

FEBRUARY 2025 NEWSLETTER

FROM OUR DIRECTORS



The first two months of 2025 have been extraordinarily busy as we have made several trips to Annapolis to advocate for proposed bills that will benefit crime victims and, perhaps most importantly, to oppose bills that would harm victims of crime. The most concerning bill so far has been presented in various forms over the past seven or eight years. It is referred to as the "Maryland Second Look Act," but this name is misleading.

This bill was introduced in the Senate as SB 291 and had a hearing before the Judicial Proceeding Committee on January 30, 2025. A similar bill was introduced in House as HB 853 and heard before the House Judiciary Committee on February 18, 2025, click [here](#) to read the press release. These bills propose that any violent offender who has served only 20 years (even if given a life sentence or a sentence significantly longer than 20 years) can file a petition to reduce their sentence, and the court must grant them a hearing. In the Senate version, these hearings must be granted every three years, while in the House version, they must be granted every five years. These hearings are in addition to any parole hearings or other hearings to which the defendant is already entitled.

It is important for residents and legislators in Maryland to understand that there are numerous ways within Maryland law for defendants to seek a reduction in their sentences after being sentenced by a judge.

Here is a list of these options:

1. A three-judge panel can review and revise a sentence.
2. A defendant can appeal an illegal or unconstitutional sentence.
3. Rule 4-345 allows for the revision of a sentence.
4. Good conduct credits.
5. Work task credits.
6. Education credits.
7. Special project credits.
8. Participation in Patuxent Institution and eligibility for early parole.
9. Post-conviction proceedings.
10. Release to home detention.
11. Parole.
12. Medical Parole.
13. Geriatric Parole.

14. Reduction or reconsideration of a sentence based on alcohol or substance abuse treatment (Health General 8-505).
15. Commutation or Pardon.
16. The Juvenile Restoration Act (for defendants who committed crimes as juveniles but were charged and sentenced as adults).

Thus, in the spirit of honesty, this should be considered the Seventeenth Look Act; however, it is not an exhaustive list.

The focus of our justice system should prioritize the protection of innocent individuals rather than finding more ways for violent offenders to be released from jail early. Granting frequent opportunities for resentencing undermines the importance of accountability for one's actions. The message conveyed by SB 291 and HB 853 is that violent crime may not lead to the long-term consequences that victims and society expect and deserve.

The provision in the bill that disregards the twenty years served if the State's Attorney's Office files for a reduction of the sentence is concerning. This is a power that should not be granted to the State's Attorney's Office, and the Maryland State Attorney's Association does not support this approach. It is important to listen to the families of the victims and those who are still grieving the loss of their loved ones. Therefore, the legislature should not allow any of these new exceptions.

The release of convicted murderers from prison poses significant dangers to society. Although older offenders often demonstrate lower rates of reoffending, it is misleading to assume that this means there is a negligible risk. According to the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), the chance of re-offending for those released between 2017 and 2019 is alarmingly between 9-21%. This statistic represents a substantial risk, particularly when considering the severity of the crimes committed.

Please reach out to your State legislators and the Governor to let them know that you oppose SB 291 and HB 853. Ask them to vote against both bills!!!

(Click here if you need help finding yours)

Thank you for everything you do to support us in this mission!

Joanna D. Mupanduki
Deputy Director

FROM OUR BOARD



I wanted to serve on the board for MCVRC because I felt that I needed to do more to help my community and bring attention to my beloved home, Cecil County. At home, we are still reeling from the national opioid epidemic and the lasting devastation from the COVID pandemic. Both my service as a court appointed child advocate (CASA) and my job as a local attorney placed me at the center of the deep pain experienced in my community. While Cecil County and the numerous, wonderful non-profit groups have, and still are, taking action to make recovery possible for those

struggling with addiction, I noticed that there were so many people impacted by fallout who did not have access to adequate resources to assist them - specifically, child victims and crime victims.

I knew there had to be something more that could be done to assist our most vulnerable neighbors and began my search for people with expertise. That is when I found MCVRC. I instantly knew I belonged working alongside this energetic, knowledgeable, passionate, and compassionate group of advocates. It was an honor to be asked to serve on the board and join the mission and the fight for justice and to preserve systems of justice that respects the dignity and rights of all people. I want to do my part to end the deadly stigmas and shame surrounding human suffering and bring dignity and hope to others wherever I go. Most importantly, I want to do my part to assist in bringing home some of the knowledge, resources, and victim support services that our community desperately needs. As a board member, I bring years worth of knowledge in strategic planning, organizational oversight, and law firm management. It is my deepest desire to see our local courts, government, and community members embrace, uphold, and work to strengthen victims' rights as we continue to fight against the devastation caused by crime, addiction, and poverty. I am honored to serve this organization and thrilled to be a small part of the solution. I cherish the opportunity to serve as a MCVRC board member, because I know how deeply committed the entire MCVRC team is to making these same goals attainable across the entire state of Maryland.

Sydney Comitz
Board Member

MCVRC Win

The ongoing impact of crime on the crime victim is lessened when the attorney advocate can effectively assist the crime victim in using the Victim Impact Statement and the Motion for Restitution to tell the story of how victimization impacts the life of the crime victim. In this particular case, a crime victim sought assistance from MCVRC in a case involving the malicious destruction of her automobile and attempted burning of her family home on July 14, 2024 in Pikesville, Maryland. The functional impact on the crime victim was worsened in this case, as the crime victim had been part of an ongoing scenario, where the crime victim had been previously threatened and tormented by the defendant, a blood relative, former co-resident of the family home, who had ongoing mental health problems.

The case initially was filed in District Court for Baltimore County, Maryland. However, the defendant asked for a jury trial at the initial trial date. On October 17, 2024, the defendant pleaded guilty to the threat of arson. The attorney advocate assisted the crime victim with preparation of a Victim Impact Statement, filing a Motion for Restitution and acting as a liaison between the crime victim and the Assistant State's Attorney assigned to the case. The attorney advocate also filed a claim for restitution.

After reviewing the Victim Impact Statement of the crime victim, the Judge ordered a presentence psychiatric evaluation for the purpose of assisting the court in sentencing the defendant. In this case, the Victim Impact Statement allowed the court to better understand the experience of the crime victim. It became clear that the crime victim experienced substantial emotional distress due to the actions of the defendant. While the Motion for Restitution outlined the financial damages, totaling the out-of-pocket expenses sustained by the crime victim, the body of the Motion articulated the actions of the defendant and the bizarre and dangerous behavior in which the defendant engaged.

On January 30, 2025, the defendant was sentenced to 10 years' incarceration, suspending all but time served and ordered the defendant to three years of supervised probation. Of the numerous conditions of probation, the most helpful to the crime victim was a no contact condition. Thus, if the defendant violates this condition by coming into contact with the crime victim or coming to her residence, the defendant faces reincarceration.

FREE Mental Health Counseling for Crime Victims

MCVRC has contracted with Safe Harbor Behavioral Care, LLC to assist clients in accessing mental health services **at no cost**.

We understand many victims face challenges in finding affordable counseling, and we are committed to alleviating this concern.

If you are a client or a victim of crime seeking mental health services, please call our office at 877-VICTIM1 to get on the referral list.

Lunch and Learn: Paths to Healing (Virtual)

PATHS TO HEALING (VIRTUAL) HEALING WITH YOGA

No experience
necessary & open to
all ages!

Find us on Facebook or
Youtube as we go live!



Recap!

[Click here to watch our past Lunch and Learn series](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

1. Survivors of Homicide Victims Support Group

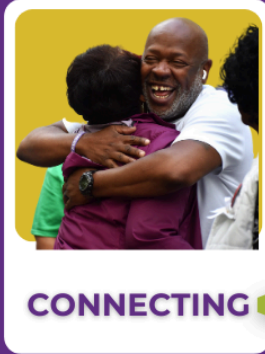
PLEASE NOTE that the next meeting will take place on **Thursday, March 6, 2025, and will be held on Thursday's moving forward.** It will be held in a hybrid format, both virtually and in person at the Upper Marlboro Office (1001 Prince George's Blvd, Suite 750, Upper Marlboro, MD).

The Support Group is a safe place for friends and family members of victims of homicide to meet, discuss, and support each other. All participants need to call us and request a referral to the homicide support group only (if you prefer individual counseling, we offer that too). **You can reach MCVRC at 301-952-0063 to get put on the referral list.**

2. 4th Annual Make a Difference Walk and Resource Fair

4th Annual

MAKE A DIFFERENCE WALK *and* RESOURCE FAIR



SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2025

Watkins Regional Park
Upper Marlboro, MD



Thank you for your support



We're excited to invite you to our upcoming Make a Difference Walk/Resource Fair, a FREE event for everyone to attend! This is your chance to make a difference while enjoying a day of community and connection.

Please create a team and/or register to attend and, if you feel it in your heart to support us, you can also set a goal to fundraise.

If you have any questions, please contact Sandra Sanna-Buckles at ssannabuckles@mdcrimevictims.org or call/text 240-335-4037. .

Click [HERE](#) to register!

Oliver Smith Jr. Award



Do you know someone who has shown courage in protecting the public or a victim from crime? We are now accepting applications for the Oliver Smith Jr. Award!

On February 26, 1997, Officer Oliver Smith Jr. was shot and killed outside of his apartment in Forestville, Maryland, during a robbery attempt while off duty. Officer Smith served as a D.C. police officer for three years and was a lifetime resident of Maryland.

MCVRC presents the Oliver Smith Jr. award to those who have shown courage in protecting the public or a victim from crime. These heroes may not always be police or first responders, they could be a neighbor or a stranger who just happened to be there.

We would love to hear your award nominations. Send your completed [nomination forms](#) to crosil@mdcrimevictims.org by **April 1st**.

Awardees will be recognized at our annual Make a Difference Walk and Resource Fair.

3. Save The Date: Ceremony of Remembrance

October 11, 2025

Join us at the Ceremony of Remembrance for a peaceful ceremony dedicated to those whose lives were lost to criminal violence.

More details coming soon! In the meantime, please submit your brick order [here](#).

#WHYWEFIGHTWEDNESDAY

Each day we find motivation to continue to be a voice for those who need one. We started these posts on social media last year, but since some of you are not on social media, we are now including our monthly motivations here.

These are a small fraction of the faces that motivate us. Their names and photos are taken from our Ceremony of Remembrance event slideshow. Each Wednesday, we share a life that was taken on that date and we celebrate them and use their face to remind us that crime is not victimless. These people are real and their families miss them. These faces are "why we fight."



Do you have events you want us to attend?
Do you have something you would like to
share in our next newsletter?

[EMAIL US AND LET US KNOW!](#)

Feeling the love ❤️? Share it here by
supporting our work 🙌! Your 💵 goes
a long way to support victims of crime
and their families!

Donate now!

MCVRC is a non-profit organization funded by government
and community grants, and generous contributions from
former clients and the public who believe in our cause.

Copies of this newsletter will be made available on our website: [Access it here!](#)



Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.
1001 Prince George's Blvd, Ste 750, Upper Marlboro, MD 20774

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