

February 14, 2025

Honorable Delegate Luke H. Clippinger, Chairman
House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building 6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD. 21401

Written Testimony in SUPPORT of HOUSE BILL – 853
(The Maryland Second Look Act)
CRIMINAL PROCEDURE - PETITION TO REDUCE SENTENCE
Sponsored by Delegate Cheryl E. Pasteur

Dear Chairman Clippinger,
and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Anthony Wazir Muhammad.¹ Almost 32-years ago, on January 26, 1993, at the age of 15, I was arrested on two murder charges in Baltimore City. Ultimately, I was convicted and sentenced to life plus 20-years in prison.

The judge who sentenced me mistakenly believed that I was unredeemable, unreformable, and that the crimes I committed were unreconcilable. She stated that I had “*little prospect of ever being able to come out and function,*” and that I showed very “*little hope of rehabilitation.*” Even though I had no prior adult criminal record, and only one minor juvenile offense, my sentencing judge was unconvinced that “*job training, education, and such would make [me] a safe citizen,*” and in her most condemning remarks stated her belief that if I was ever given the opportunity to commit these crimes again, “*it would happen.*”

¹ My birth name is *Anthony Sylvester Fair*. In 2021, I legally changed my name.

Thankfully, the judge who sentenced me was all wrong about me.

On September 20, 2022, I was released under the Maryland *Juvenile Restoration Act* (JRA), a recent law passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2021, and allows juvenile offenders who were convicted as adults and have served a minimum of 20-years of incarceration to petition the court to modify a sentence, if the individual can prove that he is not a danger to the public, and that the interest of justice will be better served by a reduced sentence.

After serving 29-years, 7-months, and 29-days, I was released under the JRA – with the full support of then Baltimore City State’s Attorney Marilyn Mosby and her former Sentencing Review Unit Division Chief, Becky Feldman.²

Interestingly, the judge who released me under the JRA, the Honorable Judge Yvette Bryant of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, said the exact opposite about me than the judge who sentenced me. In fact, Judge Bryant stated that what I was able accomplished during my incarceration was so remarkable, that in all her years on the bench, I was the very first violent offender that she had absolutely no reservations about releasing back into the community.

There are no words adequate to express the depths of my remorse for the crimes that I committed. I made a horrible decision. It was the worst decision I ever made in my life, and I will always deeply regret my actions. However, egregious as my crimes were, they were not the result of “*permanent incorrigibility,*” “*irreparable corruption,*” or “*exhibit such irretrievable depravity that rehabilitation is impossible.*” As the distinguished civil rights attorney, author of the book *Just Mercy*, and founder of the *Equal Justice Initiative*, Brian Stevenson, once said - “*Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.*”

² BALTIMORE BANNER NEWS ARTICLE:
<https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/community/criminal-justice/it-means-everything-how-the-juvenile-restoration-act-has-provided-a-second-chance-for-people-sentenced-as-children-to-prison-in-maryland-HDCZ6OY2TFAR3G4IUK6VKUTJUM>

Thankfully, among all that I have been able to accomplish since my release, most notable, through the Baltimore Community Mediation Center, I was blessed to participate in a very successful victim/offender mediation with one of the families of the victims in my case – who gave me their forgiveness.

Now, I am employed as an advisor to *The Maryland Parole Partnership* (MPP), under Sonia Kumar, Senior Staff Attorney for the ACLU of Maryland. Together, we recruit, train, and assign attorneys, law firms, and legal clinics to represent *pro bono* inmates with life sentences during their parole hearings who have served a minimum of 25-years of incarceration.³ Unfortunately, Mr. Pratt would not be eligible for MPP services because his sentence is *without* parole.

In addition, I have now become part of the solution to crime and violence in Baltimore City, the very same community where I was once part of the problem.⁴ I am a Community Engagement Specialist with the *We Our Us* organization, a non-profit organization that serves the community. We are the new front line in the fight to make our communities a safe and descent place to live. We are the “*Credible Messengers*,” the “*Violence Interrupters*,” that go door-to-door, block-by-block, street-by-street. We put boots on the ground in the community as “*Connectors*,” “*Protectors*,” “*Mediators*,” and *Messengers*.”

Thanks in part to the incredible work of the *We Our Us* organization, which includes our *Stop The Beef* program facilitated mostly by returning citizens, in the last two years Baltimore City has experienced *historic* reductions in homicides & non-fatal shootings. While no single individual or organization can claim all the credit for these historic reductions in violent crime, Baltimore City Mayor Brandon M. Scott has highlighted the work of the *We Our Us* organization.

³ <https://www.aclu-md.org/en/maryland-parole-partnership>

⁴ MARYLAND MATTERS NEWS ARTICLE:
<https://www.marylandmatters.org/2024/03/06/commentary-once-part-of-the-problem-we-are-now-part-of-the-solution/>

The absolute joy of my community service work is being a youth mentor with *Baltimore Brothers, Inc.*, a program that provides mentorship, manhood training, and life coaching to Baltimore City youth. I am currently the facilitator of the *Baltimore Brothers's* program inside Booker T. Wahington Middle School.

In addition, I am a member of several groups that work directly with returning citizens. Particularly, the *1st Monday Empowerment Support Group*, which consist of over 300 returning citizens who served life and long-term prison sentences in Maryland and are now productive members of society. The leadership of this phenomenal support group is employed by *Living Classrooms*, which provide a host of re-entry services and resources to returning citizens.

Also, I'm a proud member of *The Maryland Juvenile Lifer's Support Group*, which is facilitated by the *Campaign For the Fair Sentencing of Youth (CFSY)*, an international organization with renowned interest in youth offenders.

In conclusion, long-term returning citizens are now working in collaboration with all community stakeholders. There is literally NOTHING that we are not doing as productive members of society. For example, in both Baltimore City and Prince George's County, we are employed by multiple agencies in city government. We are consultants to the Baltimore City Police Department on best practices for community engagement. We are partners with Maryland's Department of Public Safety & Correctional Servies at resource fairs to provide re-entry services to fellow returning citizens, and some are currently under contract with Maryland's Department of Juvenile Services through the *Thrive Academy* to provide life coaching and mentorship to young offenders.

Long-term returning citizens are contributing throughout the public school system, in multiple capacities. We are in all the local recreation centers. We are on college campuses and universities in Maryland. We are in law school programs and legal clinics. We have both joined and established organizations doing phenomenal work in the community. We are business owners, entrepreneurs, homeowners, hard-working, tax paying citizens.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that the vast majority of those who qualify for release under SENATE BILL 291 will join us in doing the same if given the opportunity – being productive members of society. All of the data, volumes of research, all prove that people age out of crime, and that the rate of recidivism for those who qualify for relief under this legislation is much lower than the main. We have hundreds of success stories in Maryland all around the country.

For all of these reasons, I urge a FAVORABLE vote on HOUSE BILL 853.

Thank You,

Anthony W. Muhammad