

# FREE STATE LIBERTIES

**ACLU**  
Maryland

WINTER 2024

## WE BELIEVE IN SECOND CHANCES

By Nehemiah Bester

Together with our partners at the Maryland Parole Project, we've created a limited series titled *Life After a Second Chance* to highlight the incredible community work of six formerly incarcerated individuals on these topics: Medical Parole, Community Engagement, Restorative Justice, Supporting Survivors, Race Disparities, and Family Reunification.

This project captures the contributions of people who return to our communities after serving extreme sentences. It demonstrates the critical

importance of passing the *Maryland Second Look Act* and legislation to remove the Governor from the medical parole process. Waiting on the Governor for months to decide on medical parole can be a death sentence.

In the 2025 Legislative Session, we seek to make the Maryland Parole Commission the final decision maker for all parole decisions for Marylanders sentenced to life imprisonment. We are also pushing for the *Second Look Act* to allow individuals who have served at least 20 years and have

demonstrated their rehabilitation, the ability to have judges take a second look at their sentence.

In the series, we do a deep dive on the stories of a few incredible humans. Their journeys speak for themselves on the importance of taking a second look. The film series is directed by Nehemiah Bester, who speaks to six people who have rejoined our communities from life sentences about what they are doing now and how we can safely bring more people home, dismantling extreme incarceration in our state. Throughout the series,

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# FREE STATE LIBERTIES

The newsletter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland and the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland.

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Documents and information filed under the Maryland Solicitations Act may be obtained from the Maryland Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401.

**COVER IMAGE:** Maryland Parole Partnership member Gordon Pack in his backyard. Photo by Nicole McCann.

**PAGE 2 IMAGE:** Gordon Pack has his hand on his wife's pregnant stomach, celebrating his second chance after parole. Photo by Nicole McCann.

**PAGE 3 IMAGE:** Advocates and Senator Jill P. Carter bird dogging at the state capitol to support the Maryland Second Look Act. Photo by Lorena Diaz.

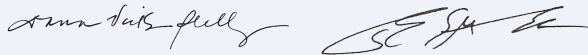
## DEAR FRIENDS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

The ACLU of Maryland is committed to centering and investing in racial justice work.

This year, we are looking forward to challenging unjust election systems, defending police transparency, championing immigrants' rights, advocating for free speech of activists speaking out against violence in Gaza, and protecting the rights of Marylanders who are incarcerated. **Together with community groups across the state, we strive to make a deep and lasting impact.**

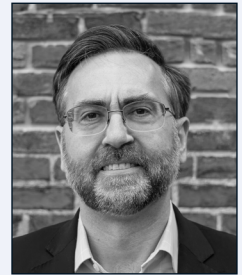
Thank you for showing up as members of our community. It is hard to overstate the challenges ahead. While we face more well-organized, better-funded opponents, we have a more powerful vision: **A Maryland where we can exercise our rights so that the law values and uplifts our humanity.**

With gratitude and in solidarity,



**DANA VICKERS SHELLEY**

Executive Director,  
ACLU of Maryland



**COREY STOTTELMYER**

Board President,  
ACLU of Maryland

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Nicole McCann worked closely with each person to photograph and capture their full humanity and the beauty of a second chance.

"If you don't believe that a man's soul can be redeemed, then you sell humanity short," said Bobby Stewart featured in the series.

Watch the series to find out what our fellow humans have done with their second chance, and why restorative justice and the *Second Look Act* are essential to improving the lives of all Marylanders.



Learn about our 2024 legislative →  
priorities: [aclu-md.org/legislation](http://aclu-md.org/legislation)

### GET TO KNOW OTHER ISSUES WE ARE TAKING ON THIS 2025 GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION

- Our state needs its own fully effective *Voting Rights Act (Maryland Voting Rights Act)* to protect the rights of Black, Indigenous, and Voters of Color, regardless of which direction the Supreme Court pushes federal law.
- Police Accountability Boards across the state need independent investigatory and subpoena powers to increase police transparency and accountability to the community.



## ADVOCATING AGAINST MODERN-DAY ENSLAVEMENT OF INCARCERATED WORKERS

Working with local civil rights and racial justice groups, and leading ACLU affiliates, we helped to support incarcerated workers. Activists and organizations opened the door to federal labor law protections in a Baltimore County jail work program.

## PROTECTING STUDENTS' RIGHT TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST VIOLENCE IN GAZA

Arab and Muslim students and their parents demand that the Howard County Public School System protect students' First Amendment rights and work to repair the harm caused by the school system's censorship of pro-Palestinian speech during the 2023-24 school year.

## DEFENDING POLICE TRANSPARENCY FROM FOP ATTACKS

Acting to vindicate police accountability and transparency obligations, we intervened with the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability in a sealed lawsuit brought by the Fraternal Order of

Police in Montgomery County, seeking to block the County's release of police disciplinary records and have Anton's Law declared unconstitutional.

## CHALLENGING THE GOVERNMENT'S EXCESSIVE FEES FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION

A series of disturbing complaints from Black Calvert County residents about invasive police searches led to us requesting documents related to these searches under the *Maryland Public Information Act*. The Sheriff attached a \$12,000 price tag to access the records. We sued, arguing that withholding public information is part of a troubling new statewide pattern, in response to Anton's Law. Thankfully, our lawsuit prevailed.

## CHALLENGING VOTE DILUTION IN WICOMICO COUNTY

Since filing the December 2023 case under the landmark *Voting Rights Act of 1965* to challenge the discriminatory at-large component of the election system for Wicomico County Council and Board of Education, Black voters and local organizations expressed

interest in collaborative reform to resolve the lawsuit. We hope this will bring long-overdue racial fairness to Wicomico County in time for the next state elections.



## LEGAL DOCKET 2023 - 2024

### NEW LEGAL DOCKET REPORT

The new ACLU of Maryland Legal Docket (2023-2024) shows our ongoing work toward justice with clients, colleagues, and partners, through new projects as well as developments in long-running litigation.

➔ Read the new Legal Docket and about our cases: [aclu-md.org/cases](https://aclu-md.org/cases)



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