

Bill No: **Lifers Bill (HB0003)**
Title: Parole Reform
Committee: Judiciary/Judicial Proceedings
Hearing Date: January 18, 2021
Position: SUPPORT

I have been volunteering with lifer groups in the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW) and the Maryland Correctional Institution in Jessup (MCIJ) for the past ten years. My heart goes out to these incarcerated individuals sentenced to life imprisonment with the possibility of parole. I believe that the Governor should not play a role in the parole process in Maryland. I urge a favorable report on this bill.

I personally know so many of these inmates and have witnessed their rehabilitation. Their crimes were committed years ago, many during their teen years. They are not the same individuals that they were at the time of the crime. Many were incarcerated due to a felony murder charge – didn't even commit the crime themselves. The Parole Commission is well able to review the records, the progress in the inmate has made while incarcerated, interview the inmates, and make a determination of whether the inmate poses any risk to society. I have personally witnessed the significant rehabilitation that has occurred with so many of these inmates. They have paid their debt to society and deserve a second chance.

Maryland is one of only three states that includes the Governor in its decisions to grant parole. The politicization of the process for releasing rehabilitated incarcerated individuals has kept these inmates with life sentences in prison longer than they deserve. The process gives the Governor far too much power in making these decisions; it leaves the Maryland Parole Commission essentially powerless. From Governor Glendening's declaration that "life means life" in 1994 to Governor Hogan's refusal to parole lifers approved by the Maryland Parole Commission today, denying parole to lifers has been based on the false and offensive narrative that these inmates cannot be rehabilitated.

I am a Maryland resident, taxpaying constituent of the members of this Judicial Proceedings Committee. The inmates that I know well with life sentences are stuck in this stagnant, unjust system. They do not deserve to die in prison. We Maryland citizens do not deserve to watch these men and women live out their days in prison after being promised true and meaningful consideration at parole. These inmates are being resented de facto to death by incarceration. It is unfair to their family members and it is unfair to Maryland citizens of good will.

I strongly urge the passage of this parole reform bill.

Mary Pat Donelan
8816 Besthold Garth
Columbia, MD 21045
marypatd@verizon.net