

# MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



## Parole Incentive for Life

### What's the Problem?

Maryland law provides two types of life sentences – those eligible for parole and those without the possibility of parole.

However, some Governors have eliminated this distinction by automatically vetoing parole for every life-sentenced inmate – even those eligible, model inmates recommended for parole by the Maryland Parole Commission!

Besides ignoring the law, such action removes the incentive for inmates with life sentences to live with hope, to be model prisoners, and to support younger inmates to do the same.

As [Chief Judge U.S. District Court \(Maryland\) Frederick Motz observed:](#)

*That opportunity [of parole] has now been taken from them. The effect of these changes is to foreclose lifers from ever being able to obtain parole. Hope and the longing for reward for one's efforts lie at the heart of the human condition. Their destruction is punishment in the most profound sense of the word.*

### What's the Proposal?

This Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform bill would prevent Governors from removing the difference between “Parole-eligible” and “Without-the-possibility-of-Parole” sentences.

Rather than veto every parole, Governors would select capable Parole Commissioners who would make evidence-based recommendations, prescribing parole for inmates who earned it and providing the safest parole supervision conditions.

### Will this Work?

Other states that allow parole commissioners to grant evidence-based parole for those with life sentences have found much less reoffending for this population, compared to those with non-life sentences.

For example, California reviewed six years of statistics and found less than 10% of inmates selected for parole from life sentence returned to prison, compared to 64% of other felony inmates automatically paroled at the end of their sentences. See the recent article [“Record Numbers Of Life-Term Inmates Granted Parole In California”](#)

### Status of the Legislation

The MAJR-supported “Parole Incentive” bill would have amended the Maryland Code’s Correctional Services Article, Sections 4-305, 7-301 and 7-309 to maintain a Parole Commission that is fair, professional and responsible for Maryland public safety.

In 2020 the [Maryland Senate Bill 817](#) was introduced and sponsored by [Senator Jeff Waldstreicher](#). [Maryland House Bill 1219](#) had been introduced and sponsored by Delegate Luke Clippinger.

Learn More!

To learn more about how evidence-based parole can increase community safety and reduce new offenses, see the recent report “[Transition from Prison to Community Initiative of the National Institute of Corrections](#).”

The Justice Policy Institute took a close look at Maryland’s practice of denying parole to lifers. [Here is their summary fact sheet](#). JPI also published a thorough report on [parole in Maryland](#).

Learn how Walter Lomax and the [Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative](#) worked toward passage of similar legislation.

Read the 2017 [Lifers Conference Brochure](#)

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*The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan association of over fifty community organizations and churches with members in every part of the state, formed to support justice reinvestment. Individual supporters include judges, attorneys, corrections professionals, as well as returning citizens, victims, and service providers.*

Live links are found at: <https://www.ma4jr.org/parole-incentive-for-life/>