



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony

SB 648 - Correctional Services - Medical Parole - Life Imprisonment

Good afternoon, Chairman Smith, Vice Chair and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. SB 648 would **remove** the Governor's role in the approval process for medical parole for those serving life sentences. This bill is a necessary technical fix to streamline the process and ensure fairness, compassion, and efficiency, particularly for those who are gravely ill.

The need for the Maryland Parole Commission to act expeditiously is most critical in cases where the parole candidate is seriously ill or dying. Under current law, when the MPC recommends medical parole, the decision must be transmitted to the Governor, who has 180 days to either approve or disapprove the decision. Unfortunately, the 180-day waiting period often causes unnecessary delays that can be life-altering for individuals who are critically ill. In fact, in 2021 alone, **five individuals recommended for medical parole died while waiting for the Governor to act.**

This delay is not just an administrative issue it's a matter of human dignity. The difference between a peaceful death surrounded by family and a lonely death behind prison walls can be as simple as the passage of time. By removing the Governor's involvement, we can ensure that these decisions are made in a timely manner, allowing families to be with their loved ones when it matters most.

In fact, many states have successfully adopted a system where the Governor does not have the authority to approve or disapprove medical parole decisions made by the parole board. States like California, New York, and Illinois have streamlined the medical parole process, giving the final decision-making power to the parole board, ensuring swift action when an incarcerated individual is critically ill. By following the example of these states, Maryland can ensure that its medical parole process respects both the health needs of individuals and the importance of public safety.

It's worth noting that this bill was previously sponsored by former Senator Jill Carter and passed out of this committee with **NO opposition.** Former Senator Carter was a staunch advocate for justice reform, and she understood the critical need for this technical fix to address delays in medical parole decisions.

Therefore, I respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report for SB 648. It is critical to act swiftly in cases where individuals are seriously ill or dying. The Maryland Parole Commission is fully qualified to make these decisions, and removing the Governor's involvement will allow for quicker, more humane outcomes for those who need it most.