

Good afternoon. My name is Melissa Castro, and Bri was my best friend.

She is not just a name attached to legislation. She was a daughter. A friend. A light in every room she walked into. She had the sweetest, most beautiful soul, and I miss her every single day.

Losing Bri has changed my life in ways I never imagined. Her life was stolen by another person's choice that she should have never had that opportunity. To lose someone in such a sudden, violent way is unbearable.— it follows you everyday, especially holidays, quiet moments, and milestones she should still be here for. There is an emptiness where laughter used to be. There are memories that now feel both precious and painful. And there is a constant awareness that one moment changed everything by her murder.

When we talk about postrelease mandates and requirements, it can sound like policy language. But for me, this is personal. Behind every gap in the system, behind every missed opportunity for intervention or support, there are real people whose lives are forever altered.

If stronger postrelease programs, better supervision, or more structured reintegration can prevent even one family from experiencing this kind of loss, then this work matters. Studying the current approach for violent and gang affiliated felons is essential because we need to identify where the gaps are to address Maryland's high Reincarceration rates. We can help guide the people being released into our communities by ensuring they utilize and grow from these programs for their success.

I cannot bring Bri back. I would give anything if I could. But I can stand here today and ask that her name represents change — thoughtful, thorough and meaningful change that protects others and strengthens the systems meant to keep communities safe.

Bri deserved a long, full life just like everyone here. She didn't get that but we can ensure what happened to her doesn't keep happening.

Thank you for listening, and for taking this work seriously.