

Taj Mahon-Haft  
Christiansburg  
LD 1979

Honorable Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and Esteemed Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Taj Mahon-Haft, Ph.D., and I am speaking strongly in favor of LD 1979. I am also representing The Humanization Project, an organization who worked extensively on this very issue in Virginia, where earned sentence credits were expanded in stages in the last four years, producing SO FAR a 17% reduction in the prison population, four institutions closed permanently, hundreds of millions in savings, and, most importantly, tens of thousands of families reunited sooner and communities strengthened as release incentives produced more invested, equipped returning citizens.

What happened to public safety? Well, Virginia has the sixth lowest violent crime rate in the nation and since the last major wave of expanded occurred on July 1, 2024. Over 800 people with at least some violent convictions released on one day (and expedited rates since), and in the last year homicide is down 42%, violent crime overall down 7%, and even property crime is down 11%.

Why? Because we provided reasons to do better. Incentives work when linked with opportunity. Without these opportunities, we are simply warehoused, waiting endlessly and immovably for the other side. With these incentives, people can overcome that despondency and hopelessness. With a chance to prove our character and growth and a reason to do so, to return to our loved ones, we embrace hope and purpose. And we come out better citizens on the other side. Lower recidivism is the measured outcome, sure, but it's a product of hope instilled with opportunity, of a why to do better. And we all benefit. And save millions. And have more together families and communities.

This opportunity to testify arose in short order, though, so I do not have a chance to fully elaborate at this moment.

While I do not yet have full written testimony prepared, I will gladly meet further with any agency or actor seeking additional information or provide further written statements.