

TESTIMONY ON SB648

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 13, 2025

SUPPORT

Submitted by: Magdalena Tsiongas

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I, Magdalena Tsiongas, am testifying in support of SB648. This is a common sense fix to make the medical parole system align with the rest of parole decisions.

Currently, for those seeking medical parole, they must face the additional barrier of receiving approval from the Governor to be paroled, unlike any other parole decision. This reality was due only to an oversight, as the Governor was removed from the parole decision for others in 2021.

In my organizing work with those facing extreme sentences in Maryland, as Convener of the MD Second Look Coalition, many family members have reached out to me, desperate for a way to get their loved ones home from prison, who are either elderly or terminally ill. However, without addressing the issues with medical and geriatric parole, the reality is, there is no where they can turn. Instead, they must watch as the people they love, who are usually unable to have their complex medical needs met by a prison, age and pass away, apart from their families.

I support this legislation, even though it does not apply to my own loved one, who has been incarcerated on a life without parole sentence since 19 years old. Nor does it apply to the hundreds of others incarcerated on non-parole eligible sentences. However, there is still a great need to make an avenue for those who are now elderly or very ill to come home and end their lives with dignity, surrounded by those who loved them.

Maryland is in need of multiple avenues to address decades of mass incarceration, particularly of Black people. In fact, 23% of the incarcerated population in Maryland is serving life sentences or sentences of 50 years or more (also known as death by incarceration sentences). 76% of these individuals are Black. Maryland is also one of only eight states where more than one in six women in prison are serving a life sentence. Of this population of people serving these extreme sentences, 1,314 are aged 55 or older.¹

We know too, that for those elderly individuals released from prison, their recidivism is extremely low. This has been seen with the Ungers, 200 Marylanders serving life sentences, who were released after the landmark case *Maryland v Unger*, who have a less than 4% recidivism rate².

¹ The Sentencing Project [A Matter of Life: The Scope and Impact of Life Imprisonment in the United States](#) (2025)

² Justice Policy Institute [Fact Sheet: The Ungers](#) (2018)

With the release of the Ungers, the state saved a projected \$185 million that would have been spent on keeping them incarcerated.³

Please make this the year that medical parole is addressed with this simple fix.

I encourage you to vote **favorably** on **SB648**.

Thank you.

³ OSI-Baltimore [Building on the Unger Experience: A cost-benefit analysis of releasing aging prisoners](#) (2019)