



Legislation Text

File #: 18-0081R, Version: 0

* **Warning:** This is an unofficial, introductory copy of the bill.
The official copy considered by the City Council is the first reader copy.

Introductory*

**City of Baltimore
Council Bill R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmember Henry

A Resolution Entitled

A Council Resolution concerning
Honoring Dr. Elizabeth Vartkessian

For the purpose of congratulating Dr. Elizabeth Vartkessian on her work with ARC, Inc. and welcoming the J.M. Kaplan Fund to Baltimore City.

Recitals

Whereas, The United States incarcerates more people than any other country, and examining who is incarcerated in our nation highlights serious injustices in the system:

- Racial disparities: African Americans and Hispanics made up 56% of all incarcerated people in 2015, while comprising just 32% of the US population.
- Mental illness: In 2012, there were estimated to be 356,268 inmates with severe mental illness in prisons and jails, more than ten times the 35,000 patients with severe mental illness in state psychiatric hospitals.
- Poverty: Recent studies have shown that the pre-incarcerated median annual income for those imprisoned is 41% less than for non-incarcerated people.

Whereas, The practice of life history investigation disrupts the systematic dehumanization of defendants by providing a detailed picture of their lives so that decision-makers such as prosecutors, judges, and juries have the opportunity to base their judgments on a view of the accused as a whole person, not just on the worst set of facts available.

Whereas, Dr. Elizabeth Vartkessian has worked as a life history investigator with defense teams throughout the United States since 2004 and has witnessed first-hand the impact that life history investigation can have in even the most contentious of cases.

Whereas, In 2014, Dr. Vartkessian founded Advancing Real Change, Inc. (known as ARC, Inc.) in Baltimore. Through the practice of life history investigation, ARC, Inc. seeks to promote the dignity of all persons, disrupt dehumanizing practices, and shine a light on the deeper truths in our society that must be addressed for real justice to be achieved.

Whereas, ARC, Inc.'s work now includes conducting life history investigations on behalf of especially vulnerable clients who are facing extreme penalties such as the death penalty or juveniles at risk of being sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, and providing trainings and consultations to defenders across the country in an effort to improve the standard of life history investigation and to expand its use, including bringing it to front-line defenders who are working on less aggravated criminal cases.

Whereas, ARC, Inc.'s clients are among our nation's most vulnerable. They are individuals who have faced significant challenges and disadvantages before they ever entered the criminal justice system, such as abuse, neglect, community violence, racial and ethnic marginalization, and poverty from which they could not escape.

Whereas, One of the goals of ARC, Inc. is to prepare the next generation of defenders, especially life history investigators. In pursuing that goal, ARC, Inc. provides career opportunities, internships, and essential training to students and young professionals in Baltimore. In particular, the Baltimore Mitigation Training Series provides an intensive, multi-day training to more than 100 participants, including students from local universities, annually.

Whereas, In 2015, Dr. Vartkessian was named as one of the inaugural recipients of the J.M.K. Innovation Prize, which aims to support and raise the visibility of U.S.-based teams or individuals addressing our country's most pressing needs through social-sector innovation. Specifically, the Prize seeks to support inter-disciplinary innovation in the fields of cultural heritage, human rights, the built environment, and the natural environment. In its first year, the Prize received 1,138 applicants from across the U.S. and selected only 10 as Prize recipients.

Whereas, In May 2018, the J.M. Kaplan Fund, awarder of the J.M.K. Innovation Prize, will host its semi-annual convening in Baltimore, bringing innovators from across the country to further develop their own practices as social change leaders and to learn about Baltimore's rich history of civil rights activism and social change.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of Baltimore, that the Council extends its congratulations to Dr. Elizabeth Vartkessian on her work with ARC, Inc. and welcomes the J.M. Kaplan Fund to Baltimore City.

And be it further resolved, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, ARC, Inc., and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.