

**TESTIMONY ON HB853
MARYLAND SECOND LOOK ACT**

**House Judiciary Committee
February 18, 2025**

FAVORABLE

Submitted by: Magdalena Tsiongas

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

I, Magdalena Tsiongas, am testifying in support of HB853, the Maryland Second Look Act.

I am submitting this testimony as an impacted family member, whose loved one John, has been incarcerated since 19 years old on a life without parole sentence.

Prior to last session, I started the Maryland Second Look Coalition, of now over 200 individuals and 50 organizations, to work together to create second chances for those we love behind bars. Our coalition is led by impacted family members and previously incarcerated people, and supported by justice advocates. I have been so moved by the many stories that people have shared with me; mothers having spent 40 years working to find a way for their son to come home; friends who left their mentors behind in prison and promised to help them find their path; and spouses and children wanting their families to be whole again. This work is motivated by love and a strong belief in the ability for change.

That love is what brought me to this work and I will share some words from John on what the opportunity for a second look would mean for him:

My name is John and I am a college student, a partner, a son, a brother and an uncle. But for the past 18 years, I have been incarcerated on a life without parole sentence for murder, since I was 19 years old. At 19, I didn't see a future for myself, didn't have any drive, didn't have any purpose, I was just trying to survive. I was, what I thought was, taking care of myself. When I was sentenced, the judge didn't see a future for me either.

But since then, I received my GED, I've become a college student, I've been attending therapy every week for at least an hour for the past 6 years. I now have the opportunity to look at the violence and abuse in my own life and past that put me on this trajectory, like surviving childhood abuse, attempted murder from my own mother, surviving being shot twice as a teenager, and the PTSD that came along with those traumas. On my own healing journey, I've been working to set others up for success who I see struggling around me with the same traumas, with addiction and hopelessness, depression. I hope for the opportunity to be able to show that I have healed and grown as a person and can thrive and be productive and positive in the community, if given the chance.

Hope is a powerful tool. For those with extreme sentences in Maryland, many have been operating without hope, but still striving to improve themselves and help others from inside the prison walls.

I ask you to take this opportunity to demonstrate your commitment and belief in rehabilitation and the potential for transformational change.

Please vote **favorably** on the **Maryland Second Look Act HB853**.

Thank you.