

Committee: House and Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee Favorable Support

My name is Janet Johnson. I am currently incarcerated at Maryland's Correctional Institution for Women. I entered the system as an emerging adult at the age of 18 and at 19 was sentenced to 25 years to life with the possibility of parole.

The scientific community recognizes emerging adults as adolescents between the ages of 18 - 25. Youth between the ages of 18 -25 are classified as emerging adults because, while they have exceeded the age required for classification as a juvenile, their brain hasn't reached the stage of development required to classify them as an adult. Farrington, Loeber and Howell explain in their research article Young Adult Offenders that the higher executive functions of the brain, which includes planning, verbal memory and impulse control, are not usually developed fully until the age 25.

I am now 37 years old and have worked hard at becoming the woman I am today. On May 31, 2024 I graduated from Goucher College with Honors. I achieved honors by defending my thesis that questioned "Have cultural norms shifted to signify that eighteen is no longer the marker at which an adolescent transitions into adulthood? Science supports that brain maturation within an adolescent is not reached until the age of 25. What does this mean for emerging adults within Maryland's criminal justice system?"

I spend my time giving back by tutoring my peers and training to become a peer recovery specialist. I have all of the hours required for certification and am just waiting to take the test. I enjoy creating programs that assist in the rehabilitation of the women in my community. I share this with you because I want you to know that I am not the same person I was at the age of 18. I have grown and am working hard to prevent at least one at-risk youth from making the same mistakes that led me to prison by sharing my journey of growth.

I am an adult who was incarcerated at the age of 18. I believe that I needed to be held accountable for my decisions that led me here. Someone lost their life and that is something I have to live with for the rest of my life. Although I do have parole eligibility, because of my sentences, there is no guaranteed timeline for release. I was given a 10 year hit as a result of my parole hearing in 2020. My next hearing is in 2030. If given a recommendation for release, I would still have to have a risk assessment. The process for a risk assessment has been lengthy. For most people, the process has been three years.

Passing the Second Look at would mean a realistic release date for emerging adults like me. I didn't fit the criteria for the Juvenile Restoration Act of 2021 because I was 18 at the time of my offense. However, the scientific data that renders juveniles less culpable than adults includes emerging adults as being less culpable as well.

I thank you in advance for your time and support of this bill.

Respectfully,

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