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A Deeper Dive Into Maryland's HB 1156

Overview of House Bill 1156's changes to parole commissioner appointments and the creation of a selection committee.

Overview

[House Bill 1156](#) will change the appointing authority and process for the selection of parole commissioners, adjust Commission staffing (with no budgetary impact), and ensure parole commissioners conduct all hearings.

Comparing Parole Appointment Across the US

Currently in Maryland, the Secretary of DPSCS appoints **10 commissioners** (with the approval of the Governor and the advice and consent of the Senate) and an **unlimited number of hearing examiners** (that do not require approval or consent of other governing bodies) to conduct parole hearings.

In most states, the Governor has the sole authority to select and appoint parole commissioners (i.e. parole board members), often with Senate advice and consent. In all but four states, the Governor appoints at least *part* of the Parole Commission. Listed below are the exceptions to the rule:

Secretary of Corrections | Maryland, Kansas

Maryland is an outlier – it's one of two states (Kansas, [Kan. Stat. § 75-52,152](#)) that permits the Secretary of Corrections to appoint parole commissioners.

Director, Department of Corrections | Michigan, Ohio

Michigan's Director appoints members with no approval or oversight from any other elected position or governing body ([Mich. Comp. Laws § 791.231a](#)). Ohio generally does not require any approval ([Ohio Rev. Code § 5149.02](#)) except one of their members has to be a victim / family of a victim who is chosen "in consultation with the governor" ([Ohio Rev. Code § 5149.10](#)). No other oversight is required by law.



Combination | Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin divide their appointment duties across multiple positions.

- Oklahoma | [Oklahoma Constitution, Article VI, Section 10](#)
 - 3 members appointed by Governor
 - 1 member appointed by the Chief Justice of Supreme Court
 - 1 member appointed by the Presiding Judge of Court of Appeals
- South Dakota | [S.D. Codified Laws § 24-13-1](#)
 - 3 members appointed by the Governor
 - 3 members appointed by the Attorney General
 - 3 members appointed by the Supreme Court
- Wisconsin | [Wis. Stat. § 15.145](#)
 - The Governor appoints the Chair. The Chair appoints the other three members.

Appointment Panels

Six states utilize parole panels to screen applicants and submit candidates to the Governor to choose from to select their appointee. HB1156 would make Maryland the seventh.

- Alabama | [Ala. Code § 15-22-20](#)
 - 3 member panel
- Florida | [Fla. Stat. § 947.02](#)
 - 5 member panel
- Hawaii | [Haw. Rev. Stat. § 353-61](#)
 - 6 member panel
- Kentucky | [Ky. Rev. Stat. § 196.701](#)
 - 23 member panel
- Massachusetts | [Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 27 § 4](#)
 - 9 member panel
- Utah | [Utah Code § 63M-7-202](#)
 - 17 member panel



Commissioner Qualifications

Training and experience qualifications for parole commissioners are unchanged by this bill.

[Md. Code. Corr. Servs. § 7-202](#) specifies that:

(b) Each commissioner shall:

- (1) be appointed without regard to political affiliation;
- (2) be a resident of the State; and
- (3) have training and experience in law, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, education, social work, or criminology.

Commissioner Salary

Parole commissioners are full-time, salaried employees. According to a [records request](#) submitted to the Maryland Comptroller, parole commissioners make between \$117k (commissioners) and \$132k (Commission Chair) per year.

Currently, there are 10 hearing examiners who make an average of \$99k per year. It is the intent of HB1156 that the hearing examiner salaries will be re-budgeted for the expanded Parole Commission.

From lines 28-30 (page 9) of the bill:

“SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That it is the intent of the General Assembly that any funds budgeted for hearing examiner salaries as of the effective date of this Act be re-budgeted for parole commissioner salaries.”

HB 1156 Correctional Services Parole Commission 3-

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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.

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BILL: HOUSE BILL 1156

POSITION: OPPOSE

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EXPLANATION: HB 1156 alters the membership of the Maryland Parole Commission from 10 members to at least 15 with a limit to 20 members and the composition of the membership. Additionally, the role of the Secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional services and the Senate are eliminated from appointing members of the commission. Finally, the use of hearing examiners would be repealed.

COMMENTS:

- The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (Department) operates the Division of Correction (DOC), the Division of Pretrial Detention and Services (DPDS), and the Division of Parole and Probation (DPP).
- In accordance with Correctional Services Article (CSA) §7–201, the Maryland Parole Commission (Commission) was established in the Department.
- Altering the membership of the Maryland Parole Commission from 10 Commissioners to at least 15 with a limit to 20 would have a significant fiscal and operational impact. The Commission would have to increase staffing by at least 50% and potentially 100%. This would include support staff, administrative personnel, and hearing officers. Increasing the number of staff members would require larger office space as well as office and electronic equipment.
- Hearing examiners provide tremendous support to the Commissioners. The hearing examiners do much of the preparatory work necessary prior to a hearing, conduct research, and support the administrative staff. Additionally, they draft new policies and procedures for the commission and serve as liaisons to other criminal justice agencies.
- HB 1156 also states the Governor shall appoint the Commissioners from among nominees chosen by a specific panel of members. The Secretary of the Department should be included in the nomination process due to the impact on the Department. Furthermore, curtailing the requirements of membership would reduce the number of potential applicants increasing the length of time to fill positions.

CONCLUSION: For these reasons, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services respectfully requests an UNFAVORABLE Committee report on House Bill 1156.