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HB 3

Correctional Services - Parole - Life Imprisonment

Hearing before the House Judiciary Committee, January 18, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) supports HB 3 as a matter of plain justice as well as governmental efficiency. It is time to give meaning to the “with parole” in a life sentence with parole by taking the decision out of the hands of any Maryland governor and placing the responsibility with the parole commissioners who are appointed by the governor and have the experience and expertise to evaluate applicants and make parole and commutation decisions.

Currently, Maryland is one of only 3 states in the entire US to give its governors this power. Since they have no expertise in making such important decisions, this amounts to a gut-check opportunity to bend to public opinion or political pressure not to release deserving, rehabilitated individuals approved by the parole commission. Even under the best of circumstances, this process results in unnecessary delay and a redundant level of review and approval already undertaken by multiple more qualified layers of government. This life with theoretical parole bottleneck now means that 10 % of Maryland’s prison population are costing us over \$70 million a year.

Most important, Maryland’s current parole system disproportionately burdens people of color at a shameful level. Worse than some southern states with legendarily racist prison systems, the percentage of Black people serving life with theoretical parole is more than double the percentage of the Black population of our state. 77 % of those counting on theoretical parole are Black.

The PJC is a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to racial equity and ending poverty. Its Prisoners Rights Project seeks basic justice through reform in our criminal justice system and an end to all unnecessary detention and incarceration.

The PJC urges a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB 3. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Debra Gardner, Legal Director, at gardnerd@publicjustice.org or 410 625 9409 ext 228.