



Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

Continuing the Missions of the Stephanie Roper Committee and Foundation, Inc.

☎ 877-VICTIM-1 (877-842-8461) ✉ mail@mdcrimevictims.org 🌐 mdcrimevictims.org

LETTER IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 823

February 23, 2026

Headquarters

1001 Prince George's Boulevard
Suite 750
Upper Marlboro, MD 20774
301-952-0063
877-842-8461 (toll free)
240-929-0526 (fax)

Baltimore

1 North Charles Street
Suite 700
Baltimore, MD 21201

Carroll, Howard, & Baltimore Counties

Oakland Manor
5430 Vantage Point Road
Columbia, MD 21044
240-335-4032

Eastern Shore

240-335-4012

Frederick & Montgomery Counties

240-335-4021

Southern Maryland

301-952-0063

Western Maryland

59 Prospect Square
Suite 6
Cumberland, MD 21502
240-335-4013

The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center (MCVRC) urges an unfavorable vote on SB823.

Senate Bill 823 would shift full appointment authority for the Maryland Parole Commission to the Governor. Under current law, the Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services selects the parole commissioners, requiring the approval of the Governor and the consent of the Senate. SB823 instead forms a new 14-member panel that will suggest candidates to the Governor.

The proposed 14-member nominating panel is neither composed of experts in criminal behavior and recidivism nor balanced between differing philosophies of punishment and public safety. Under current law, parole commissioners are selected by the Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services; under SB 823, the Parole Commission would instead be effectively handpicked by the Governor. Of the 14 panel members, ten are directly chosen by the Governor, either through SB 823 itself or by virtue of their gubernatorial appointments to state positions. Only four are not gubernatorial selections, specifically the President of the National Association of Social Workers, the President of the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association, the State Superintendent, and the Executive Director of the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission. The proposed panel is heavily weighted toward social workers, treatment providers, and community organizers, and lacks a focus on public safety. Most of these members are unlikely to have had substantial responsibility for enforcing criminal laws, managing violent offenders, or directly protecting the public. Because they are not required to have experience with violent offenders who must be separated from the community, they lack the background needed to nominate parole commissioners who can reliably safeguard crime victims and the public. As a result, the bill would likely politicize and destabilize the appointment process, inviting contentious advocacy and lobbying from individuals with limited experience in penology who favor across-the-board sentence reductions and who may seek to reshape or obstruct the Commission's proper functioning for ideological reasons.

The bill's specific panel composition underscores this concern. It includes representatives from the Office of the Public Defender and prisoners' rights organizations that have repeatedly opposed and sued the Parole Commission, pursued resentencing mechanisms to bypass the parole process, and promoted non-parole avenues to accelerate releases from state correctional institutions. These are stakeholders whose stated objectives are often directly at odds with the regular operation and even the continued existence of the Parole Commission. Entrusting opponents of an agency's mission with a central role in selecting its most impactful leaders is unsound public policy.

Perhaps most telling of the bias in the nominating panel is that it only includes one token representative for crime victims to reflect the interests of those people who bear the greatest trauma from violent crime and parole decisions. If this were a serious effort to structure a Parole Commission dedicated to public safety and a fair justice system for all parties, at least half of the panel's membership would consist of victim representatives and the other half of professionals with expertise in criminal justice, parole and probation, public safety, and victimization. Packing the panel with social work and treatment-focused individuals, contravenes crime victims' constitutional right under Article 47(a) of the Maryland Declaration of Rights to be treated by all agents of the State with dignity, respect, and sensitivity at every stage of the criminal justice process. For these reasons, Senate Bil 823 is unconstitutional and should not be supported. Crime victims are profoundly affected by the decisions of the Parole Commission. Senate Bill 823's token crime victim representative on the 14-person panel is a mere disrespectful glance in the direction of crime victims; it is not a serious role in the parole process. SB 823 does not make an effort to treat victims of crime with dignity, respect or sensitivity, and should not be supported.

The Parole Commission makes vital decisions about releasing individuals convicted of the most serious offenses—people serving lengthy sentences imposed by judges and upheld through layers of appellate review. Maryland cannot allow its Parole Commission to be stacked with political appointees lacking the decades of experience required to work effectively in this role. Ignoring the primary role of public safety and the need for meaningful victim involvement in the parole process is disrespectful and recklessly disregards the real dangers involved in parole decisions.

For the above reasons, we urge an unfavorable vote on SB 823.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victor D. Stone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Victor D. Stone, Appellate Division Chief
240-335-4014; vstone@mdcrimevictims.org

Joined by: Joanna Mupanduki, Deputy Director & Kurt Wolfgang, Executive Director