

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

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January 30, 2025

SUPPORT

Submitted by: Qiana 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, Qiana Johnson, am providing written testimony in strong support of SB291, the Maryland Second Look Act, and submitting in writing as a community member from Clinton, Maryland, and the Founder and Executive Director of Life After Release.

The Maryland Second Look Act provides an essential opportunity for sentence modification for individuals who have served at least 20 years of their sentence. It gives those who can demonstrate personal growth and rehabilitation the chance to reintegrate into society, provided they are no longer a threat to public safety.

*Currently, Maryland limits sentence modification petitions to within 90 days of sentencing, a restriction that effectively eliminates meaningful review of lengthy sentences. Until 2004, Maryland judges had discretion to review extreme sentences, offering a vital safeguard against injustice, but that discretion was removed. Additionally, Maryland's parole system has historically denied relief to individuals serving life-with-parole sentences, exacerbating racial disparities and contributing to prison overcrowding. Today, of the 2,212 people serving life sentences in Maryland, **80% are Black**, even though Black residents make up only **31%** of the state's population. Maryland shamefully leads the nation in sentencing young Black men to the longest prison terms.*

*SB291 is a critical step forward in addressing these disparities. Evidence shows that most individuals age out of crime, and those released after decades of incarceration pose little threat to public safety. For instance, under the landmark *Unger v. Maryland* decision, 200 Marylanders serving life sentences were released, with a recidivism rate of less than **4%**—a stark contrast to the national average. Their release also saved the state a projected **\$185 million** in incarceration costs. Many more incarcerated individuals have similarly demonstrated their readiness to reenter society and contribute positively to their communities.*

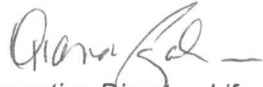
*This legislation balances public safety and rehabilitation by ensuring victims are notified of resentencing hearings and given the option to participate. Importantly, victims are not required to attend or engage if they choose not to. Research shows that victims overwhelmingly prefer a justice system that prioritizes rehabilitation over punishment by a **2-to-1 margin**.*

SB291 represents a necessary pathway to addressing systemic racial disparities, fostering rehabilitation, and reallocating state resources effectively, all while maintaining public safety. For these reasons, I urge you to vote favorably on the Maryland Second Look Act, SB291.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

Qiana Johnson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Qiana Johnson", followed by a horizontal line.

Founder and Executive Director, Life After Release