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Mandel: Soon Out of Prison

Marvin Mandel's prison ordeal is coming to a close. With President Reagan's announcement that he has commuted the ex-governor's three-year sentence five months ahead of schedule, Mr. Mandel will be out of jail and back home in Annapolis in time for the holidays. His early release from federal prison in Florida comes after a well-orchestrated campaign by friends and lawyers to persuade Mr. Reagan that the ex-governor has paid his debt to society.

Indeed, Mr. Mandel has served practically all of the prison term set by a federal judge. He has never shown any remorse or contrition over his wrongdoings, which may have been one reason prison officials balked at releasing Mr. Mandel as quickly as his other six co-defendants in the mail fraud and corruption case.

After six years of trials and appeals and another 19 months in jail, Marvin Mandel at 61 can start afresh. It will not be easy, but the personal damage and humiliation he brought on himself perhaps has taught him better ways. It would be a mistake, though, for the ex-governor to rush back into the public spotlight, egged on by a gaggle of sympathetic friends and politicians.

Maryland has changed markedly since Marvin Mandel ruled the State House as undisputed king of the hill.

Voters issued a stunning rejection of his way of doing business in 1978 with the landslide election of the anti-Mandel, anti-corruption candidate, Harry Hughes. Most of the Mandel cronies have been swept out of state government and the old political rules—favoritism, behind-the-scene deal-making, heavy-handed lobbying—have been swept away, too. The public, from what we can discern, has backed these reforms.

The release of Mr. Mandel will come as a relief to many Marylanders—those who sympathize with the ex-governor's plight and others who are made uncomfortable at the spectacle of the state's former chief executive behind bars. But it must never be forgotten *why* Mr. Mandel was sent to prison. He disgraced the state's highest office. He lied, he misled, he enriched friends unfairly, he manipulated public government to benefit himself and his colleagues. His flawed career should stand as a lesson for all public officials, especially officeholders in Maryland.

For now, though, Mr. Mandel's thoughts must be on a joyous holiday season, something he has not seen in recent years. We hope he returns to Maryland a wiser man, one who can put his tragic missteps behind him and become a useful member of society.