

# Mission

The Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative is a four phase initiative. Our mission is to promote humane and sensible criminal justice policies for those incarcerated long term in Maryland's prisons. By implementing policies of restoration, redemption and reconciliation, we can create long-term systemic change.

The purpose of this initiative is to organize, advocate and support prisoners serving long term and life sentences so these men and women have a meaningful opportunity to regain their freedom and contribute to the communities from which they came. The initiative began in 1995 when policies changed in the Maryland Division of Correction for persons serving long term incarceration such that parole for this group was effectively reduced to a trickle. Since then concerned citizens have attempted to change this policy but so far to little avail.

In May 1999 the first ever all day Seminar to bring members from the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches of Maryland State Government together was scheduled. The purpose was to establish policies, and if necessary, change law in this area. However a lock down of the institution where it was to be held caused the event to be canceled. It was again scheduled for December 2001, but the event instead changed into a photo op and general discussion by DOC officials.

The Seminar was rescheduled to take place in September 2006, but the tragic death of a correctional officer at the Maryland House of Correction, and its subsequent closing, canceled the event once again. Finally, in 2008, sponsors, partners, family members, and friends decided to host the event on the outside, and Phase I took place May 14, 2008. Phase II of the initiative was held on September 20 at Morgan State University in cooperation with the Social Work Department, chaired by Dr. Anna McPhatter.

We hosted Phase III January 10, 2009. This event was also partnered with Dr. Anna McPhatter and the Social Work Department. We listed this event as a 'Town Hall' meeting. The objective was to consolidate the support system, inform family members, friends and the general public of legislation to be introduced in the upcoming general assembly session, and discuss the issue of long-term incarceration on family members. Phase IV began with our having legislation introduced, Senate Bill 900 in 2009, and SB-901 and HB-940 in 2010. In 2011 we received a margin of success with the passage of SB-172 and HB-302. This legislation, though positive, does not address our over all concern, which is the politicization of the parole process. We will continue our efforts, and we need your support as we move forward to correct this inherent miss courage of justice. **'We will never give in, nor will we ever give up.'**

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## *Sponsors*

Baltimore Safe & Sound, Case Maryland, Fusion Partnerships, Inc. , Justice Policy Institute, Maryland CURE, Morgan State University Dept. of Social Work, *Open Society Institute Baltimore*

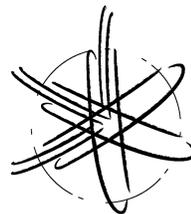
## *Partners*

ACLU Baltimore Legislative Department, Community Conferencing, Correctional Round-Table, Families Against Mandatory Minimums Baltimore Chapter, MSBA Correctional Reform Section, The Sentencing Project;

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# Maryl and Restorative Justice Initiative



When Justice is not blind, the Maryland Restorative Justice is working to Balance the Scales.

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# History

1993 Participation in Pre-release, work release and family leave programs ended

1995 Governor Glendening says "Life means life"

1995 Knox vs. State of Maryland

DOC ordered to create programs

1996 First bill introduced

1997 Habeas Corpus petitions challenging the policy

Court orders parole board to ignore Governor's policy

1998 Leadership conference at MHC

Uniformity from all three branches of Maryland state government

May 1999 scheduled seminar canceled

2001 Second leadership conference

December 2001 Seminar is photo op for DOC

Administration Change

Dormant from 2003 to 2006

September 2006 Seminar Canceled

2007 Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative (formerly The Lifer's Coalition) was formed

May 2008 Phase I hosted by Fusion

September 2008 Phase II held at Morgan

January 2009 Phase III Town Hall meeting

Phase IV began in 2009 with the introduction of SB- 900 introduced, and SB-901 & HB-940 in 2010 and will continue until there is a change in the current policy. SB-172 and HB-302 were introduced in 2011, and passed both chambers. This legislation gives any setting governor 180 to either deny, approve, or take no action in parole recommendations, in which case the parole commissions decision become final. This is not the legislation we sought, but is a step in the right direction, and as we move forward we need your support.



**When Justice is not blind, the MRJI is working to balance the Scales.**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability, it comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of people willing to make a change," - Faith with out good deeds is no faith at all-- Hope without action is like luke-warm acceptance from those who claim to care, which is more bewildering then out right rejection from those who don't." And, quoting our esteemed brother, Frederick Douglass: "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

There will be those who will tell you that we've tried this before, and it will not work. We'll remember Shirley Chisholm, Jessie Jackson, Al Sharpton, and now our newly elected president, Barack Obama, We'll tell them yes we can.

There will be those who will say, they will not listen to him, he's been in prison. Well, remember Malcolm X, (El Hij Malik Shabazz), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. Say to them, yes they will. And there will be those who will say, who do you think you are? Well, say to them, we are somebody.

The Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky once reflected, 'The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.' Entering into any of our prisons, is to witness mans inhumanity to man.

Walter Lomax was just 20 years old when he was wrongly accused, convicted and sentenced to life in prison for the robbery and murder of Giles Food Market Night Manager Robert A. Brewer. Now Mr. Lomax is leading a first of its kind effort in Maryland to transform the criminal justice system.

Despite the years of imprisonment for a crime that he knew he did not commit, Lomax never faltered in his determination to achieve the goals and vision that he had for his life, including getting an education. In May 1976, he earned a Vocational Education Certificate in welding, and in 1979 he earned his high school diploma. Between 1983 and 1984, he gained continuing education credits from Anne Arundel Community College and in 1986 he earned an associates degree from Essex Community College while still imprisoned.

Poetry, fiction, and short essays became a source of empowerment for Lomax. He became the editor of the prison's monthly magazine, *The Conqueror*. He used his skills as a writer to document the inhumane conditions in the Maryland House of Correction in Jessup, nicknamed "The Cut." He wrote about the abuses of power from the guards and the despair experienced by his fellow inmates. After being released from prison, his short essays, based in part on the horrors he witnessed in prison, were compiled into a book entitled *Mandela Conquers the Cut*.

Today, exonerated after spending 39 years behind bars, Lomax understands the plight of those who have been sentenced to life, and has been actively trying to address the problems they face in the system. "I spent two-thirds of my life in prison. The fact that I was innocent did not matter, I was still subjected to the same conditions as those who were [not innocent]," said Lomax. "I know first hand what they are experiencing...and I believe that I can be an asset to correcting some of the problems."

Drawing on his desire to make a difference, Lomax joined forces with organizations such as the Drug Policy Alliance, Families against Mandatory Minimums, Community Conferencing, and the Baltimore Chapter of Maryland's Outside Connection to launch the Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative (MRJI).

MRJI, informally known as "The Lifer's Coalition," is a four-phase initiative that focuses on "changing policy and advocating to create a mechanism for persons serving parole-eligible life sentences and long term incarceration to receive a meaningful chance of release." Each phase of the initiative is designed to put policymakers in contact with family members, friends, and other organizations that are looking to reform parole.