2.5) years.

On the morning of July 9, 2022 my friend John Duckett's son Jamari at the age of 18 was the victim of vehicular manslaughter. It was not a nonviolent accident it was a horrific violent crime committed with a vehicle as a weapon. I had become friends with John and Jamari as the father and son worked side by side in a local diner my husband and I visit regularly. Jamari was a fixture working there and always greeting everyone that came through the doors with his big infectious smile. In regularly seeing and conversing with Jamari I formed a friendship with this aspiring young man. I became invested in him and the bright future he had before him. He had just graduated high school and was preparing to attend college to become a mechanical engineer. He was working two jobs. He worked at the diner and at the Sheetz convenience store saving up money for his college expenses. He was a wonderful young man whom we loved and adored with a promising future ahead of him. When I learned of his tragic passing it was excruciatingly heart breaking. Then I learned that our justice system categorizes this crime as vehicular manslaughter because it was committed using a car as the weapon and knowing the maximum penalty achievable was only 10 years brought such feelings of injustice. It shook my faith in this justice system I so firmly have believed in my whole life. Knowing the man who killed Jamari was driving while under the influence which is a crime in our state so he knowingly and intentionally ignored the law. He was driving 90mph and literally drove his truck up over and onto Jamari's car causing such horrific injury to Jamari that Jamari lost his life. The law states that causing death with a vehicle is manslaughter a nonviolent crime presumably accidental in nature. However, Jamari's death was violent and not truly accidental once a choice was made to drive impaired. Therefore, to truly impart proper justice in cases like Jamari's there needs to be an increase in the maximum penalty. Increasing the maximum penalty would provide proper punishment and accountability for driving while impaired and taking a life instead rather than calling a friend or an uber for a ride. It would also allow time for possible rehabilitation and provide more deterrence. If this bill was law back on July 9, 2022 and the maximum penalty was 20 year and 30 years for subsequent conviction it may have deterred his offender from driving that night and Jamari might still be with us today working on his mechanical engineering degree and greeting everyone at the diner with his infectious smile, making our world a better place. However, if his offender was not deterred then at least Jamari's family and friends could have received true justice with an appropriate punishment for the crime.

I fully support HB0264/SB0026 to allow for proper justice for vehicular manslaughter in MD. Making this bill a law can make our State a safe place to raise a family and when this law is not abided by it will make the punishment more befitting of the crime restoring the communities and my faith in our justice system. I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0264/SB0026.