

February 9, 2024

Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chair, House Judiciary Committee  
Room 101  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD. 21401

Testimony in SUPPORT of **HOUSE BILL – 724 (The Second Look Act)**

**CRIMINAL PROCEDURE - PETITION TO REDUCE SENTENCE**

*Sponsored by Delegate Cheryl E. Pasteur*

Dear Chair Luke Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Anthony Wazir Muhammad (formerly known as Anthony Fair). Thirty-one years ago, on January 26, 1993, at the age of 15, I was arrested for two homicides charges in Baltimore City. I was ultimately convicted and sentenced to life plus 20-years in prison for the crimes that I committed.

My sentencing judge mistakenly believed that I was unredeemable, unreformable, and that the actions that I committed were unreconcilable. She stated that I had “*little prospect of ever being able to come out and function,*” and that I showed very “*little hope of rehabilitation.*” The judge was unconvinced that “*job training, education, and such would make [me] a safe citizen.*” And in her most condemning remarks, she said that she believed that if I was given the opportunity to commit these crimes again, “*it would happen.*”

Thankfully, my sentencing judge was all wrong about me. Sixteen-months ago, on September 20, 2022, I was released under the Maryland *Juvenile Restoration Act* (JRA). I served a total of 29-years, 7-months, and 29-days. I stand before the committee today not only redeemed and reformed, but reconciled with the family of the victims in my case who has granted me their forgiveness.

Interestingly, the judge who released me said the complete opposite about me than my sentencing judge. In fact, the judge who released me under the JRA stated that what I accomplished throughout my incarceration was so remarkable that in all her years on the bench I was the very first violent offender that she had absolutely no reservations about releasing back into the community.

There are no words adequate enough to express the depths of my remorse for the crimes that I committed. I made a horrible decision. It was the worst decision I ever made in my life, and I will always deeply regret my actions. However, egregious as my crimes were, they were not the result of “*permanent incorrigibility*,” “*irreparable corruption*,” or “*exhibit such irretrievable depravity that rehabilitation is impossible*.” As the distinguished civil rights attorney, author of the book *Just Mercy*, and founder of the *Equal Justice Initiative*, Brian Stevenson, once said - “*Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done*.”

Since my release, I have now become part of the solution to crime and violence in the very same community where I was once part of the problem. Currently, I am a Community Engagement Specialist, for the *We Our Us* organization. We are the new front line in the fight to make our communities a safe and descent place to live. We are the “*Credible Messengers*,” the “*Violence Interrupters*,” that go door-to-door, block-by-block, street-by-street. We put boots on the ground in the most dangerous neighborhoods in Baltimore City as “*Messengers*,” “*Protectors*,” “*Connectors*,” and “*Mediators*.”

Thanks in no small part to the incredible work of returning citizens, particularly those who served life and long-term sentences, for the very first time in 9-years, Baltimore City experienced the single largest reduction in homicides in almost a decade. While no one individual or organization can claim all the credit for the success, what is undeniable, what is undisputable, is the positive contributions that long-term returning citizens are making in this effort.

Long-term returning citizens are working in collaboration with all of the community stake holders. There is NOTHING that long-term returning citizens are not doing as productive members of society. We are employed by multiple agencies in the Baltimore City government. We are consultants to the Baltimore City Police Department on best practices for community engagement.

We are partners with the Maryland DPSCS & DOC to provide re-entry services to returning citizens. We are currently working with the Maryland DJS to provide life coaching & mentorship services to help address what many are now mistakenly calling a juvenile crime surge.

Long-term returning citizens are helping all throughout the Baltimore City Public School system, in many capacities. We are in all of the Recreation Centers. We are on college campuses and universities throughout the State of Maryland. We are in law school programs and legal clinics here in Maryland. We are the leaders in non-profit organizations doing phenomenal community engagement work. We are business owners, entrepreneurs, homeowners, hard-working, tax paying citizens who are thoroughly engaged in the community.

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I did not thank Delegate Jazz Lewis, Mr. Chairman, and the members of this committee for the great work that was done on the JRA. However, our message to this esteemed committee is this: the work of this esteemed committee is not done yet. There are many more just like us who are still locked behind the prison walls in Maryland. They are aging, and they are dying. They have served their time in prison - some 20, 30, 40, and yes, even 50 years in the Maryland prison system. No, they were not juveniles. They did not qualify for release under the Unger decision or the JRA. However, they deserve a second look. It is indisputable that they are no longer threats to public safety and we are confident that they will make positive contributions to society, if given the opportunity, just as those of us who stand before you today.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on SB123. Thank You!

Respectfully submitted,  
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