

**TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 853
MARYLAND SECOND LOOK ACT**

House Judiciary Committee
February 18, 2025

SUPPORT/FAVOR

Submitted by: Sharon Y. Blake

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and honorable members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I, Sharon Y. Blake am testifying in support of House Bill 853, Maryland Second Look Act. I am submitting this testimony as a Baltimore County resident in District 10, having had no one in my family impacted by an extended sentence of twenty years of incarceration in the Maryland penal system, I believe, as a citizen and educator I have sufficient interest in this matter.

Professionally I served as President of the Baltimore Teachers Union. Moreover, I served 43 years as an educator in the Baltimore City Public School System, with the large majority of my career having being dedicated as a teacher of History at the high school level. In this role, I saw students enter high school as freshmen with their glasses half empty and four years later graduate with their glasses half full. This analogy can apply to the Maryland prison system population as well...young people, committing violent crimes; enter the prison system with half empty glasses. Often the half empty glass is that of anger, homelessness, disappointments, poverty, hopelessness, ignorance and despair. However, twenty years later, these very same young people are now adults who have demonstrated intellectual advancement, spiritual development, remorse, rehabilitation and no longer are a risk or danger to society. To that end, twenty years later, these are very different people. These are now mature persons who tend to have “aged out of crime” and are very unlikely to impact public safety in an undesirable manner. Twenty years later, these are very different people who now see their glass as half full... half full of hope, demonstrated intellectual advancement, spiritual development, remorse, and rehabilitation. Moreover, this is evident with the landmark case Maryland vs. Ungers. The two hundred (200) Marylanders serving life sentences, who were released, had less than a four percent (4%) recidivism rate. In addition, with the release of the Ungers, it was projected the state saved \$185 million dollars that would have been spent on keeping them incarcerated.

More importantly, this bill also has very serious racial justice implications. The general population of Black Marylanders is only thirty one percent (31%); however, of the two thousand two hundred twelve (2,212) people serving life sentences, appallingly eighty percent (80%) are Black Marylanders. It is disgraceful that Maryland also is the frontrunner in our nation in sentencing young Black men to the longest prison terms, at a rate twenty-five (25%) higher than the state of Mississippi.

Please note, there are many men and women serving decades-long sentences who have worked extremely hard to demonstrate intellectual advancement, spiritual development, remorse, and rehabilitation who are yet yearning for their opportunity to reenter and become value added in their communities.

Therefore, I urge this honorable committee to vote in favor of House Bill 853, Maryland Second Look Act!

Thank you.