



Testimony - HB 759, Criminal Procedure - Motion to Reduce Duration of Sentence -
Repeal of Sentencing Date Limitation
Favorable
House Judiciary Committee
February 17, 2026
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Honorable Chairwoman Bartlett & Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Maryland has made important and nationally recognized progress in sentencing reform over the past several years. The enactment of the Juvenile Restoration Act and the Maryland Second Look Act reflected a bipartisan understanding that young people are fundamentally different from adults, that they possess a unique capacity for growth and rehabilitation, and that our justice system must allow for meaningful review of lengthy sentences imposed on our youth.

These reforms were grounded in decades of research and constitutional principles recognizing that children and young adults have diminished culpability and heightened capacity for change. They created a mechanism for judicial review after 20 years of incarceration—offering a second look at sentences imposed when individuals were very young, often under circumstances shaped by immaturity, trauma, or limited decision-making capacity.

However, despite this significant progress, an inconsistency remains.

Under current law, individuals who were convicted as adults for offenses committed while they were minors are eligible to file a motion to reduce the duration of their sentence only if they were sentenced before October 1, 2021. This sentencing-date limitation creates an arbitrary distinction between individuals based solely on when their sentencing occurred—not on their age at the time of the offense, not on their rehabilitation, and not on public safety considerations.

House Bill 759 corrects that inconsistency by repealing the sentencing-date limitation. It ensures that all individuals who were convicted as adults for conduct committed when they were minors—and who have served at least 20 years—are treated equally under the law. The bill does not guarantee release. It simply guarantees access to judicial review.

Importantly, the existing procedural safeguards remain in place. The court must hold a hearing. The individual must be present. The State may present evidence in support of or opposition to the motion. Victims are notified and may submit victim impact statements. Judges retain full discretion to deny relief where appropriate. Public safety remains paramount.

This bill aligns Maryland law with the spirit and intent of prior reforms. If we believe that youth matters at sentencing—and Maryland has clearly said that it does—then access to review should not turn on a technical cutoff date. Justice should be consistent, not contingent.

SEIU Local 500 supports policies that strengthen communities, promote fairness, and recognize the human capacity for change. Many of our members work in public institutions and see firsthand the importance of rehabilitation and reintegration. A system that allows courts to reassess sentences imposed on children after decades of demonstrated growth is not soft on crime—it is smart, equitable, and rooted in evidence.

House Bill 759 completes the work that the Juvenile Restoration Act and the Maryland Second Look Act began. It removes an arbitrary barrier and ensures that similarly situated individuals are treated similarly under the law.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 759.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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