

HB 016 – Correctional Services – Maryland Parole Commission - Members Incarcerated Adults – Favorable w/Amendments – February 27, 2026

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

In addition to being a formerly incarcerated Lifer with parole appearances before the Patuxent Board of Review and the MD Parole Commission in the double digits, I am a Parole Advocate and the former chair of the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC) Decarceration and Parole Subcommittee. The recommendations of this Subcommittee comprised of representatives from the Parole Commission, Division of Parole and Probation, DPSCS Case Management, Social Work and Program and Reentry services, Victim Rights Advocates, relatives of incarcerated Marylanders, Family Support organizations, legal clinics, law professors and parole advocates are reflected in this proposed legislation. The objective of this group of diverse stakeholders was to improve parole as a means of decarceration. Many of my colleagues have onboarded to the Sentencing and Parole Workgroup of the Maryland Justice Partnership (MJP) since the sunset of MEJC.

While I applaud the legislature's recent interest in our state's parole scheme, specifically, with regard to commissioner appointments, I believe HB016, falls short and can create bigger problems for Marylanders in the years to come which reflects limited collaborative discussion of stakeholders. For most of the Commission's existence, Commissioners have been primarily white, male, former law enforcement representatives with no term limits. Recognizing the lack of diversity of the Commission in an ever-evolving system, the Moore Administration redressed this issue by appointing commissioners from diverse disciplines and backgrounds.

While this has resulted in a more balanced Commission, the apparent lack of consideration of actual job performances of those not reappointed impacted morale. None opted to stay onboard as legislation provides until replacements were found. One retired before his term expired. For over two years, the Commission was understaffed until an influx of replacements were hired.

Additionally, it would seem that the four newly appointed commissioners around the same time detracted from the overburdened duties of the current commissioners. I would think this would be reflected in parole and revocation outcomes. Another frightening reality is that in the next 4-5 years, a new administration can repeat a similar cycle.

Theoretically, legislating a 90-day requirement to fill commissioner vacancies would appear to keep commissioner seats full. Yet the addition of a committee to select

commissioners along with having senate and gubernatorial approval seems to lengthen the appointment process. As this bill would have a lasting impact on Commission productivity, I am compelled to recommend more time and discussion centered on retention, reappointment, replacement, and even advancement of hearing officers to fill interim vacancies.

Thus, I urge this honorable committee to vote favorably for HB016 with amendments.

Sincerely yours,

/s/Gordon R. Pack