

**TESTIMONY ON SB291
MARYLAND SECOND LOOK ACT**

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 30, 2025**

SUPPORT

Submitted by: **Dr. Carmen Johnson**

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

Subject: Written Testimony in Support of SB291, the Maryland Second Look Act

I, Dr. Carmen Johnson, is in support of SB291, the Maryland Second Look Act, by submitting this written testimony as a community member from Odenton, Maryland and the Founder of Helping Ourselves to Transform. The Maryland Second Look Act creates a meaningful opportunity for sentence modification for incarcerated individuals who have served at least 20 years of their sentence. Those who can demonstrate personal growth and rehabilitation, proving they are no longer a threat to public safety, should have the chance for release.

Currently, Maryland only allows sentence modification petitions within 90 days of sentencing, severely limiting opportunities for review. Judges previously had discretion to review extreme sentences, but this was removed in 2004. Additionally, Maryland's parole system has historically denied life-with-parole cases, contributing to prison overcrowding and extreme racial disparities. Of the 2,212 people serving life sentences in Maryland, 80% are Black, despite Black Marylanders making up only 31% of the state's population. Maryland also leads the nation in sentencing young Black men to the longest prison terms.

This bill provides an essential step forward, especially considering evidence that most individuals age out of crime. Data from the release of 200 Marylanders under the Unger v. Maryland decision shows a recidivism rate of less than 4%, saving the state a projected \$185 million in incarceration costs. Many others serving long sentences have similarly demonstrated readiness to reenter and contribute to society. The Act ensures victims are notified of resentencing hearings and given the option to participate, without requiring their involvement if they choose not to. Research shows victims prefer a system focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment by a 2-to-1 margin.

*SB291 offers a critical pathway for addressing racial disparities, promoting rehabilitation, and saving state resources, while maintaining public safety. I urge you to support this important legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration. For these reasons, I encourage you to vote **favorably** on the **Maryland Second Look Act SB291**.*

Sincerely, *Dr. Carmen Johnson*, 202-674-6300