



PREPARE
PREpare for PARole and REentry

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SB0823 - Correctional Services - Maryland Parole Commission - Members - UNF

I am a formerly incarcerated parole advocate who co-founded PREPARE while incarcerated at MCIW. I have been assisting individuals in the parole process since 2017, and PREPARE has served over 2,000 parole-eligible Marylanders with education and support in the parole and reentry process since 2021. I have participated in several statewide collaborative workgroups since my release in 2022, many of which led to greater understanding of the administrative functions and challenges within the parole system. SB0823 contemplates identified issues in the Parole Commissioner appointment process, but as written would only slow the process down by adding the additional step of creating a Committee to review future Commissioner candidates.

From 2023-2025 the Maryland Parole Commission (MPC) experienced a staffing crisis. Seats remained empty for up to 2 years and the number of Commissioners dwindled from 10 to 6. The Secretary did not exercise her authority to appoint Hearing Examiners as interim Commissioners. Today there are 10 Commissioners, but the danger is clear for those with life sentences for crimes committed on or after October 1, 2021. Due to a technical issue in Correctional Services § 7-307 (c), they need 6 votes for release, even if there are only 5 Commissioners present in the meeting. When MPC is sufficiently understaffed, their process grinds to a halt. Furthermore, even now individuals with technical revocations sit in prison awaiting a Commissioner hearing for 3-4 times the 15 day maximum allowable sanction due to administrative hurdles. They are held for months while they lose their jobs, housing and transportation for infractions as minor as forgetting to update their address and then are sent out with nothing to rebuild their lives once again. Commissioner vacancies have real consequences.

SB0823 would exacerbate these problems by adding time consuming steps to a sluggish process. It takes time to gather a Committee, time to distribute and read CVs, time coordinate schedules for group interviews, time to debate candidates, write minutes and take votes. Meanwhile, the seat is empty and hearings are gridlocked. SB0823 also fails to improve fairness and transparency in the Commissioner appointment process by excluding impacted voices in favor of undefined “general public” seats that add no specific expertise and have no limitations to protect them from being used to pack and politicize the Committee. Today I urge an unfavorable report, but I hope to collaborate on a future version of this bill where each Committee seat is precisely defined, impacted voices are heard, and guardrails are put in place to prevent MPC understaffing.

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