



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1123

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The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP) serves as a coordinating office that advises the Governor on criminal justice strategies. The office plans, promotes, and funds efforts with government entities, private organizations, and the community to advance public policy, enhance public safety, reduce crime and juvenile delinquency, and serve victims.

House Bill 1123 would repeal the requirement for gubernatorial approval of medical parole requests, leaving the medical parole decision to the Parole Commission. Second, the bill establishes measures to streamline parole determinations for elderly individuals. Finally, the bill provides for funding to expand the Commission's capacity to implement the new streamlined process.

Despite recent reforms in Maryland aimed at reducing the State's incarcerated population, the current parole system has resulted in low parole grant rates and an aging prison population. Incarceration is expensive, especially for elderly and sick individuals, and reduces the resources available to address the underlying causes of crime and recidivism.

HB 1123 provides that, on an ongoing basis, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services will submit to the Parole Commission the names of incarcerated individuals who are (1) at least 60 years old, (2) have served at least 20 years, (3) without major disciplinary infractions within the previous 3-year period, and (4) are not serving a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. Within 60 days of receiving that information, the Commission must conduct a risk assessment for all qualifying individuals and, upon completion, conduct a parole hearing.

A significant challenge in the parole review process is the time, expertise, and resources it takes to conduct risk assessments. Currently, the Parole Commission has one psychologist conducting risk assessments, and there is a backlog of parole-eligible individuals awaiting assessment. HB 1123 allows GOGPP to direct Justice Reinvestment Act funding to the Commission to hire additional psychologists to conduct these risk assessments. This would allow the newly eligible elder incarcerated individuals to move through the parole process in a more timely manner. HB 1123 would eliminate some of the obstacles to timely parole decisions and appropriate parole grants to eligible individuals.

GOCPP urges the House Judiciary Committee to report favorable on HB 1123.