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TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

January 18, 2021

Chair Luke Clippinger
Vice Chair Vanessa Atterbeary
Members of the House Judiciary Committee
Room 101 House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

House Bill 3 – Correctional Services – Parole – Life Imprisonment

POSITION: Oppose

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you to provide information about and to respectfully oppose House Bill 3. This bill would remove the Governor's oversight of the Maryland State Parole Commission's decisions to parole those who are sentenced to life imprisonment.

1. Governor Hogan's approval of paroles and commutations. Governor Hogan takes his executive parole and clemency responsibilities very seriously. During his term, Governor Hogan has paroled 26 people serving life sentences, either by approving the parole or allowing it to go into effect by not taking action. He has also approved or allowed seven medical paroles to individuals serving life sentences. In addition, the Governor has now commuted life sentences of 22 inmates, resulting in early release from incarceration. There is no reasonable justification for removing gubernatorial oversight from the parole process at this point given the diligent and proper consideration that Governor Hogan has given these matters. During the course of eight years, the prior governor granted two medical paroles and three commutations.

2. Current arrangement provides important accountability for Marylanders. The Governor's oversight duty in the current system makes policy on these sensitive issues responsive to the people. One elected official is accountable to the voters for the parole of offenders who committed heinous murders and attempted murders. An appointed group such as the Parole Commission is less accountable for its exercise of such authority than the Governor.

3. Governor Hogan, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, and the Parole Commission have been working to improve the parole process. The State has settled litigation in the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland involving certain parole issues for inmates who were sentenced to life imprisonment for crimes committed when they were juveniles.

The Hogan Administration, its Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, and the Parole Commission have been continuously working to improve the system for all inmates with life sentences in a number of important ways.

First, the Parole Commission has adopted regulations to ensure that its existing practices are consistent with recent U.S. Supreme Court and other federal-court decisions, expressly providing that parole authorities are to consider a juvenile offender's age at the time of the crime, demonstrated maturity, and subsequent rehabilitation to assure they have some meaningful opportunity to obtain release.

Second, Executive Order 01.01.2018.06 now provides that the Governor will consider all applicable statutory and regulatory factors in making parole decisions.

Third, the Parole Commission's process for psychiatric evaluations of inmates recommended for parole has been streamlined to make the assessments more convenient and timely scheduled.

Lastly, the Division of Correction is creating better opportunities for inmates with life sentences to achieve lower security classifications, which in turn will provide them with more and better opportunities to demonstrate rehabilitation, making parole more likely.

All of this is by way of explanation that Governor Hogan is actively concerned about these issues, takes his powers and duties seriously, and is diligently implementing practical reforms to provide suitable parole candidates with a meaningful opportunity for release.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 3. If you have any questions, please contact Erin Chase, Governor's Office at 410-974-3336 or erin.chase1@maryland.gov