

IN SUPPORT OF HB 853; Maryland Second Look Act

House Judiciary Committee

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Testimony by: John Sexton

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

Greetings and good day to you! I would like to share a perspective with you about HB 853. As a threshold matter, it needs to be emphasized that this bill is NOT against victims of crime. It is not. Indeed, HB 853 is all about the atoning and accountability process. It is about expiation and the capacity of human beings to be overwhelmed with remorse and contrition for the harm that they have done and the people, families, and communities they have hurt.

Can you imagine a state of being where God deprived us of the ability to repent for our sins? Without that Grace and Mercy, we would all be done for. And yet, as human beings, we all too often have an insatiable hunger for never ending retribution and vengeance.

There exists an unrelenting power in the guilt, shame, and remorse that consumes a person as they grow, mature and - in the vast majority of cases - get out of the drug addiction that afflicted them - and come to understand the devastation that their transgressions have had. Not only their transgressions, but the entirety of the ripple effects reverberated therefrom. It is a power that intensely drives most of us who have committed such devastating crimes to actively engage in undertakings that diminish particularly young people from going down pathways which lead to crime and victimization. Just look at the incredibly meaningful and positive impact most of those who have received a second chance are having on their community:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEy4PVRxGtI> (link to the docuseries Life After A Second Chance). Those that this bill would apply to will have very similar impacts. I dare say, contributions these formerly incarcerated individuals are making monumentally outweighs the vengeance sought by the opposition's leaders. Especially

considering the staggering amount of time these individuals have spent in a retributive state.

The reason HB 853 is needed is because there are no straightforward pathways for atonement, repentance, and restoration. None. As the states' attorneys leading the opposition have continually pointed out through their misleading references to mechanisms (which are extremely limited in scope) available to challenge unconstitutional convictions – it's all about challenging the convictions. None of the mechanisms they cite embody notions of repentance, remorse, atonement, or making amends. Principles of godliness, morality, and integrity call upon all of us to repent and make amends for our transgressions. HB 853 encourages such repentance, expiation, and making amends, rather than challenging convictions.

Incredibly, you will find that the state's attorneys leading the charge of the opposition to this bill are in opposition to *any* process that encourages repentance, expiation, or the ability to make amends within our community. Indeed, they oppose all parole processes—any notion of modifying a sentence based on demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation. They speak about truth in sentencing while totally ignoring a sentencing court's decision or intent to provide an errant with a future opportunity to redeem their lives. In the opposition's view, all prisoners are incorrigible. That notion is dispelled by the profound goodness that so many who have been given a second chance are giving back to their communities right now. The opposition leaders would have opposed their release too. The Life After A Second Chance Docuseries illustrates some of these stories: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEy4PVRxGtI>

Thank you for considering my testimony, and I urge you to vote **favorably** on the **Maryland Second Look Act HB 853**.

Thank you,

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