



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 18, 2025

HB853

Criminal Procedure - Petition to Reduce Sentence (Maryland Second Look Act)
Judiciary Committee
Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of **House Bill 853**. The Maryland Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

The Maryland Second Look Act allows individuals who have served at least 20 years of their confinement to petition the court for a sentence reduction. If the individual has previously petitioned, at least five years must have passed before filing a new petition. The court may reduce the sentence after a hearing if it determines that the individual is not a danger to the public, with a rebuttable presumption in favor of the petitioner under specific conditions. This legislation promotes justice and fairness by providing an opportunity for individuals to demonstrate their rehabilitation and reenter society after long periods of incarceration.

Catholic social teaching emphasizes the dignity of every human person, including those who have committed crimes. The Maryland Second Look Act reflects the Catholic principles of redemption, mercy, and restorative justice. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that "society pursues social justice, which is linked to the common good and to the exercise of authority, when it provides the conditions that allow associations and individuals to obtain what is their due." ("Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church."). Demonstrating repentance and rehabilitation, aligning with the Church's belief in the transformative power of grace and human resilience. Additionally, this Act embodies the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable by addressing systemic inequities that often disproportionately affect marginalized groups in the criminal justice system. Supporting this legislation is a moral imperative to recognize the potential for redemption and to foster a just society that offers second chances to those who seek to rebuild their lives. It encourages a culture of hope, compassion, and healing while ensuring accountability and safety for all.

House Bill 853 can benefit communities by offering individuals who have demonstrated growth and rehabilitation an opportunity to reintegrate into society. It reduces the burden on the state's correctional system while fostering public safety through careful review processes. By prioritizing fairness and second chances, the Act can strengthen families and communities, reduce recidivism, and allow formerly incarcerated individuals to contribute to the economy and

society. Furthermore, it acknowledges that human beings are capable of change and can positively impact on their communities when given the opportunity.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference urges a favorable report on **House Bill 853**.