



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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Judicial Proceedings Committee

2 East Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for Senate Bill 291 (SB291) – Criminal Procedure – Petition to Reduce Sentence (Maryland Second Look Act). This bill allows individuals serving a term of confinement to petition the court for a sentence reduction after serving at least **20 years** of their sentence, with an emphasis on rehabilitation and reintegration into society. SB291 is a critical step forward in advancing justice, particularly for African Americans who are disproportionately impacted by long sentences in Maryland's criminal justice system. **This bill is a 2025 legislative priority for the Black Caucus.**

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly believes that our criminal justice system must prioritize fairness, rehabilitation, and second chances. African Americans in Maryland and across the nation have long been subject to the harmful effects of mass incarceration, which has resulted in overrepresentation in prison populations, particularly for non-violent offenses and sentences that fail to account for the possibility of rehabilitation. According to a 2023 report from the **Sentencing Project**, Black Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white Americans, making it essential that policies like SB291 seek to address these systemic inequities by offering opportunities for sentence reconsideration and reducing the long-term impact of incarceration on Black families and communities.

SB291 addresses these inequities by providing an avenue for individuals who have demonstrated maturity, rehabilitation, and fitness to reenter society, to petition for a reduced sentence after a significant period of time served. The **Second Look Act** aligns with the principles of restorative justice by encouraging courts to consider the individual's growth and transformation over time, including their age at the time of the offense, institutional behavior, participation in rehabilitative programs, and overall readiness to rejoin their communities. In Maryland, a 2020 study by the **Maryland Justice Project** found that African American individuals were more likely to receive longer sentences for similar offenses compared to their white counterparts, exacerbating racial disparities in the state's prison system. SB291 provides a needed path for reform, particularly for Black Marylanders who have been disproportionately impacted by these racial disparities.

SB291's provisions for sentence reconsideration offer a fairer, more equitable process for those who have served decades behind bars. The bill ensures that courts take into account factors like **rehabilitation, age, and personal growth**, which are especially important for African Americans who have often been subjected to harsh sentencing policies. Additionally, the bill's retroactive application ensures that **those already**

incarcerated, including many Black individuals, can benefit from this opportunity for justice and redemption.

For Black communities in Maryland, the impact of this bill cannot be overstated. By providing an opportunity for individuals who have served a significant portion of their sentence to petition for release, SB291 allows the possibility for **a more just and humane criminal justice system**. The passage of this bill would represent a tangible step toward reversing the damaging effects of mass incarceration and providing Black Marylanders who have shown rehabilitation and remorse with the chance to rebuild their lives outside of prison.

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports SB291 and its efforts to reform Maryland's sentencing practices. This bill reflects our commitment to a criminal justice system that promotes fairness, accountability, and rehabilitation, while also recognizing the systemic racial disparities that continue to affect Black Marylanders. We urge your support for SB291, as it offers a thoughtful and proactive approach to addressing the harms caused by overly punitive sentencing practices and the ongoing challenges faced by Black individuals in the criminal justice system.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland **strongly supports Senate Bill 291**.