

**TESTIMONY ON HB853
MARYLAND SECOND LOOK ACT**

**House Judiciary Committee
February 18, 2025**

SUPPORT

Submitted by: **Charles B. Adams**

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

I, Charles B. Adams, Ph.D., testify in support of HB853, the Maryland Second Look Act. I submit this testimony as the Executive Director of Bowie State University's Prison Education Program.

The passage of the Maryland Second Look Act would create a meaningful opportunity for sentence modification for incarcerated individuals after serving 20 years of their sentence. I firmly believe that those who can demonstrate their growth and rehabilitation, showing that they are no longer a threat to public safety, should have the chance for release.

As the Executive Director of Bowie State University's Prison Education Program, I strongly support the Maryland Second Look Act (HB853), as it directly addresses the challenges faced by our currently incarcerated students. Many of our students have demonstrated remarkable personal growth, earning degrees, developing essential skills, and actively engaging in rehabilitative efforts. However, the inability to have their sentences reviewed by a judge after serving long sentences limits their potential for full reintegration into society. The Second Look Act provides a necessary opportunity for those who have shown genuine rehabilitation to have their sentences reevaluated, offering a second chance for a better future. This bill fosters hope and encourages ongoing personal development, reflecting the core values of our educational programs, which aim to empower individuals for successful reintegration into society. By passing HB853, we can create a more just system that recognizes the capacity for change in those who have demonstrated a commitment to growth and rehabilitation.

This bill also has significant racial justice implications, given that among the 2,212 individuals serving life sentences in Maryland, 80% are Black, a stark disparity compared to the 31% of Black Marylanders in the general population. Shamefully, Maryland also leads the nation in sentencing young Black men to the longest prison terms, at a rate 25% higher than the next closest state, Mississippi.

Given that individuals tend to age out of crime and that those released after serving decades-long sentences have an exceptionally low recidivism rate, this decision is unlikely to pose a risk to public safety. This is evident in the case of the Ungers—200 Marylanders serving life sentences who were released following the landmark *Maryland v. Unger* decision—who have maintained a recidivism rate of less than 4%. Their release also resulted in an estimated \$185 million in savings for the state, which would have otherwise been spent on continued incarceration. Similarly, many other men and women who have served decades in prison have demonstrated their commitment to rehabilitation. They are eager for the opportunity to reintegrate and contribute positively to their communities.

The Act would require that victims receive notice that a resentencing hearing will be held and obligate the judge to consider the victim's input if the victim or their representative chooses to provide a statement. Victims would not be required to return to court or participate if they

choose not to. By a margin of 2 to 1, victims also prefer a criminal legal system that focuses more on rehabilitating those who commit crimes than on punishing them.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote favorably on the Maryland Second Look Act HB853.