THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

The Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 0853

Criminal Procedure – Petition to Reduce Sentence
(Maryland Second Look Act)

FAVORABLE

TO: Del. Luke Clippinger, Chair; Del, J, Sandy Bartlett, Vice-Chair; and the Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Rev. Kenneth Phelps, Jr., The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

DATE: February 18, 2025

In 2015 (2015-A011) and again in 2018 (2018-D004), the Episcopal Church adopted resolutions calling for comprehensive reforms on both the state and federal level aimed at reducing mass incarceration practices, disparities in sentencing and the humane treatment of prisoners.

Incarceration rates in the United States have quintupled in the last 40 years, and our jails and prisons now house 2.2 million people. State expenditures on corrections have increased approximately ninefold since 1985. These facts reflect changes in laws and sentences, not increases in crime rates. Moreover, racial and ethnic disparities rise as the severity of punishment increases. The Black imprisonment rate was more than five times that of whites in 2016; the Latino rate was two and a half times that of whites.

The proportion of the Maryland prison population that's Black is more than double the national average, making the racial disparity the highest of any state in the union. Disparities are most pronounced among those incarcerated as "emerging adults" (18-24) who are serving long sentences. "Nearly eight in 10 people who were sentenced as emerging adults and have served 10 or more years in a Maryland prison are Black. That is the highest rate of any state in the country." Keeping people incarcerated for crimes they committed when young is particularly problematic. We know that the brain does not reach maturity until a person is in their mid-twenties. And over the course of decades people can change radically.

Moreover, "people in prison are physiologically 7 to 10 years older than their chronological age," making their care much more expensive. Some states estimate that it costs four times as much to care for older prisoners than younger ones. Because people age out of crime by middle age, incarcerating them does not serve any counterbalancing public safety benefit.

So there are a variety of reasons—rooted in justice, mercy, racial inequities, inefficiency, and cost—to enact a Second Look Act.

The Diocese of Maryland requests a Favorable report

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