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Legislative District 10
Baltimore County
—
Judiciary Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1156: Maryland Parole Commission Membership

March 4, 2025

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

I am before you requesting a favorable report on **House Bill 1156**. This bill represents a significant and necessary reform that will enhance the efficiency, transparency, fairness, and accountability of Maryland's parole system. I strongly urge you to support it.

Currently, under Maryland law, the **Secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS)** has the authority to appoint parole commissioners, with the Governor's approval. While this process has worked in some ways, it has its limitations, particularly when it comes to ensuring that the selection of commissioners is based on qualifications, experience, and impartiality rather than political considerations. **HB 1156** seeks to address these limitations by creating a **Parole Commissioner Selection Committee**. This committee would be tasked with thoroughly screening and recommending candidates for the Governor to appoint as parole commissioners.

This change is crucial for several reasons:

1. Enhanced Transparency

By involving an independent committee in the selection process, **HB 1156** ensures that the process of appointing parole commissioners is open and transparent. This committee will vet candidates based on **objective criteria**, such as their qualifications and experience, rather than political connections. This process mirrors best practices in other states, where **six states**, including **Alabama, Florida, and Kentucky**, already use similar selection panels. These states have demonstrated that independent selection panels increase public confidence in the fairness and transparency of the parole system. It's time Maryland took a similar step.

2. Greater Accountability

Under the current system, the parole decision-making process is somewhat fragmented, as **hearing examiners** often have a role in making parole recommendations. **HB 1156** consolidates the responsibility for parole decisions fully within the hands of **parole commissioners**, removing the role of hearing examiners. This change makes commissioners fully accountable for their decisions, ensuring that individuals making life-altering decisions about parole are directly accountable to the public. No longer will

authority be delegated to individuals who are not subject to the same levels of oversight and confirmation. This change will ensure that those who have the power to determine an individual's future are thoroughly vetted and directly answerable for their decisions.

3. **Improved Efficiency and Structure**

The creation of the Parole Commissioner Selection Committee will bring greater **structure and consistency** to the selection process. This standardized approach ensures that the most qualified individuals are chosen to make these critical decisions, minimizing the influence of political motivations and increasing the overall quality of the parole decision-making process. A structured, transparent selection process will result in a more competent and effective Parole Commission that can better serve the needs of both incarcerated individuals and the public.

HB 1156 aligns Maryland with national trends that are pushing for more **fairness, transparency, and accountability** in parole systems. It will help enhance public trust in the parole process, ensuring that decisions are made by individuals who are not only qualified but also held to the highest ethical standards.

By supporting **HB 1156**, we are taking a significant step toward improving Maryland's parole system—making it more transparent, accountable, and effective. It is a reform that will help ensure that decisions regarding parole are made by people who are well-qualified, fair, and answerable to the public.

I thank you for your time and consideration, and I strongly urge you to support this important bill.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "N. Scott Phillips". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

N. Scott Phillips, Esq.