

## **TESTIMONY: Fair Chance Housing Bill (HB 1073)**

Good evening. My name is Gary Mitchell. I live in Salisbury, Maryland, on the Eastern Shore.

Because of drug addiction, I went from retail theft to an unarmed bank robbery. I emphasize unarmed to be clear—I have never physically harmed anyone. I served my time and was released from federal prison in 2022.

When I came home, I tried to do the right thing. I applied everywhere—fast food, mass merchandisers, anywhere that would take a chance on me—and I was turned away again and again. Eventually, my mother helped me get a full-time job paying \$13 an hour, while my 17-year-old cousin was making \$18 an hour at a company that wouldn't hire me. That's something to sit with.

An advocate later helped me get a second, part-time night job paying \$17 an hour. I would leave one job and go straight to the next, doing everything I could to make ends meet—yet I still could not secure housing.

There are no re-entry housing programs on the Eastern Shore. I was blessed to stay with my mother, who never gave up on me. But even then, I was denied housing simply because of my criminal record. Application after application. Denial after denial. And the fees kept adding up.

Eventually, one property manager wanted to help me—but because he knew how the owners felt about criminal backgrounds, he asked me to pay two months' rent upfront plus a security deposit just to push my application through. I was only able to do that because my aunt stepped in. Without her help, I honestly don't know where I would have ended up.

I am grateful—for God's grace, for my family, and for community support. But no one who has served their time and is trying to rebuild their life should have to face another sentence when they come home—a sentence of housing discrimination.

That is why I am here today. I strongly support the passage of the Fair Chance in Housing Bill. Thank you.