



PREPARE
PREpare for PARole and REentry

February 9, 2024

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 0724
Criminal Procedure - Petition to Reduce Sentence

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I support HB 0724 sponsored by Delegate Pasteur and ask that a favorable vote be rendered.

I am a beneficiary of the Juvenile Restoration Act (JUVRA) which became effective in October 2021. I pled guilty and was sentenced to a congregate parole eligible life sentence for horrible crimes committed as a fifteen year old in 1979. As the sentencing judge denied my Motion for Reduction of sentence two months later, the Court lost jurisdiction to act in my case. The ninety-day provision for filing a sentence modification was inadequate to make any accomplishments to demonstrate maturity and rehabilitation.

I became eligible for parole in 1993. Although I had amassed a strong record of accomplishments, no avenue would exist for a meaningful parole consideration based on demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation until 2019. In response to former Governor Glendenning's 'life means life' policy not a single lifer was paroled outright in over two decades. I filed several legal Motions to no avail because the Court still had no jurisdiction to act.

Despite the Court's consideration, intent, and recommendation when imposing sentence, MD has no legal presumption that any prisoner should be released upon reaching parole eligibility. The lack of statutory and regulatory provisions regarding the exercise of MD Parole Commission discretion and the, then, gubernatorial discretion results in disparity without explanation. Additionally, those who have reformed and may be deemed worthy of release consideration by the Court prior to and after reaching parole eligibility may never receive it.

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Without the legislation of JuvRA, I still would not know when, if ever, I would be released or what was expected of me to be paroled. Fortunately, the Court recognized my growth and maturity and acted upon its new jurisdiction in my case. I am honored and grateful to report that I have been doing remarkably well since my 2022 release. Although I still face reentry barriers, I do maintain livable wage employment covering my rent, utility, car, insurance, eating, and clothing expenses. I vote and pay taxes. I am active in reentry support groups, engage in criminal justice and juvenile justice reform, live a law abiding life. I am happily married, expecting a child, and have a strong support network.

Though I am deeply sorry for the tragic crimes fifteen year old me committed, I question the purpose of holding juveniles, emerging adults, and seniors -reformed men and women- in prison for twenty, thirty, forty years. These particular men and women whom have accepted responsibility for their wrongs, worked hard to improve their social functioning, and become pillars of redemption no longer pose a threat to public safety and would be productive citizens, too.

As an example of someone who was held in prison longer than necessary, in terms of rehabilitation, and has transitioned to the outside community successfully, I recognize the value of second chances. Providing an incarcerated individual the opportunity to petition for reconsideration of sentence after serving twenty years would only permit the Court to determine whether the imposed sentence still serves its intended purposes. Thus, I urge this honorable committee to vote favorably for HB 0724.

Truly yours,

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