



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 17, 2026

HB 759

Criminal Procedure - Motion to Reduce Duration of Sentence - Repeal of Sentencing Date Limitation

House Judiciary Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of House Bill 759. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

In 2021, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 494, prohibiting a court from imposing a sentence of life without parole on a person who was less than eighteen years of age at the time the offense was committed. Furthermore, it would allowed a court to review a sentence for an offense committed under the age of eighteen after an individual has served twenty years of their sentence. The legislation dictates that courts must now consider factors such as age at the time of the offense, the nature of the offense, good behavior, academic achievement, family circumstances and demonstrated rehabilitative nature. The legislation, however, limited such review to offenses committed prior to October 21, 2021.

That aforementioned temporal limitation has posed a constitutional inconsistency, as Maryland's Second Look Act subsequently expanded the judicial review mechanism to include certain individuals who were ages 18 to 24 at the time of their offense. Thus, where individuals ages 18 to 24 receive an opportunity for review, individuals under 18 do not if the offense was committed after 2021. For example, if a 15-year-old child and 24-year-old adult were arrested today as co-defendants, the 24-year-old would receive sentence review after 20 years while the 15-year-old youth would not. After a decade and a half of U.S. Supreme Court jurisprudence emphasizing how children are different than adults for the purposes of criminal sentencing, it is contrary to Constitutional protections that individuals 18 and over receive sentencing review while children under 18 do not.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that "society must never respond to children who have committed crimes as though they are somehow equal to adults fully formed in conscience and fully aware of their actions." (*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, USCCB, 2000)

House Bill 759 is an impactful technical correction and we thus request a favorable report.