

# Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform

Working together for a criminal justice system that better serves our communities



## **Senate Bill 823 Favorable with Amendments Judicial Proceedings Committee Submitted by Olinda Moyd**

Chair and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR), an all-volunteer, non-partisan organization with 2,000 members statewide, we urge your favorable report on Senate Bill 823 with the proposed amendment.

We support the proposal that would reform the appointment process for commissioners to the Maryland Parole Commission. The creation of a nominating panel representing broad interests across the state will enhance the likelihood that these important decision-makers will better reflect the communities that they serve. The Maryland Parole Commission is charged with determining on a case-by-case basis whether incarcerated individuals are suitable for release into the community. According to their most recent, publicly available annual report, they hear approximately 6,000 cases per year for people confined in our state prisons and local detention centers.<sup>1</sup> They bear the grave responsibility of maintaining public safety while balancing the restoration of deserving individuals back to their families and communities.

The Maryland Parole Commission, like most paroling boards, plays a critical role in determining who is ready to reenter society after incarceration. When these boards reflect the diversity and values of the communities they serve, their decisions are more likely to be fair, equitable, and informed by a broad range of perspectives. Community representation ensures that decisions consider the unique needs, concerns, and experiences of the state. A broad nominating panel can ensure that the commissioners are diverse and can help build trust between the justice system and the community, fostering transparency and accountability. This inclusiveness also encourages policies and practices that are responsive to social realities, leading to better outcomes for both individuals seeking parole and the wider community. When commissioner appointments are purely political and heavy with former law enforcement personnel their decisions can

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<sup>1</sup> The Maryland Parole Commission, Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report. [Microsoft Word - Annual Report FY 2024 Maryland Parole Commission.docx](#).

be skewed. It is important that decision makers understand the neighborhoods patterns, lifestyle traditions, or cultural norms that people bring with them into the hearing room in order to avoid racial inequities and control inherit biases.<sup>2</sup>

Proposed Amendment:

8. [THREE MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNOR]

8. THREE MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC WHICH SHALL INCLUDE ONE MARYLAND RESIDENT FORMERLY INCARCERATED IN THE MARYLAND CORRECTIONAL FOR WOMEN, ONE MARYLAND RESIDENT FORMERLY INCARCERATED IN ANY MARYLAND PRISON AND ONE MARYLAND RESIDENT WHO IS THE IMMEDIATE RELATIVE OF A FORMERLY OR CURRENTLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUAL.

The current list lacks the important perspective of formerly incarcerated individuals and their loved ones. Including formerly incarcerated people on the nominating panel is crucial because they bring firsthand experience and unique perspectives on correctional operations and how the parole system operates in reality. Their insight can help identify gaps and challenges that may not be visible to other members of the nominating panel. Additionally, their participation promotes fairness, amplifies marginalized voices, and fosters trust within communities impacted by the justice system.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report with the proposed amendment.

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<sup>2</sup> *Racial Disparities Inherent in American's Fragmented Parole System*, by Olinda Moyd, American Bar Association, Criminal Justice Magazine, Spring 2021. [Racial Disparities Inherent in America's Fragmented Parole System](#).