



LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

121 Mystic Avenue, Suite 9
Medford, Massachusetts 02155
(781) 393.6985

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lieutenant Diane Goldstein, Ret.
Nevada, USA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Deputy Chief Wayne Harris, Ret.
Chair, New York, USA

Major Neill Franklin, Ret.
Treasurer, Florida, USA

Professor Jody Armour
Secretary, California, USA

Sergeant Terry Blevins, Fmr.
California, USA

Chief Mike Butler, Ret.
Colorado, USA

Ms. Nadine Jones
New Jersey, USA

Captain Leigh Maddox, Ret.
Virginia, USA

Captain Sonia Y.W. Pruitt, Ret.
Virginia, USA

Superintendent Richard N. Van Wickler, Ret.
New Hampshire, USA

Detective Sergeant Neil Woods, Ret.
Derbyshire, England, LEAP UK

Date: February 24, 2022

To: Virginia House Courts of Justice Committee

Re: SB 378 - Criminal Procedure Post Conviction Review

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I spent 25 years with the Richmond and Petersburg Police Departments, rising from patrol officer to chief. I am here as a speaker for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP) to support HB 378, which would allow courts to conduct post-conviction reviews of the sentences of eligible incarcerated people.

LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety, addressing the root causes of crime, and working toward healing police-community relations.

The most important barrier I see to law enforcement reducing violent crime is the cooperation of the community. Without communication from the community, we cannot prevent crime, and we cannot solve crime. Our detectives depend on information from witnesses to come up with leads, understand what happened, and close cases. We need the trust of community members.

HB 378 is a step in the right direction to help Virginia's officers regain that trust. This legislation would allow our courts to review applications for resentencing from incarcerated people, with strict eligibility requirements. If the court determines that the current sentence does not serve the interests of justice and public safety, it can decide a reduced sentence. These individual sentence reviews would contribute to restoring faith in the criminal justice system. I cannot overstate how important the community's

faith in the criminal justice system is to the police's ability to protect and serve.

We also know that shortening unnecessarily long sentences reduces overcrowding and frees up criminal justice resources to focus on those who really do pose a public safety risk. Some people change and can be rehabilitated. We must reserve our limited prison space for those who threaten our safety. In addition, having the opportunity for sentence review would incentivize positive behavior in prison.

Another benefit of HB 378 is that it would help address the dismal record of racial disparities in Virginia prisons. While comprising only 20% of the Virginia population, Black people make up over [50% of the roughly 24,000](#) people in Virginia's prisons. Many of these people entered prison over a decade ago. Their continued incarceration does very little, if anything, to maintain safety for Virginia. As this population ages, it will also require increased resources to keep them incarcerated. We can better use those resources elsewhere.

Allowing sentence reviews is the right thing to do - for incarcerated individuals, for communities, and for Virginia's justice system. Our neighbors in Washington, D.C. have already passed second look legislation. We should join their ranks in order to provide dedicated officers the ability to build community trust by not having initial arrests result in overly-harsh consequences for members of the public.

Many thanks for your time and the opportunity to write to you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Chief John Dixon (Ret.)
Richmond, VA