

HB-0853 (UNF)

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The reasons HB-853 should not be passed should be patently obvious to anyone. As a parent of a murder victim (17) and attempted murder of my other child (19) in Maryland, I wholeheartedly oppose any additional automatic re-sentencing hearings for convicted, incarcerated violent criminals. As written, HB-853 extends to all incarcerated persons, regardless of offense, having served at least 20 years of their sentence; this includes the most violent offenders. If new evidence is uncovered that may exonerate an inmate, then, by all means, it should be brought to light.

It is clear to me the author(s) of HB-853 does not have first-hand experience of the trauma of extreme physical violence and/or murder; if they did, this proposed bill would not exist in its present form. The trauma victims and their families suffer is life-long and can be severe and debilitating. No one truly recovers from a violent attack or the murder of a family member(s). Increasing the number of hearings only serves to ensure a never-ending nightmare for the victims and their families. Not all victims or their families live in the Baltimore metro area and places an undue burden upon them if they choose to travel to make their voices heard in person.

HB-853 attempts a "safeguard" in stating that inmate information is to be reviewed to help prevent the release of inmates who would pose a threat to the public. Perhaps Maryland wants to follow in California's footsteps as Manson Family member and brutal murderer, Leslie Van Houten, was released in 2023. Van Houten was eligible for parole after 7 years, but as can be seen, given enough tries, she eventually got out. HB-853 amazingly states that after serving 30 years of a lengthy sentence or attaining the age of 60 automatically deems such inmates not to pose a public threat; it is ludicrous. HB-853 states that at the 30 or 60 year marks it must be proven the inmate *is* a threat to the public in order to keep them incarcerated. Releasing violent criminals early cheapens the lives of their victim(s) and further traumatizes victims and their families. The fundamental question is why should a person who committed violence upon others be permitted to enjoy freedom early or for some, ever again?

The whole affair I experienced was traumatic and long (5 years and 3 trials). When I travel north, I avoid Maryland and especially Baltimore whenever possible, as it is emotionally very difficult for me. I was permanently altered by the events that took place in 2013 and have thoughts about it every day. My surviving child continues to have serious emotional issues as a result of what he experienced. Having to provide a statement every 3 years (of course, my choice) to relive everything will certainly not do me any good. I can't imagine it would be any different for other victims or their family members.

HB-853 sends a message that you may inflict violence, torture and/or murder and still have a good shot at being free again, adding fear, anger and more pain to their victims and family members. Why are needs of the victims below that of the offender?

I strongly urge the Maryland legislators to defeat HB-853 and move on to matters that will help people rather than hurt.

Respectfully,

Whitney Gadsby