IT'S TIME TO FIX OUR BROKEN PAROLE SYSTEM

Restore Parole-Eligible People To Their Families
The following is a very long document. It could have been much longer. It is worth taking some time to read it, though. It can introduce you to some people who have been hidden from our view, and who often feel they have been completely forgotten.

There are nearly 3,000 prisoners currently being held in Wisconsin’s prisons who are eligible for parole. All of these were sentenced in the last century, prior to “Truth In Sentencing” legislation. The letters contained in this book are just a sampling of the hundreds of such letters that have been received by the WISDOM organization in the past few years. They come from parole-eligible prisoners who have expressly given permission that their letters and names be used. Many, many other letter-writers have asked that we not share their names, for fear that it would hurt their already very slim chances of being granted parole.

Our hope is that when you read these letters, you will come to see these prisoners as human beings, not as statistics. Our hope is that you will for a moment share their frustration, and their hopes. Our hope is that you will understand a little bit about how a cumbersome bureaucracy can crush people, perhaps without meaning to. Our hope is that you will feel compelled to speak out – to talk to your friends and family, or to call your legislator or write to the governor, about these men and women.

There is a troubling lack of transparency and accountability for the decisions of the Parole Board. There is no appeal process, and no outside review. When advocates or legislators have asked the Parole Board and/or Corrections officials about the very slow rate of granted paroles, they are given blanket statements of dismissal like, “these are the worst of the worst,” and “all the people who could be paroled were released a long time ago.” We have been told that the lack of action for these prisoners is justified because “96% of these prisoners are incarcerated for heinous and violent crimes.” One advocate was even told by a DOC official that many of the parole-eligible prisoners don’t really want to go home.

Our hope in printing this sampling of letters is that when fair-minded people read the words of parole-eligible prisoners, they will demand of our state government that it immediately review its procedures and offer a fair chance for these men and women to gain their freedom, to be able to get on with the rest of their lives. We do not call for the immediate release of all 3,000. We call for an immediate review of all the cases, and an expedited process for the release of those who can be released safely.

Please take a few minutes to read the letters. Sometimes, their predicaments can be a little complicated, and sometimes the truth is a little bit hard to handle. But our parole-eligible brothers and sisters need to know that someone hears them and cares.

David Liners
WISDOM State Director
October, 2015
The Department of Corrections goes to great lengths in perpetrating the perception that parole-eligible inmates “pose some grave danger to the community.” Let’s examine the real facts:

- The number of inmates released on parole has decreased dramatically in recent years, from 1,146 in 2005 to 132 in 2012
- About 2,800 people whose sentences allow for parole remain in prison
- 400 of these inmates have minimum security classifications and are housed in low-risk facilities
- Many of these inmates work outside the institution, in the community, and operate state vehicles in order to get back-and-forth to work
- Under old law sentencing practices, judges imposed longer sentences believing the inmate would be subsequently paroled
- Truth-in-Sentencing inmates receive shorter sentences, and actually spend less time behind bars, even for the same crime


I am Jacqueline Battiste-Johnson, sister of John Battiste #145811. He was charged with 1st Degree Attempted Homicide and received 30 years with an additional 15 years for Use of a Dangerous Weapon (car) to be served consecutively. He has been incarcerated since 1996.

His first parole review was in 2007, when he received a 24 month deferment. In 2009 and 2011 he also received a 24 month deferment. In 2013, he received a 12 month deferment and in 2014 he received an 11 month deferment. This year, in 2015, he has received a 9 month deferment with an endorsement for reduced custody to allow for work in the community. According to their records, he is still a threat to society and hasn’t served enough time – even though he has had commendable behavior and been steadily employed since his incarceration. It has been reported that he is respectful and respected by staff and his fellow inmates!!

Thank you for the opportunity to present my brother to you,

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Battiste-Johnson

Those caught in this Catch-22 claim they have been denied parole eight, nine, and 10 times with claims of “insufficient time served” with no definition of what “sufficient” really means. Others say they are told they must complete various programs but are then denied access to those programs…

My name is Andrae L. Bridges and I write to bring an important matter to your attention. Increasing attention has been given to Wisconsin’s incarcerated “Old Law Prisoners.” Many of whom, like me, have proven rehabilitated and essentially remain in prison for nothing, and at enormous cost. By no means do I intend to minimize the seriousness of our offenses with that statement.

On March 25, 1992 – just six days after my 16th birthday, I was arrested and charged with First Degree Intentional Homicide – Party to a crime. I got waived into adult court and subsequently I was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole until 2037. That means after having served nearly 24 years, I have yet to be seen by the parole board and I won’t become eligible to do so until I’m 61. I’m now 39.

My crime was undoubtedly grave. I have acknowledged my role in the crime and have expressed deep remorse to the victim’s family. My life before the crime was turbulent and unstable. It was marked by physical, emotional and sexual abuse by the adults in my life, including family members. Although I do not assert my troubled childhood as an excuse for my actions, I do emphasize its importance as a mitigating factor that warrants reconsideration of the length of my parole eligibility.

After an initial adjustment period, I matured immensely throughout the years of my incarceration. I’ve earned my high school diploma, an Associate's Degree in Theology of the Bible, math and marketing credits, completed vocational welding, and various other programs like CGIP Phases I-IV and Restorative Justice to name a few. I have also held multiple jobs, participated in community service and a number of certificates. I am considered hard working and deep thinking by my supervisors and teachers. My record includes positive institution adjustment and evaluations, as well as letters from family, friends, corrections staff, LAIP, and community leaders supporting my release.

I am now blessed with an outstanding support system, including and not limited to my father, Peggy Swan of FFUP, Dean/Professor Stan Stojkovic, and a loving fiancé I am planning a life with. I have drafted an extensive release plan and will present well to potential employers upon release. These factors, together with my level of maturity, labor skills, support system, and desire to give back will significantly reduce the likelihood of me ever reoffending. The community does not need protection from me.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter!

Andrae L. Bridges (#248420)

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections said it costs about $30,000 per inmate every year to pay for housing, clothing, food and medical expenses.

Le, Pauleen. “Wisconsin prison system costs three times more than education.” News8000 LaCrosse 18 May. 2013
I am writing to you in regards to being considered for parole. My governing case is an armed robbery. I also have a felony for possession of a firearm and possession with intent to deliver. All of my cases are from 1998. I have been incarcerated for 17 years, since I was 21 years old. I am now 38 years old. I was eligible for parole 10 years ago. I have been to the parole board 12 times and was denied for reasons like not having served sufficient time, or that I’m a risk to the public. I have completed all of the programs that were required and more. I have been in minimum custody for over four years. I have been on work release in the community for over two years. I have followed all of the rules of work release and I haven’t received a major conduct ticket since 2006.

I’m currently on work release; I’m in the community every day. I have my driver’s license and I have acquired a couple of jobs skills. My pre-parole investigation was approved and I have 18 months until my mandatory release (MR) date. I see the parole board again in December. At that time, I will have 15 months to my MR date. I feel that I can be a productive member of society if given a chance.

Sincerely,

Devan Brooks (#286398)

I’m “old law”, in for armed robbery and murder. I was sentenced 50 years in 1986. I have nearly 30 years in; I was 32 at the start and now 61. This is my first and only incarceration. I have been parole eligible for 16 years and have yet to be given serious consideration. I took and completed any and all programs put in my path; some weren’t even required needs. I continue to get the blanket statement, “insufficient time served,” and in the Wisconsin system, they have full discretion, no questions asked.

When I was young, I saw things through a young man’s eyes. Since then, I’ve went through a metamorphosis of change. I’ve grown leaps and bounds; far more than I thought possible. I think that I have grown mentally as a man now. I think before I speak, and I think twice before I act on any level. The most important things to me these days are family, loved ones, and most cared about (PEOPLE). Everything else is secondary by far. I have three children, 12 grandchildren, one great grandchild, and an outstanding ex-wife who has shown me great care, loving kindness and help over all these years. I’d love to be in their company as much as humanly possible for the remaining days of my life; which at my age there may not be that many days left.

I haven’t had one serious conduct report since 1998/99. I have been working outside the prison for more than a year now on the Badger State Industries truck, making deliveries all over the state.

Thank you for your time and trouble,

Sincerely,

Mr. Eugene G. Buggs III ( #195003)
Wisconsin's broken parole system leaves inmates behind

Anthony K. Brown is still in prison and there doesn't appear to be any reason he should be. Brown is one of 400 minimum security inmates who are eligible for parole but remain behind bars at a cost to taxpayers of $15 million a year.

Do the crime, do the time. We get that. Under truth-in-sentencing guidelines, adopted in 1999, that is the norm in Wisconsin. The budget for the Department of Corrections now exceeds what we pay for the University of Wisconsin System.

But the state should not be warehousing 400 people in minimum security prisons when many of them could be released. At some point, a sentence must end. And based on reporting by the Journal Sentinel's Gina Barton, that time seems to be long past for Anthony K. Brown.

Brown committed a heinous act: In 1987 at age 17, he shot a man in the back and then watched as an accomplice shot the victim five more times in the head. Since then, Brown seems to have done everything he can to reform his life.

"It was a senseless crime that took place. I'm fully aware of that," Brown told Barton. "Everybody makes mistakes — some bigger than others. I made a huge mistake, but I'm no longer the same kid I was at 17. I'm thinking for myself now. I'm an adult."

Officials at Oakhill Correctional Institution, a minimum-security prison in Dane County, now trust Brown enough that he is allowed to leave the lockup unsupervised to work on a state-owned farm. In 2010, the Wisconsin Parole Commission ruled that Brown was rehabilitated.

Despite that, he hasn't been paroled or even given a job in the community — usually the final step before parole. Meanwhile, the man who fired the fatal shots was set free years ago.

At the heart of the matter is a secretive system for deciding who goes and who stays in the state prison system, Barton found. Although state law says the parole board should decide, an administrative rule within the DOC has given that job to prison employees serving on program review committees at each facility. The DOC told Barton it doesn't keep official records of who serves on the committees, making them unaccountable to the public.

The committees are in charge of making sure that inmates are enrolled in counseling or moved to low-risk facilities when the time comes. If the committees don't do their jobs, inmates won't meet the standards for parole. In that unfortunate case, there's not a thing the parole board can do about it.

It's unfair. It's cruel. It's a system that should be reformed. Inmates who have done what is asked of them and who pose no threat to the public should be freed. The state prison system now houses 22,000 inmates, triple the number in 1990. This broken system, and truth-in-sentencing, are the primary reasons.

Gov. Scott Walker, who authored the truth-in-sentencing bill while a state legislator, should end this unnecessary drain on taxpayers. He should demand that the parole commission and program review committees work closely together, which Barton found was often not the case. And he should demand that DOC keep accurate and public records of who is making these important decisions.

"We're not saying just throw the doors open and let everyone out," said David Liners, executive director of WISDOM. "But we need to take a fresh look at every case and be sure that we release the people that are able to be released."

Exactly right.
My name is Billy Clark and I am serving my first incarceration for First Degree Reckless Homicide. I committed my crime in 1996, and in 1997 I was given a 40 year sentence. In 1996 the law changed. The crime I was sentenced for used to carry 20 years. I was 19 years old when I committed my crime and I am now 39 (40 in three months).

I have changed a lot since I committed my crime. I have a whole new thought process now. I am a man now, I no longer think like a child and I no longer let others think for me. I have an outstanding institutional adjustment. I only have 5 minor conduct reports and no major reports in 18 years. I have received my H.S.E.D and completed a vocational class (WTCS Horticulture). I completed both AODA and Anger Management. I took a Per Compass Re-entry Assessment on 11/14/14 and they added a program (T4C) Thinking for a Change, they said my criminal personality is probable.

This is my first incarceration, I never had an adult record and my institution record is outstanding, so I don’t understand the added program. I first became eligible for parole in 2007, and I have seen parole 7 more times after that. I see them again in October. The reasons they gave me for denying my parole is, I have not served sufficient time for the punishment and that release at this time would involve an unreasonable risk to the public. I am in a minimum community and I have been working outside the fence in public for going on 8 months. I don’t think I am a risk. When I am released, I plan to keep thinking for a change. I plan to find work, no matter where or what it may be. I understand I will have to start the bottom. I just want a chance to prove that I can make it in society. One day I will own my own landscaping management lawn care company.

Sincerely,

Billy Clark (#342745)

Retired Dane County Circuit Judge Daniel Moeser said he’s troubled by the sharp drop off in paroles, which he said are part of the “checks and balances” in the criminal justice system.

Moeser said as a judge, he had the impossible task of guessing whether an offender would be ready for release years later. He said the possibility of parole gives offenders incentive to improve their behavior in prison and take advantage of programming that could boost their chances of success on the outside.

Halting parole, Moeser said, would be “a politically motivated position, frankly, which does not recognize the fact that some people grow and mature.”

Hall, Dee J. “Paroles plummet under Scott Walker.” Wisconsin State Journal 2 March. 2014
In 1996 I was convicted of Reckless Homicide at the age of 25. Today at the age of 44, I know that I am not the same person who committed such a mindless, selfish act nearly 20 years ago. Every day I’ve learned to acknowledge and finally accept responsibility as I have been thoroughly educated through time and various programs I’ve participated in, such as HSED, AODA, CGIP and all Reentry program modules. Presently I work as a “Physical Aide Support” at Oakhill.

Along with WI DOC structures and the much needed and greatly appreciated support of my family, I believe that I am a new and fairly educated man who is ready to go home and maybe find some kind of work where I could help others learn to avoid a life of crime, a lifestyle that only hurts others, family and self.

July 7, 2015 was the date of my most recent parole hearing, I was once again denied. I have been eligible for parole since 2006. In Minnesota (a very productive state) a same or similar case would have resulted in a sentence of less than 20 years. One sentence with a max of 2/3 in prison and 1/3 on parole, with an actual time in prison being approximately 14 years total.

At this point in time all I’ve become to the state of Wisconsin is a commodity and that in itself is becoming tragic as hope and programs are senselessly deferred. My future will result in success. I’ve had enough and I choose to become a benefit, being responsible to my family, society and myself.

Sincerely,

Mark Collins (#287101)

Madison, Wis. (AP) -- A new report says Minnesota has nearly twice the people on probation or parole as Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Taxpayer Alliance study found Minnesota had 132,541 people on probation or parole as of 2007. Wisconsin had 70,216.

Wisconsin has more than twice the number of prison inmates. Wisconsin prisons housed 23,577 in 2008 compared with 9,964 in Minnesota prisons.

The report says Wisconsin arrests more people than Minnesota, Wisconsin has truth-in-sentencing provisions and Minnesota has shifted toward probation and community-based programs for lesser offenses.

As a result, Wisconsin is spending far more on corrections than Minnesota. In 2008, Wisconsin spent more than a billion dollars compared with about $460 million in Minnesota.

News 18. “Minnesota has twice the people on probation or parole as Wisconsin.” WQOW Eau Claire 29 Apr. 2010
My name is Kevin Cook and I have been incarcerated since 1994 for reckless homicide with endangering safety. The man that is writing this letter today is a man in every sense of the word. My maturation process began in 2003 while residing in Oshkosh Correctional Facility when I had the most amazing revelation. In the month of June I was given a nine year override by the Program Review Committee to go to medium custody. I chose to go to Oshkosh for two reasons; one of them being to take the Culinary Arts program and the other was to meet up with my younger brother who was there alone. I wanted to talk to my brother before he left prison to go back to the streets. I wanted him to understand the importance of a changed life. I wanted to show him that true commitment starts within.

Immediately upon my arrival at Oshkosh, I came to realize that I was just given the most amazing opportunity to change my life and needless to say, I took complete advantage of the opportunity. It was in Oshkosh that I renounced all gang affiliation. I took a good look at my life and where it could go, after being liberated from the gang, everything else fell right into place. I enrolled in the Culinary Arts program and after nine months, I graduated with a “B.” Up until that point I had never graduated from anything that major. Soon after graduating from the course, I was given the opportunity to participate in the apprenticeship program offered to top graduates. All in all, I spent four years in the field of Culinary Arts and I’ve gained so much knowledge from the whole experience. I gained an understanding of the job opportunities this gives me. I will have many doors opened to me with the credentials I’ve acquired. While taking the Apprenticeship program, I was given the opportunity to take a Microsoft Office Computer course.

Aside from the education I received, I also participated in a few groups that helped me gain a whole new perspective into how my life and the choices I made impacted society and how I stood as a member of society. The Victim Impact groups as well as Restorative Justice groups were the most impactful and life changing groups I had the privilege of attending. Every time I arrive at the choices that I make now, it’s because I attended those groups. I haven’t been in solitary confinement in almost 20 years and haven’t had a major conduct report in just as long. I learned how to view others and how I must put others first before I consider my own personal agenda. I learned how crime and victims can be avoided if I take the time to correct my thinking.

I realize that I deserved to serve a severe penalty for the crime I committed. However, I ask you this, “How severe is severe meant to be?” and “How severe is too severe?” Was I put in prison only to serve a 54 year sentence or was I sent to prison with the hopes of rehabilitation? I believe I was given this time to bring me to a better understanding and not to simply lock me up and throw away the key. I have used this time to get rehabilitated and to become a better future member of society. Why can’t I be given the opportunity to prove that it wouldn’t be a mistake to release me back into society?

Thank you for your consideration,

Kevin Cook (# 241566)
My name is Devon’tre Cottingham Sr. and at 17 years of age, I was a getaway driver and found guilty of a party to the crime of armed robbery and party to the crime of attempted homicide. I was sentenced 55 years. I am now 35 and I have spent more time incarcerated then I did free.

I now see clearly the errors of my youth. “For when I was a child, I thought, spoke and understood as a child. But now that I am a man, I put away my childish ways.” I now have two adult children of my own whom I continue to assist in navigating youthful errors in judgement. Since my incarceration I received my high school equivalency diploma. I am a Nationally Certified Carpenter through the National Center for Construction Education and Research I have a degree in cabinetry through the NE Wisconsin Technical College and in culinary arts through Gateway Technical College. I am a Certified Tutor through the Leadership Volunteers of America; where I assisted over 100 men obtain their GED/HSED.

I have completed all institutional programming, some mandatory, but most voluntarily. These include Cognitive Thinking, Anger Management, Restorative Justice, Victim Impact, Challenges and Possibilities, Peace Studies, Conflict Resolution, and many more.

I have come to terms with my crime and the role I partook. I have without a doubt learned my lesson in these 18 years, not the 55 years I was excessively sentenced to. My victim addressed the court and said, “He feels 20 years would be an appropriate sentence for the driver.” The Parole Commissioner here agrees that I was sentenced too harshly considering other prisoners he had dealt with who have similar crimes and some worse received less time, but insists that more time is warranted, not for rehabilitation, but for the lengthy sentence.

I am not trying to take away from the seriousness of this situation. I am merely pleading to the public for a second chance to show that I am and can be a positive, productive person in society, who knows better and does better.

Respectively,

Devon’tre Cottingham Sr. (#337418)

My name is Darrell E Crowe and I am from the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, the poorest county in the state. I was locked up a month and a half after I turned 18, back in March of 1993. I was given 40 years for robbery, armed burglary and substantial battery. The substantial battery is the only violent crime I have and the one I regret the most. I now have more than 50% of my time in, but you wouldn’t even know that the way parole talks to me. It’s as though they could care less, but it seems as though I am closer to getting out now then I was at day one. No matter what I do or say, it doesn’t matter. I’ve received my HSED, a Masonry Certificate and completed Anger Management. I’ll be doing a good 25 or 26 years in prison for things I did when I was still a kid.

Yours Truly,

Darrell Crowe (#268591)
My name is Victor L. Cruz # 219920. On 5/96 I was sentenced to a term of 45 years for 1st Degree Reckless Homicide, Gang Related Party to a Crime. I have been eligible for parole since 2007. I am scheduled to see the Parole Board this October.

Please allow me to put a face behind these words. I was 21 years old when I committed this crime. I was going through a chaotic period in my life. I did not have any direction; therefore, I did not care how I affected other people. Although I had the love of my parents, I absolutely took it for granted, along with my freedom.

This time in prison has been difficult and it has affected me in the most profound way. I truly believe that prison saved my life. I’m no longer involved in any suspect gang life-style. This change really took hold about 15 years ago. I thought about my victims, their families and how I affected my family as well, with this senseless crime. For the first time in my life, I cried because of the pain I inflicted on everyone. I realized that I had to make a change. I can now say with conviction that I am a better man, son, father, family member, and human being. In my continued growth, I’ve have completed all of my A&E needs. (IE: Anger Management, AODA, Voc. Ed., CGIP Phase I & II and Reentry Modules)

At my last parole hearing (2/15), I was given an 8 month deferment with consideration/endorsement for reduced security, as well as community work opportunities. On 8/15, I saw PRC/Classification and I was given reduced security with community custody. At PRC I requested to be transferred to a Center because I would like to obtain my driver’s license. OCI does not have that opportunity. I was denied my request and told it was because of my Mandatory Release (MR) date. Parole Commissioner Davidson told me that my consideration/endorsement is for solely just that; no outside the fence institution job. This is where the problem lies. I will do my very best to accomplish what parole has set in front of me by obtaining Community Custody employment. I’ve held employment since coming to OCI 1/14 and I have applied for jobs outside the fence with no success. The “normal” saying is I have not been here long enough or parole hasn’t shown serious enough consideration for your reduction by not endorsing PRC with their deferment.

I just want the opportunity to steadily transition/move forward to make my parole a realistic possibility. I’d also like to point out that I have never failed to live up to the expectations of group facilitators, employers, and staff, who have taken a chance on me. Please know that I am extremely sorry for the life that was taken and I understand that I have to be punished for my actions. Thank you for your time and attention. It was greatly appreciated.

Respectfully Submitted,

Victor L. Cruz (#219920)
I’ve been incarcerated for 24 years on a life sentence. I’m charged with 1st degree intentional homicide party to a crime. My concern is that I’ve been endorsed several times to the AODA program, but to date, I still haven’t been allowed to take it. PRC has given me two different dates to take AODA but Mr. Mark Heise denied me, saying that it was premature each time. Just last month I was given another endorsement to the AODA program with a 9 month. Now AODA is supposed to be here at Oakhill but they are still looking for someone to run that program, which can be whenever. Now I’m sitting here with hopes of AODA starting soon and the Program Director honoring my endorsement. I’m unable to transition here because of the AODA Program being unmet, the program I’m desperately trying to take. I’ve been denied parole over 10 times basically for the same reason.

Thank you for your time,

David A. Davis (#243745)

My name is Sisakhone DouanGmala #304149. I am currently serving a 28 year sentence. I came to prison at the age of 19. I am currently 36 years old. I have served 17 years total. I believe I have been seen by the parole board about 6 times already, yet I continue to receive the same answer which is that I have not served enough time.

I would like to tell you a little about my crime. My friends and I broke into someone’s home and stole some things. At the time, I was young and didn’t know right from wrong. I made mistakes and I have learned from the mistakes I have made. I have come to understand that you can’t change the past, only your future.

While I’ve been incarcerated, I have taken full advantage to utilize any and all programs the DOC has offered me. I have finished all of my programs that were required during my staffing, I obtained my High School Diploma and I also took extra steps and took extra programs that the institution offered. At the present time I have no more program needs or schooling needs, the time I’m doing is dead.

When I see parole, they always tell me that I have not served enough time. My mandatory release date to extended supervision is 10/17/2017. When I see parole, I no longer have anything to present to them that will be positive besides my behavior in the institution. I’m asking what more do I need to do as I have done everything that the parole board has asked me to do. I have support from my family and friends. I believe I have proven myself and utilized everything the Department of Corrections can offer. My institution adjustment speaks for itself. I understand when the parole board encourages me to continue to do well, yet it bothers me that they say continuously that I have not served enough time.

I’m asking that something be done about parole for people like me under “old law.” I feel like I’m being treated according to Truth in Sentencing. I would like for this letter to encourage the parole board to find new things for inmates like myself that are doing dead time.

Sincerely,

Sisakhone DouanGmala (#304149)
In 1996, I was 19 years old and a very troubled young adult; I was emotionally and psychologically disturbed and unwilling to seek help following the death of my father who passed when I was 15. This resulted in my becoming involved in high-risk criminal activity in the form of burglaries for the money and thrill of it. This spree of burglaries culminated in the reckless shooting of a police officer during an attempt to evade arrest during a burglary attempt. In early 1996, I accepted a plea bargain and was found guilty of 1st degree attempted homicide with penalty enhancers of a concealed identity and dangerous weapon. In July, the judge imposed a 50-year sentence with the understanding that I could earn parole early if I did all I could toward rehabilitation.

From July of 1996 to present, I have succeeded in completing numerous educational goals and accomplishments; all required rehabilitative programming and have contributed in many ways to give back to my community through volunteer efforts. In 2008, after serving 12 years, I was statutorily eligible for parole. I had long since completed all of my required programming and most of the educational achievements. In 2001, I received the last of only three conduct reports given in now almost 20 years. At my first parole hearing before Commissioner Hart, I addressed my involvement in the crimes, accepted responsibility, and provided a clear record of my progress in rehabilitation. We then discussed eligibility; Mr. Hart provided an analogy that parole was like a lottery—that being eligible was like buying a ticket but that I had not won anything yet. He denied parole and gave me a 36-month deferment with the opinion that I had served insufficient time for punishment and was an unreasonable risk to the public due to my crime—a fact that I can never change. In 2011, I was again seen by the Parole Commission—Commissioner Davidson. The same proceeding took place, but this time the commissioner recommended a 24-month deferment. The Parole Commission Chair was vacant at this time and Commissioner Landreman was the acting Chair. He decided to accept the decision to deny parole but negated the 24-month deferment and imposed a second 36-month deferment, in disregard to all that I had further accomplished in the way of rehabilitation since my first parole hearing three years prior.

Over a year ago when my social worker called me in for my pre-parole interview, I informed her that I was waiving parole—the Parole Commission has never given me any direction or indication of what more I can do to achieve parole, except that I must serve “substantially more time for punishment.” Denying me parole for the same reasons over and over again—factors that can only be based on my offense which was committed 19 years ago and is static and unchanging—defeats the idea of earning parole through identified rehabilitation. And so, rather than waste the time of the Parole Commissioner(s)/Chairperson and given my experience with the inexplicable reasoning for parole decision in my case, I chose to waive my only hope for release to return to my family and community.

While I can never understand the enormity of the responsibility involved in the Parole Commission’s duty to consider rehabilitation and release for people convicted of serious crimes, I believe that the system and everyone involved—from the parole-eligible prisoner to our communities—would benefit from greater transparency and informed direction in how a person can achieve parole.

Very truly yours,

Jason Faber (#290110)
I’m writing in regards to the policies the Department of Corrections has concerning the completion of treatment programs that address an inmate’s crime and having an alternative to such programs. My name is Charles Garven, a 66 year old inmate at Oshkosh Correctional. I’m currently incarcerated on a 25 year sentence. I’m working on my 20th year on this sentence. My life has been quite dysfunctional over the years.

Coming back from Vietnam, I was totally given over to drugs. Trying several treatment programs in VA hospitals didn’t alleviate the problem. I then began coming to prison for crimes such as theft, forgery, burglary, resisting arrest and sexual assault to name a few. At various institutions, I took treatment programs, nothing ever seemed to work. I just couldn’t get free from my addictions.

Then in 1996, when I came to prison this time, I experienced something life changing. I got serious with my Christian faith, a transformation occurred and I haven’t been the same since. In Christian circles, this is called being born again. Now because of this experience it has been difficult to complete the treatment programs that the institution has offered me. These programs are good to the extent that they make one aware of his problem and how to avoid further occurrences. The responsibility lies all on him to make positive changes.

Personally, I was unable to change myself in my own strength. I needed help from somewhere and that came through my faith in Jesus Christ. And for nearly 20 years now, I have had victory over drugs and lust. Just because you’re in prison doesn’t mean you can’t get high or sexually act out, which over my past incarcerations, I used to do. Because of this spiritual experience, I’m now helping the men I’m with. From assisting the elderly and handicapped to tutoring the men in meeting their educational needs.

I would like to suggest, if possible, implementing a faith-based treatment program into the system. This would be an alternative to treatment programs already in place. Several states are operating with these programs and are having great success, with recidivism rates of 3%.

In October, I see the parole board for the 7th time on this sentence. Due to my lack of completing my programs, parole has always been denied. Like I explained earlier, because of my faith, I haven’t been able to successfully complete my programs. Adding the faith-based curriculum would assist not only me, but others in meeting their program requirements. Without this, those of us who haven’t done our treatment programs will have difficulty being released. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter,

Yours truly,

Charles Garven (#048529)
I’ve been incarcerated since March 1997, for an armed robbery and possession with intent to deliver-cocaine. At the time I was 22 years old and I’m currently 41 years old. This crime is something I’m deeply remorseful for and the aftermath of which I’ve got to deal with every single day. Not to use my age as an excuse, but at 22 years old, most men haven’t learned to consider the ripple effect of their actions and the negative impact those actions can have on a victim, a victim’s family and the community as a whole. My current mentality is composed and geared towards being a responsible member of society.

During my incarceration, I’ve reflected on my past and the future I wanted for myself and my family. I made a conscious effort to take advantage of the programs and educational opportunities made available to me. I’ve completed my HSED, Custodial Services diploma, CGIP-Phases 1-2, Anger Management, AODA Residential, Restorative Justice, and the Re-Entry program. I felt that it was imperative that I obtain as many educational, social, and transferable skills as possible to make my transition back into society easier.

I first became eligible for parole in 2003 and I’ve seen the parole board a total of seven times, receiving an 11 month deferment at my last parole hearing. The reasons for my denials have been, “hasn’t served sufficient time for punishment,” and “would create an unreasonable risk to the public.” I’m fully aware of the need for punishment and how I could be viewed as a risk to the public. However, my future plans include attending college to obtain my certification in Culinary Arts and Food Productions/Self-Management. I also aspire to someday become a business owner and open my own restaurant. I believe that this course of positive thinking and self-motivation will actually help me contribute to and become an asset to my community.

I pray that you’ll consider the accomplishments I’ve made, my age at the time of my offense, the changes I’ve made towards being a productive citizen, and my plans and goals I’ve made upon my release.

Mecquon Goodwin (#261130)
I’m Fernando Guarnero, an “old law” inmate. I was convicted of 1st Degree Reckless Homicide, Party to a Crime (PTAC) and Attempted Armed Robbery, PTAC. I and 2 co-defendants attempted to rob 2 guys of their marijuana. The victim died from a gunshot wound to the back, fired by my codefendant. The crime occurred October 8th, 1997. I was 16 years old and I will be 33 in a few months. I was so impressionable, ignorant and lost that I wanted to appease the wrong people. They gave me attention and what I thought was love and respect. I’ve realized over doing time, programs and just plain growing up, that love, caring and respect is beautiful. They don’t carry harm, anger or hate. I know the meaning of empathy now! I never physically hurt anyone before, but my actions could have. I emotionally hurt people and sometimes that can be worse. I swore to try to never intentionally do either one again.

A few logistics: I faced 45 years for the 1st Degree Reckless Homicide PTAC, for which I was given 20 years. For the attempted Armed Robbery, I was given a 20 year stayed sentence and 15 years’ probation with over $9,000 restitution. I was given so much because I went to trial. My codefendant, Johnny Greenwood, that killed the victim, got 25 years. He has been out of prison for over a year now. I just think if it is safe enough to left the killer out, why not me? I’ve received 7 major conduct reports during my incarceration, but none were violent or showed violence. I’ve been seeing Parole since 2009. I’ve been given a 36 month defer, 30 month defer and an 18 month defer. I was done with all of my programs and then I was given AODA with the 18 month defer. I’ve completed my HSED, Vocational Carpentry, and Anger Management and enrolled and graduated from Restorative Justice, S.M.A.R.T. and taken mindfulness groups. I am denied parole for “insufficient time served.”

There is no more rehabilitation and punishment needed. I’m just starting to lose hope and faith as my family, support and opportunities for success fade. I’ve got a job opportunity at my brother-in-law’s carpentry business, a good place to stay and support from family and loved ones. My son was 1 and my daughter wasn’t even born when I was locked up. My son is in college now and my daughter is about to graduate high school next year. I’ve tried so hard to be a good father from in here. I want to and will be the good dad they want out there. Please give me a chance, that’s all I need!

Thanks for your time,

Sincerely,

F. Guarnero (#366496)

Hi, my name is Roger Harris. I am an inmate at Oregon Correctional Center. I am writing you in hopes of receiving your support of receiving a Parole Grant at my next parole hearing in April of 2016. I anticipate that you may have some concerns about my criminal history. I am sincerely sorry for the crime I committed and the pain I caused the victim and her family. In 1997, I struggled with a drug addiction that turned my life upside down. There is nothing that excuses my criminal behavior. I was wrong for what I did and will forever regret the poor decisions of my past.

During my time in prison, I have learned from past mistakes. I have undergone changes through extensive drug treatment programs, counseling, and the restorative justice programs. I have grown to an individual who is moving forward to be a productive, law abiding citizen. I am looking forward to attending treatment while on supervision, living a more responsible life, and making better choices for
myself. I have taken back control of my life with the help of God. I know I can meet and exceed your expectation of me being a productive, law abiding citizen in my community. I have seen the parole board 13 times in 12 years. I have been eligible for a parole grant. In July 2015, I was given a seven month deferment for the third time. Please note that all my recommended programs are completed, compass-risk level is low, and my institution adjustment is positive.

Going to parole hearings has become extremely depressing, mentally stressful, and very discouraging. It feels like being sentenced all over again with every deferment. To me, being denied a parole grant says, “Regardless of education or program treatment, you’ll never change.” However, I am praying that you look with favor on inmates such as me that do their best to make necessary change in their life through education and program treatment. Therefore, I humbly ask if you could look past my background and give me a second chance by supporting a parole grant. My family and I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

Mr. Roger Harris (#263368)

I want to start off by saying that both daughters have recanted their testimony of my guilt, that their biological father threatened them to say it was me. He ended up getting charged the same as me – both of us for the same crimes, same charges, and same sentences – only dates changed to 6 months apart. He has since died in prison and the daughters now feel safe to tell the truth, as he previously threatened to get and kill them and their mother. Both now desire me as their father figure and to walk them down the aisle at their weddings.

In 1990, I was charged with 6 counts of sexual assault on minor step-children ages 2 ½ and 9, just after the law changed from only being 2 counts (1 count each child). The children are now 30 and 36 years old. It took 3 years before the Kenosha District Attorney could manufacture a case against me and charge both myself and the biological father of the same charges, only separating the dates by 6 months. I was 35 years old in 1990 and now about to turn 60.

Yes, I have grown in the past 25 years of incarceration and improved myself by learning new skills during that time. I became an Education Tutor at the prison schools, learned to crochet for Toys-for-Tots and learned & acted Shakespeare in 4 plays ~ a historical 1st for WI prisons. I have been active in Church, Bible Studies, playing Guitar & Saxophone. I help other inmates on my unit in Bible Study, understanding the Bible and the ways of God. I help them read and write letters to their friends and family, fill out forms for those who cannot read or write, spell and explain words they don’t know or are new to them. I’m involved in Veterans Groups and activities such as Flag Raising. I’m the in-prison chaplain for our group, help with fundraisers for homeless shelters and more.

I had 3 parole hearings (every 24 months) but I stopped going in 2011 due to a negative interview with Commissioner Davis who tried to punish me for contact with my adult step-daughter victims, who had prior D.O.C. permission to have contact with me. It was resolved, but was handled very unprofessionally on her part. I am gun shy of hearings and see no reason to hear the same old reasons for
not giving me parole. “Not enough time served.” No sex offense program treatment program – I maintain my innocence.

Upon release, I desire to obtain gainful employment of any kind, be involved in my local church and community again, and most of all, restore the relationships in my family. To love and cherish them, put this all behind us and to be able for all of us to go forward in our lives and create new, positive memories.

Thank you for your time,

Donald R. Hurlbut Sr. (#220087)

My name is Arlanders Johnson. I am an African American male, who is now 59 years of age. Back in 1975, the month of August, 40 years ago, a man was killed in the city of Milwaukee outside a tavern. When people started talking about the location of where the guy got killed, I knew the area because after all, I was born and raised in the City of Milwaukee. At the time, I was 19 years old, and had a job working and I was getting my life on track because I had not long before left the boy’s school. The police came to my home and arrested me for murder. I was taken to the County Jail and they charged me with first degree murder. Despite my telling them that I didn’t kill anybody, I was sentenced to “life” in prison with the possibility of parole. Back in those days, there was no such thing as “Truth in Sentencing.” The law that I was under back in 1975, was that a person with a “life” sentence had to do 11 years and three months before they could see the parole board.

Whenever I see the board, the only thing they keep telling me is that I’ve gotten 60 something minor conduct reports, and about 100 something major conduct reports, and then they top it off by saying, “you haven’t served a sufficient amount of time!” They tell me the repeated exact thing, every time I’m scheduled to see them. I saw the parole board for the first time, starting in 1986, and have seen them every year since that time, which means I have now come up for parole 29 times. Even though I knew in my heart I truly did not commit the crime, the public attorney had told me that I was convicted on circumstantial evidence. He told me that the person who had shot and killed the guy was wearing a black jacket (wind breaker) and that the people in the community told the police during a line-up that they saw me down in the community where the guy got killed. The police took a black jacket from my home, out of my bedroom closet, and told me to put it on during the line-up at the police station.

Since I’ve been incarcerated, I’ve been moved around from one institution to the next, but have always remained within the confinement of the Wisconsin Correctional institution System and I have never been released from prison. I’ve been living in system since I was 19 years old. I’m now 59 years old. As far as programs or courses inside the prison, I have participated in quite a few but all that is meaningless to someone who has been unjustly convicted and placed in a prison for a crime they truly did not do.

Sincerely,

Arlanders Johnson (#050372)
Mr. Jeffrey Holzemar

Re: 92CF000708 St v. Jeffrey Holzemar
     92CF000763 St v. Jeffrey Holzemar

Dear Mr. Holzemar:

Thank you for your recent correspondence.

I must tell you that the judge’s role in a criminal case generally ends after sentence. I do not have any control over program eligibility or the place or scope of the detention.

Without commenting on your specific situation, I can tell you that at the time that you were sentenced, the Wisconsin Parole Commission was paroling offenders with a rapidity that many of Wisconsin’s judges, including me, felt was totally inappropriate and risky. Indeed, the complaints of the judges was a major factor which animated the Legislature to enact the Truth in Sentencing Laws. Sentences from that era were often designed to either prevent or discourage such rapid paroles. I doubt that I would have imposed the sentences of the length which were imposed in your case under the current laws. This is not a legal ground which mandates any alteration of your sentence, but you are welcome to share this letter with the corrections authorities, should you wish to do so.

Very truly yours,

Bruce E. Schroeder
Circuit Judge

Copy to:
District Attorney
I am a model inmate with just eight minor tickets in 28 years. I have been incarcerated for 28 years straight and I am 72 years old. I have worked my whole prison term in the institutions. I have done almost every job inside. I have certifications from sanitation and community services and for being active in sports (Shuffleboard). The social worker said I am on a waiting list to take the rest of my programs which are domestic violence, reentry, and Compass.

Because of the PRC board and the parole board commission not giving me minimum security custody, I cannot work in work release. I have been parole eligible for 6 years now but they say, I have not served enough time for the crime, I have not completed my programs, and I pose a threat to society. I have received two 36 month defers in a row. I see parole again in June 2016.

I am a licensed plumber and I have paid for continuous education for my plumbing license testing material through the Wisconsin Contractors Institute. My behavior has changed considerably for the good since my incarceration. I have become more religious, more patient and I listen to people around me. I deeply apologize to the victims. I look forward to working in society and living a healthy and productive life. I look forward to seeing my children and grandchildren.

I pray the commission will give me a chance to go to minimum security or even release.

Harold W. Kuntz (#039114)

I was convicted of 1st Degree Murder in the death of my wife. I was 44 at the time of my conviction. I’m almost 73 now. Going back 15-20 years ago, lifers were paroled after serving 15 years. Now we are evaluated under the standard of Truth in Sentencing. I never had program needs and have completed some schooling over the years. In 1998, I was accepted by Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida, to complete a BS in Aeronautics. I had to drop out due to the loss of Pell Grants. Being a Lifer, I was denied taking the Modules that are required through the results from my Compass Test, I’m a low risk. I’ve only had one minor conduct report.

I was convicted in May of 1987, about 3 months after the incident so I didn’t have much of a trial. My defense would have been involuntary intoxication by a prescribed drug. The Wisconsin Innocence project and LAIP looked into my case but determined they could not get by case State V.S. Escalona-Naranjo (1994).

I served 4 years and received Honorable Discharge from the Air Force, in Vietnam I was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation with 1 Bronze Oak Cluster, outstanding Unit Award with Valor and 2 Bronze Oak leaf Clusters, along with a Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross from PACM. In 2012, the parole commission told me I was a risk because of PTSD from Vietnam and for my use of this as an excuse for my crime. I have never used PTSD as an excuse for my crime and wrote to Parole Board Chair, Kathleen Nagle explaining this. Throughout my life, I never had behavior problems. I served 4 years in the Air Force and 17 years as a licensed aircraft technician with North West Airlines. I never had a police report. I rarely drank alcohol. We raised four kids on strong Christian values, while being married for 17 years.
If paroled, I would like to be in an Assisted Living Program for Homeless Vets. While there are many programs in Wisconsin, I would prefer the program at the VA Medical Center in Milwaukee. I can receive full Social Security benefits, a small pension from North West Airlines and disability from the VA. There are also healthcare and housing benefits.

Respectfully,

Richard Kusch (#179388)

I am writing to you to consider me for a release to supervision. I have been incarcerated for 17 years and 5 months. The past 28 months has been in minimum custody, where I’ve worked in the community on a supervised work crew. Since entering WIDOC at the age of 15, I have worked diligently to complete my required programs: HSED, Vocational Training, CGIP 1 & 2, Anger Management, and AODA. Additionally, I’ve volunteered to speak with troubled youth and I’ve completed 44 college credits toward a Liberal Arts Degree.

When I entered WIDOC, I was a kid who could not articulate my emotions. I acted out because I didn’t know how to ask for guidance. I am no longer that 15 year old boy; instead I am a thoughtful 32 year old man. I have maintained and grown my relationships with family and friends, which has given me a promise and purpose. Two things I did not believe I had as a teenager.

My initial parole eligibility date was in 2008. I’ve received two 18 months deferments, one 12 month, three 11 month and one 10 months deferment, all of my needs are met. I have multiple friends and family supporting my release by offering me residence, transportation and employment. My conduct report record has been good with only 1 major (2002) and 7 minors (last one 2009).

At each parole hearing, I have been told I’m doing well but more time is warranted. In the last couple parole meetings, I was told I need to transition through reduced custody. The re-classification committee unanimously recommended my transfer with reduced custody to the center system, yet the classification manager disapproved both. That has led to this plea for help or a second chance at life by releasing me to extended supervision. I want so badly to establish a life as an adult beyond the mistakes I made as a 15 year old boy. I have done all that I can to prove that I can consistently make good decisions. Please allow me to do the same on extended supervision.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael LaReau (#372952)
My name is Alvin Leifker # 197685. I was convicted of 2 counts of 1st degree sexual assault and 1 count of conduct regardless of life, a term of 45 years. There were sentencing guidelines filled out, but they were not used. They called for 84 months on the sexual assault charges, but I don’t remember what they required, in regards to the conduct regardless of life charge. I have taken all the required programs the DOC advised me to take. I have been eligible for Parole since 2000. I have received eight deferments for the reasons, “I haven’t met my program needs” and “sufficient time not served for the punishment.”

In the 26 ½ years that I have been incarcerated, I have worked for Badger State Industries for 23 years at various institutions. In 1997, I was shipped out of state to Comanche County Jail in Texas, where they made me a trustee. I worked as a contractor performing various jobs and instructing others how to work.

When I entered prison, I had a lot of anger and denial inside of me. I didn’t accept responsibility for my actions, I was self-centered and arrogant. I am a lot older now and I have changed. I no longer let anger build up inside of me; I found ways of letting it go. I learned to do things for myself and accept the responsibility. The programs have truly helped me become a much better person. I have made mistakes and learned from them and now I’m asking you to consider giving me a second chance to be a productive member of society.

Respectfully yours,

Alvin Leifker (#197685)

First of all, I want to express my deepest regret for the choices I made that resulted in the loss of life for Mr. Dennis Mansavage. I do not want to be defined by my past wrongs, I have learned from the error of my ways. I have no desire to engage in criminal activity for the duration of my stay on earth. My name is Tommy L. Matlock; I have been incarcerated since 1984. I received a 65 year sentence, 35 years for 2nd degree homicide and 30 years for armed robbery. I am one of many old law parole eligible inmates sentenced prior to truth in sentencing. I’m not the worst of the worst and release at this time would not depreciate the seriousness of the offense or present a danger to the community.

I’ve been incarcerated 31 years now. My mandatory release date is 13 years away. I’ve been in front of the parole board four times. I will see them again this October, 2015. I have not received a conduct report in 11 years; my institutional adjustment has been satisfactory and the chance of recidivism is marginally low. I’m looking to be paroled since I’m now 53 years of age.

I’ve greatly matured since I was 21 years of age. I am more responsible, circumspect and trustworthy. If not paroled this time, I believe I should at least get an endorsement that ensures I go to minimum security. I’d have the opportunity to get custody work release, which could promote readiness for successful reintegration and transition back into the community. I’ve obtained marketable skills to enter the work force, decreasing the possibility to be engaged in criminal activity. I’ve completed all programming and also accomplished Serve Safe Classes. Since I’ve been in prison, I have been using my time very wisely, increasing my marketability, having skills and craft, and staying out of trouble.

Tommy L. Matlock (#125235)
I am serving a 69 ½ year prison sentence for PTAC (party to a crime) 6 counts of burglary and 1 count of attempted burglary with the repeater enhancer. These crimes occurred in 1997, when I was 42 years old. Addicted to crack; my girlfriend and I (my co-defendant) committed these crimes to support our addiction. She received 4 years’ probation after testifying for the state against me. I turned 60 this year.

Burglary carried a maximum sentence of 10 years at the time of my arrest and convictions; less the repeater enhancer adding an additional 6 years for each count. I was offered a plea bargain that would have exposed me to well over 120 years. However, in that plea the cases were dismissed. I was re-charged and since my case was “high” profile, the state had to lie to and manipulate the court in order to get these convictions. If my case would not have been high profile, I would have been paroled by now. I was eligible for parole in January of 2015. I appeared a month earlier and received a 24 month deferment. It was my first appearance after serving the required ¼ of the maximum sentence; 17 ¼ years. My reasons for parole denial are that my institution conduct has not been satisfactory, release at this time would impose an unreasonable risk to the public and I have not served sufficient time for punishment.

During my incarceration, I have only completed 1 program; Anger Management, which was done out of state. I’m still on a waiting list for AODA and CGIP, now known as Thinking for Change. I have been on the waiting list for AODA since 1997 and CGIP since 2004. I’ve been told by staff that my sentence structure prohibits me from taking either unless I have an endorsement from parole. Also I must have an 11 month defer or less from the parole board. I do not have “one” job skill/trade completed – sentence structured as well. I was called into the social worker’s office to go over what has just been implanted into inmate profiles ~ Compass. It is supposed to tell whether or not an inmate will return to prison and if his crime will be violent or not. I see it as another road block to keep individuals such as myself (old law) inside the DOC even longer. As I sated, I am over 60 years of age and more than likely will be applying for SSI benefits whenever and if parole is granted. Since my incarceration, I’ve lost both parents and my oldest brother. My health is deteriorating with the possibility of losing eyesight to glaucoma or other illnesses complicated with thyroid and high blood pressure. I know I will have to walk the narrowest of lines if paroled due to the length of supervision I will be under. I have zero tolerance for using drugs again, I am 20 plus years drug free. Only a fool would risk both life and freedom to return to drugs after being clean for such a long period of time. My next parole appearance will be in December of 2016. We’ll see what will happen then. Thank you for your time and kind attention to my situation.

Sincerely,
Johnny Miller (#36169)

The parole board cannot release prisoners until they have met certain standards, such as getting drug or alcohol treatment and behaving well in a minimum-security setting.

But it’s up to the program review committee at each prison — not the parole board — to enroll inmates in counseling or move them to a low-risk facility. If the committees don’t follow through, there is nothing the parole board can do about it. As a result, inmates can’t meet the standards and aren’t paroled.

At the moment “we” are being discriminated against by the DOC. Last December my social worker stated in my PRC meeting that, “I feel Musgraves would make an excellent candidate for a long term minimum custody. He has historically been a good worker and has had excellent conduct.” However, I was denied because of language in DOC 302.08; the requirements for assigning a minimum custody to an inmate serving a life sentence. It states that old law inmates have to reach their parole eligibility date, but all Truth in Sentencing Lifers can go a minimum of 5 years before their extended supervision eligibility. Under statute 227 (227.10 C): Each person affected by a rule is entitled to the same benefits and is subject to the same obligations as any other person under the same or similar circumstances.

The DOC is sending all TIS (Truth in Sentencing) inmates to minimum facilities and forcing old law to have some word from the parole board. This is what is clogging the system and the reason why most are being denied parole. Look at inmate Musgraves: been in 25 years with great conduct and only 4 major conduct reports, works, less likely to re-offend, 41 years old, was a kid when he entered the system, whose case is not gang related or drug related. As a teenager I allowed my emotions lead me to a stupid decision over the assault of my stepfather. I am still to this day ashamed of taking the life of another youth.

After 25 years and being 41 years of age, I wonder if I will even be paroled in 2020 when I’m 46 or later at 50. I was a kid…what happened to change? I am not dangerous person. We are talking about a man who has matured, developed an adult’s perspective and can be seen as a person who is truly rehabilitated even by the most untrained eye; I’m a model inmate, everyone knows these facts. I was a 1st time juvenile offender who has matured into a man by the time I reached my 30’s and 40’s… Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Levelt Musgraves (# 251988)

My name is Demetrius Newman and I am writing to you in hopes of gaining your support/assistance in my efforts to move forward in my incarceration, towards eventual freedom. I am currently serving my 23rd year on a sentence of Life for a conviction of 1st Degree Intentional Homicide while being a Party to a Crime. In March of 1992, I attended a memorial party in the basement of the residence of Ulysses Hall, whose cousin who was killed by homicide. In front of the residence an argument broke out and eventually moved into the street and shots were fired. A 14 year old girl, Corzetta Vance, was shot and killed by my codefendant, Andrae Bridges. In August of 1992, Andrae was found guilty of 1st Degree Intentional Homicide while Party to a Crime while using a dangerous weapon. He was sentence to Life in prison, but is not yet eligible for parole. He was just 16 years of age and on supervision for another shooting related matter. It was undisputed that Bridges was the direct actor but during the jury trial the DA was allowed to tell my jury that the courts had already found my co-defendant guilty.

I became eligible for parole after serving 15 years in 2005. I am currently awaiting parole and PRC hearings scheduled for September 2015. I’m coming off of my second 11 month deferment. This
will be my 7th parole hearing, which I am expecting will be denied for having not served sufficient time. I’m a Lifer under the old law so there will never be enough time served since TIS was implemented. Although I am not the person who actually took the victim’s life, I take full responsibility for my actions that contributed to the loss of an innocent life. I’ve used this time to change my life in appositive manner mentally and spiritually. Knowing that I cannot go back and change what took place, I am committed to live my life in a way that will not only repay my debt to society, but add to it in a productive way. Before this incident I had never been imprisoned or been on parole or probation. At the time of my arrest, I was 20 and unable to read beyond a third grade level. However, through hard work and self-determination I learned to read, I passed the third grade reading level and I was able to finish my GED and then my HSED. I also continued my education by enrolling in several correspondence college courses through the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, University of Wisconsin-Platteville and Fox Valley Technical College. I’m an off campus student at UW-Gateway for their Culinary Arts program. I will complete that in September of 2015. I was instrumental in starting a library on the Rock Unit here at RCI. Since my incarceration, I have participated in a number of pre-release programs, jobs, modules and charities that have and will benefit me in my present & future endeavors. I have actually participated in over 20 educational and rehabilitative programs.

In 2001, while in an out of state prison, I took part in a rescue effort to produce in excess of 32,000 sandbags to help save a community from a flood. For my actions I received an award of recognition from the mayor of Appleton, MN, the Honorable R. Ronning. I have worked for manufacturing companies such as Badger State Industries and Jacobs Trading Company.

At present, I have no outside support to help me with this and so I appeal to your status as a public servant and to the compassion in you as someone who cares about the community, especially the voiceless and disenfranchised.

Sincerely,

Demetrius M. Newman (#249340)

My name is Parish Perkins #318937. I’m convicted of 1st Degree Reckless Homicide. There’s no way to downplay the seriousness of the senseless loss of life. However, the circumstance surrounding the crime involves the victim committing an armed robbery of the drugs I was selling. I fired shots at the car the victim was fleeing in, in an attempt to stop the car, accidentally striking the victim.

During the time of the crime, I was the tender age of 23. At that time in my life, I was arrested in my development from boyhood to manhood and, those who influenced me most were lacking in any effective “man examples” to change my condition. But like the caterpillar who transforms into a beautiful butterfly, so have I.

I’ve completed Anger Management twice, CGIP, and participated in Thinking for Change; (completing half of the program but, I was dropped due to having a kidney transplant in April of 2015). I’ve obtained my HSED, completed occupational communication, occupational work place success, and horticultural lawn and turf care through Moraine Park Technical College. Education has been the driving force behind my transformation from boy to man.
I’m not a threat to anyone in the community. I’ve been parole eligible since 2004. I didn’t expect to be released at that time but now 20 years has passed and I’m still denied parole, it’s like the parole board and the members don’t believe in the programs they require inmates to take. It also seems like the members don’t believe that a person who commits a violent crime can be released even though the violent crime offender has served 20 or more years and has the lowest recidivism rates.

I need what you would want for your child or yourself, and that’s a second chance. I have strong family support and I also have a girlfriend of 5 years. I’ve already saved up the money needed to attend technical college for diesel truck and heavy equipment operator. My girlfriend lives in the Madison area and supports my decision to get this training to make myself more employable.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I pray these things are considered at my October 2015 parole hearing.

Parish Perkins (#318937)

I’m serving a 35 year sentence for burglary/unarmed becoming armed, and three counts of burglary. From one of the homes I removed a hand-gun with the rest of the property. I was 25 years old when I was sentenced, and I will be turning 47 this October. I will be seeing the parole board again this October for the 17th time. I was first eligible for parole in 2003. I have completed all of my programs and I’ve learned to think ahead, I’m aware of the harm that crime causes to the victims, my family and myself. I have served over 20 years in prison now – And there is punishment involved in a 20 year sentence, there’s times when I don’t know how I’ve done it. I’ve had a prerelease investigation twice now to live with my mother. It gets approved, but I’m never released. My plans are working and helping my mother because of her health. I’m asking kindly for my freedom back, with a promise to live a crime free life.

Tannor L Persons (#147551)

I am writing to you in regards to an upcoming parole hearing in October. My name is Jamal Purifoy #223960. I am currently incarcerated at Oregon Correctional Center. My current offense is Attempted 1st Degree Intentional Homicide while armed with a Dangerous Weapon (Party to A Crime). I was sentenced to the Wisconsin penal system for 45 years. At the time when I committed this crime, I was 22 years of age. I am now 44 years old. I have currently served 21 years and 7 months.

Since my incarceration, I have strived to better myself in several ways; therefore I can truly say that I am not the person that I was when I came into the system. The time I have spent incarcerated has allowed me to do much soul searching and self-analyzation, which has helped me mature as a man and taught me to have self-respect, as well as respect for others and their rights as human beings. I understand that being a man is not about reaching a certain age, but being responsible in my thinking, actions, and assuming certain responsibilities.

The crime that I was convicted of was a severe tragedy; a tragic loss of life, in which I accept full responsibility. I am sincerely sorry for the crime I committed and the pain I caused to the victim and the
victim’s family. I have taken back control of my life with the help of God. I have been parole eligible; I have seen the parole board 11 or 12 times. In February of 2015, I was given an 8 months defer for the second time. Before the two eight month deferments, I was given four 10 month deferments. Please note, that all of my recommended programs are completed, my Compass Risk level is low, Violent Recidivism is low, general recidivism is low, Compass Risk recommendation is low.

Going to the parole board hearings has become extremely depressing, mentally stressful and very painful. Going to these hearings is like being sentenced all over again, especially when receiving the same occurring deferments over and over again. To me, being denied a parole grant says, “Regardless of your education or program treatment, you’ll never change or your change is not good enough.” I am praying that you look with favor on inmates such as me, who have done their best to make the necessary changes in their lives through education and program treatment. Therefore, I humbly ask if you could look past my background and give me a second chance by supporting a parole grant. My family and I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

Mr. Jamal Purifoy (#223960)

For far too many Wisconsin inmates, with parole eligibility, they languish in prison indefinitely, with no real chance for a second life. This approach to incarceration seems punitive, rather than rehabilitative.


In reference to my father, James Schuman (335144): James is my father and I am voicing concerns his family and supporters have for the ongoing lack of consideration for his parole. After reviewing the parole action and recording of the parole hearing from June 2015, we are of the opinion that the hearing was pre-determined and there was never any consideration for parole, the same as the previous hearings. Commissioner Davidson obviously used the fact that my father was not at the time hold a prison job as a punitive means to determine parole suitability.

In the past 18 years of incredible effort and participation, it’s very obvious that my father has received no consideration of any type, not even a shorter deferment as many other inmates have. At the hearing, my father was wearing a hand brace due to many years of sharp pain and loss of strength, he frequently has trouble gripping. We could detect no concern by the Commissioner over the physical problems which cause my father to have trouble working. It appears his medical records were of no importance and should not be considered. My father experienced an issue with his heart and was taken to Mauston Hospital to have his heart defibrillated. He was put on medication that he had a strong reaction to which caused dizziness and weakness. He has had multiple cortisone injections for chronic pain in his shoulders, elbows, knees and back. He suffers from degenerative back issues, hearing impairment and has medical classification of light activity with a restricted use of his right wrist.
Most jobs at PDCI are unavailable to people with light or medium medical classifications or medium custody rating. My father is less than 5 years from his mandatory release date and he’s still in medium custody while many inmates are up to 10 years from MR and are in minimum and community custody. In his spare time, my father volunteers to help students that ask for assistance as he believes in helping those that are less fortunate. He partakes in self-study, if given the opportunity he will pursue business to the best of his ability. He has always been an asset to the community and certainly has the ability to return to it again.

The case files are full of Class A, Felonies with life sentences that have served less time than my father. His crime is a Class B, and Class C, Felony. Sentences on my father’s crime vary from probation to around 10 years. We ask that you give my father a new hearing by an agent that is not in need of remedial training and look at my father as a human being who has been responsible and completely compliant.

James Skipp Schuman

In at least seven other states, board members’ official biographies do not make clear whether they have criminal-justice experience. Four states — Wisconsin, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Indiana — refused to provide board members’ biographies.


I have been incarcerated in WIDOC for 35 years now and was sentenced in 1980. Over the past 35 years I have received a total of six major conduct reports, I saw the parole board for the first time after serving 11.3 years of my sentence. It has always been the same reason for denial, “You haven’t served sufficient time for the punishment”. I could never understand this statement; I have completed all my required programming needs that were requested of me. I worked hard at every job that I was ever assigned to and I even took it upon myself to do programming needs that were never assigned to me.

Health wise, I suffered from grand mal seizures before being incarcerated. But they are under control and have been since 1981. In 2005, I came down with GBS which almost killed me. I ended up with high blood pressure, heart problems and glaucoma as well as a bunch of neuropathies. In 2011, I went back to the hospital because of a heart attack. I had two stents placed in my heart and six days later I had another heart attack and there was another minor heart attack in 2014.

Now that I’ve told you a little about myself, I wish to ask you a question and truly do pray for a response other than a copy of this letter being placed in my file. Please tell me; just what is “sufficient time for punishment under Old Law?” Or is it true that all of us Old Law Lifers are under what is known as new laws that have come up over the years?

John M. Schwartz (#47372)
I was convicted in 1995 for sexual assault of a child and repeated sexual assault of a child. I accepted a plea of two 40 year sentences running consecutively for a total of 80 years making me eligible for parole in March of 2015. I was 40 years old when I was incarcerated and I am 60 years old now. I have not seen anyone with similar offenses sentenced to such harsh time in my entire 20 years of incarceration.

I’ve completed 3 years of individual therapy provided by the Salvatorian Order and the Milwaukee Archdiocese. I volunteered for and completed two 2 ½ years of therapy with the Intern Program of Dodge Correctional Psychiatric Services. I’ve completed numerous DOC self-improvement programs and re-entry modules. I upgraded my GED earned in 1974 to an HSED and completed several courses with the Moody Bible Institute in Illinois (these courses count towards an associate in Theology). I completed 5 college level courses and I volunteered and completed an intensive 172 hour Anger Management Program.

I have come to understand how my choices to offend are in a similar manner as how I had been victimized; which allowed me to do what I’ve done. I don’t blame the rapes and molestations (too many to count) which I incurred from seven years of age until my mid-teens for what I did; however, I have come to see how it affected me, I understand my self-worth and my views of the word around me are different.

It is my hope and desire to be allowed to participate in SO-4 program so I may further understand the choices I’ve made in my life. After completing the program, I hope to someday be released back into society as a productive law-abiding individual.

I’ve wrote this letter so you may better understand the predicament of the situation I am in as an inmate under the old law. It is my hope that you and other members of the board take this into consideration for me and others when making decisions on parole in the future.

Respectfully,

David Skidmore (#297337)

My name is Tommie Thames and at the age of 17, I was waived into adult court for 1st Degree Reckless Homicide and attempted 1st Degree Intentional Homicide, I received a total of 70 years. In 1995, two friends and myself, were playing with guns and acting foolishly. Though there was no justification for our stupidity, we did believe that the guns were empty. While pointing the guns at each other playing around the gun went off, killing my friend. I was scared and didn’t know what to do. I panicked and began to make a tragic situation even worse with some irrational actions in an attempt to try to cover the accident up. I should have tried to get help or get him to the hospital. Instead, I made some horrible choices.

I’m sorry for everything that happened and I can’t help but live my life full of shame because it was my actions that caused so much pain and suffering. I never want to see another person suffer because of my actions. This is why I made a decision when I came to prison over 20 years ago, to be accountable for the harm I caused. I took a look at everything in my life that allowed us to be in such an irresponsible
situation, my behaviors, my attitude, my actions and my beliefs. From that point, I didn’t like what I saw because even though it was an accident it is still that foolish, reckless life I had lived that made all that pain and suffering possible.

So I began to work on me to make a change for the better. I started by educating myself, earning my HSED, a welding certificate, a certificate in Institution Food Production and a course in Convicts to College. I’ve always held a full-time job in here and volunteered in the Youth Awareness Program. I’ve participated in the Victim Impact Program, Challenges and Possibilities and I’ve been able to see and feel the negative impact that crime has on people. I am a full-time dog trainer in the OSCI Guide/Services Program.

I am now 38 and I’ve done as much as I can to allow my actions to show and prove that I am no longer the irresponsible and irrational kid that I was at 17. I’ve seen the parole board twice and I have been denied because I am somehow still considered a risk to the community and I have not served enough time. My only desire is to earn my freedom and become a productive member of society, work as a welder, a personal dog trainer, work with at risk teens and be the best father, brother and son that I can be. I’ve caused enough hurt and pain through my past actions. I don’t ever want to hurt or harm another or my community again. I live to help, not hurt people.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Tommie Thames (#297592)

I am writing in regard to my upcoming parole hearing in December. This is my second parole hearing; I received a 48 month defer the first time. I am the success story the DOC and the community is looking for. I humbly ask that you grant me parole so that I can prove that the system does work, and that what I’ve accomplished while incarcerated has made me a better person.

I was sentenced to Life in 1999 for first degree homicide. In October of 1998 I took the life of Mr. Marlo Vernon and nothing will ever change that fact. I take full and complete responsibility for my actions. Furthermore, nothing I can say or do will take away the pain, grief, and loss I caused Mr. Vernon’s loved ones. I have also come to realize that I’ve caused much pain and heartache to my own family and friends. My selfish and violent actions ended the life of one man and destroyed the lives of countless others. Personally, I will carry the guilt, shame, and regret of my actions for the rest of my life.

Though I cannot change the past, I work diligently each moment to improve myself and never bring harm to another person ever again. Over the years I have participated in many programs, groups, and workshops that have positively impacted my life and set me on a path to becoming a better human being. I have successfully participated in and completed: Anger Management, Violent Offender Group, Pre-release Modules, Financial Literacy, Business Basics, employment, Housing, Financial Literacy, The Home Program, Smart AODA Program, The Brick Program, and Restorative Justice, Coping with Long Term Incarceration, Gang Crimes/Making Amends Workshops and many more.

Although I have had several institution jobs over the years, I have been a tutor in some capacity for approximately 12 years. I enjoy helping others succeed and I have helped hundreds of men complete
Anger Management, Financial Literacy, and Business Basics and earn their GED and HSED. I am a leader by example and I am constantly stressing the importance of education. I also encourage others to strive for excellence in and out of the classroom.

In addition, I have earned 36 college credits in the past few years and am applying them to a degree through Indiana University. I have also earned a Certificate in Liberal Studies from Louisiana State University. As part of the baking vocational course I passed an exam to receive national certification in sanitation, food safety, and restaurant management. My academic efforts have been recognized by the administration at RGCI and I have received two professional letters of recommendation in support of possible scholarship opportunities.

By far I was involved with anger management longer than any other program and for several reasons. For one, I was serious about changing who I was and the programs at GBCI and RGCI set me on a path which I will continue to walk for the rest of my life with the skills I’ve acquired from the 20-plus groups I’ve been part of. I have changed my entire belief system and thought process; as a result I am now able to manage my day to day life in a constructive manner. Also, I have worked with over 200 inmates and was able to utilize what I had learned to help them achieve their goals. Furthermore, working with dedicated staff members was truly an honor. Their emotional support and words of encouragement will forever be respected. In short, being involved in these anger management programs has changed my life.

As for my support system, my parents have been there for me since day one. They have visited me often and since they relocated to Oshkosh nine years ago my parents have come to see me twice a week. Their love, kindness, and support have allowed me the many opportunities I have had to become the man I am today. I also have other friends and family who may not visit as much, but they show their love and support through letters, or when we talk on the phone. I have a strong family and community support and I will be returning to a stable, safe, and positive environment when I am released. Upon my release I plan on continuing my education, working with those who are at risk and in need and giving back to the community any way I can. I have moral and financial support, skills and certificates I’ve acquired to make me highly employable upon release.

In conclusion, the culmination of groups I have taken, my support system, and the desire to change have brought me to this point in my life. There is no undoing the past and I will never be able to replace the life I ended or take away the pain I’ve caused for so many people. However, I would like the board to know that I have gone through great lengths to ensure that I never again engage in any type of criminal, negative, or harmful behaviors. I am taking my re-entry into the community very serious, and will do whatever is necessary to be a positive, productive member of society.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Randall Toth (#180498)
My name is Ryan VanBoven and I am incarcerated in the Wisconsin Prison System, and have been since November of 1997. At that time, I was 22 years old and I was with three other individuals when I committed a burglary. I knew the occupants of the home and during the course of the burglary, which I was the “lookout” for, one of my associates confronted the occupants and demanded money from him. After the homeowner said he did not have any money, my associate shot him 3 times, which resulted in his death. Me and another individual, who was also a “lookout,” were arrested and charged with being part of the crime of 1st Degree Intentional Homicide. I plead guilty to Felony Murder/Armed Burglary and received a sentence of 40 years. During my initial placement at Dodge, I was given programs including AODA, Anger Management and schooling.

I saw the Parole Board for the first time in 2007, at which time I received a 24 month deferment. I gained medium security in 2009 and saw the parole board again and again received a 24 month deferment stating that my “program participation has been inadequate and I had a high amount of time left to serve.” When I arrived at FLCI, I asked to be placed into the AODA class here, but I was told these classes are offered depending on an inmate’s mandatory release date. This ultimately is prejudicial to me as I have a MR date of June 2024, thus making it impossible to get into these classes and impossible to complete the classes the parole department holds against me.

I saw the parole board again in 2011 and received yet another 24 month deferment, stating the same reasons for the deferment. I then saw the parole board in 2013 and was given an 18 month deferment. At my last hearing in March of this year the Parole Board, which consists of one person, gave me an 11 month deferment with emphasis that I complete necessary programming. I requested that he endorse programming for me, but he declined stating that there is still significant time to serve. So the board denies parole on these programs, yet refuses to endorse a program which would assist the board in releasing the inmate on parole. I have shown a considerable amount of program participation, including CGIP, I obtained a diploma in Masonry, became an ordained minister, completed The BRICK Program, DEP and I tutored inmates in schooling. I have a strong support system, which includes a fiancé who resides in Illinois and is asking that my parole be transferred there to get a fresh start.

I am now 40 years old, and have spent the majority of my adult life incarcerated, but I am being continuously denied parole based on “un-met program needs,” yet the Parole Board refuses to endorse them to give me a chance to gain parole. They use this Catch-22 with the majority of “old law” prisoners and repeatedly say that the inmate has “too much time left to serve,” yet the inmate(s) have been parole eligible for years, if not decades. Your assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated, and our thoughts and prayers are with you all.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr Ryan L VanBoven (#261772)
I have completed every program mandated, required and voluntarily available to me. For the sake of brevity, I won't reiterate the list of all my completed A&E Programs, the multiple volunteer programs completed and classes I currently participate in. My family members and I have written to your office several times listing this information.

My growth, maturity and positive adjustment continue to be excellent. I have been incarcerated for 20 years for two party to a crime robberies (with no physical harm). I acknowledge that what I did was wrong; I am truly remorseful for my prior actions. I have served more than the amount of time that was once considered a life sentence (13 ½ yrs), in the 1980's. My point is that I have served a significant amount of time for the crimes I committed, which is what my sentencing Judge asked for when she imposed my conviction. She also referred to me returning to society as an older mature adult, placing an emphasis on how I hold the power to be a better person when released.

I chose to be a better person and I chose to better myself. I took advantage of my program needs as well as all of the other courses and programs offered that would serve as useful tools upon my release. I have maintained steady employment and I have been a positive mentor for my growing family and peers with an admirable work evaluation from my employer. I have shown excellent growth and transition, a clear indication that I am ready to be paroled, I will prove this by being successful once released. Meeting all of the requirements set forth by my sentencing judge, my program needs and my institutional adjustment should be grounds for parole to be granted.

I have accepted responsibility for my crimes, served a significant amount of time, and I will continue to pay my debt to society as a responsible parolee. I fully embrace my responsibilities as a father, grandfather, son, and husband and as an Afro American Man. I am 41 years old; I have changed so much from when I was the young foolish boy who committed those crimes. When I reflect on my growth it helps me realize the error of my ways, I actually feel old. I have a great support system and a job lined up when I am released. I am ready to join my family, living outside of prison and participating in my children lives, please allow me the opportunity to show you who I am today and grant me parole.

Respectfully,

Baron L. Walker (#182074)

My name is Verlin Walker #171948. I have been incarcerated for 19 ½ years on a 35 year prison sentence for masked armed robbery. I was 25 at the time and now I am 45 years old. During my incarceration I have maintained good conduct, successfully transition through the various prison security levels and for the past 32 months I resided in the Center System where the prisons have neither fences nor walls. I completed all essential programs such as CGIP, AODA and Vocational Training, worked in paying jobs in Madison, Minong and Milwaukee on work release. As a result, I’ve obtained approximately $23K in savings, employability skills and continued employment upon my release. I had a release plan investigated and approved by parole agents in December of 2013 and February of 2015.

Since I became parole eligible in October 2004, I was reviewed and denied 13 times for allegedly being an unreasonable risk to the public and having not served enough time. However, at my last review in March 2015, the Parole Commission considered my criminal past, length of incarceration and above 5
stated facts before concluding that I met all the enumerated criteria to be granted parole such as not a risk to public and served sufficient time. Therefore, they recommended my release on or about April 14, 2015. However, Parole Chair Stensberg denied the recommendation alleging criminal past, risk to public and insufficient time and gave me another deferred review for 9 months despite my previous deferment only being 4 months. I try to understand how I am a risk to the public, when I work in the public on work release and have savings, work skills and a job to aid in my reintegration and I am less likely to reoffend.

Sincerely,

Verlin Walker (#171948)

My final program has been completed (AODA). Now, every single program the DOC offers, or once offered, I have done and a few I helped start myself. Just recently, the Parole Board gave me an eleven month defer with the indication that they want me to transition through reduced levels of custody (minimum) and then, “at some point” be released back into the community. Whatever “at some point” means, I guess we will all find out.

Since I have not been in any trouble whatsoever in quite some time, I believe I will be in a minimum shortly. Currently, I am at the Wisconsin Resource Center to participate in their treatment programs geared toward release. After almost 21 years of straight incarceration I am taking my transition back into the community very seriously since that is one area where I’ve seen far too many others fail. They simply take getting out of prison for granted. Release is the hardest part about doing time if you ask me. I am going back to an entirely different world out there. Surviving prison is easy when compared to serving, legally & legitimately out in the real world. So I am not taking anything for granted, success does not have to be so elusive for people returning to the community. I fully intend to be a continued success once I am released. I will continue to fully participate in programs and initiatives like WISDOM and 11x15. Prison reform is becoming a “hot button” issue again and I am going to help bring light to what seriously DOES NOT WORK.

My name is Ramiah Whiteside and I’m writing to you with the hope that you will strongly consider me for community custody and then parole grant after that. My request for your strong consideration is based on the following reasons. I have been parole eligible since 2007 and denied six times. All of my programs have been completed. I have been incarcerated for over 21 years and I have kept a job with good evaluations. With my own earnings and family support I have completed 1 year of college. I have successfully participated in and completed all voluntary programs/groups offered by various institutions. I have mentored/tutored for programs and academic classes. Various pillars of the community support my release on parole, including the judge who sentenced me. The COMPAS assessment rates me as “low” in all categories relating to reoffending. I have employment opportunities for me upon release. On average, I have been incarcerated 3 to 4 times longer than others who were incarcerated for same/similar offenses. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Ramiah Whiteside (#243376)
June 4, 2015

Dean Stansberg, Chair
Wisconsin Parole Commission
3099 East Washington Avenue.
P.O. Box 7960
Madison, WI 53707-7960

Dear Chairman Stansberg,

I have written several letters in the past supporting Ramiah's request for parole but the authenticity of my last letter was challenged since I was called by someone from the Parole Commission and then later by the Department of Corrections.

What I said in those letters still stands and I will not repeat it again, but Ramiah and I have stayed in contact for over 20 years (he is the only prisoner I have ever corresponded with) and I believe he is an excellent candidate for parole.

He clearly is not the same 17-year-old immature youth I sentenced, and he should have the chance to show he can complete parole if released.

One cannot diminish the seriousness of the offense, but rehabilitation, if it is your real goal, seems to have been accomplished.

Please consider this letter and the previous letters I sent on his behalf at his hearing.

Thank you.

Judge David A. Hansher
Circuit Court Judge
Milwaukee County, Branch 42

Cc: Attorney Ellen Henak.
My name is Barbara Robinson and I have two sons that are incarcerated in Wisconsin. I am writing this letter in support of their petitions. My sons have been incarcerated for 20 years. They were juveniles when an Armed Robbery crime was committed. They were charged and convicted as “Party to A Crime Armed Robbery.” They were both sentenced to over 100 years plus. My sons were both high school graduates with jobs, but made a wrong choice. They both realize that, and over the past 20 years have grown into young men with values of life. The crime they were convicted of did not result in any one's death or serious injury.

I, along with my parents who are 82 years old and other family members, have always been there for my sons. They come from a loving background, Christian family. My family and I have always been there for them and will continue to be very supportive because they have changed and learned a lot from the consequences they have suffered and paid to society.

Lawrence and Shulburt Williams have completed all programs required of them that were offered, along with additional college courses. They both have a very good report with staff workers. My family has been owners of our Bowling Alley for thirty years, and my sons would have no problem with job opportunities. We stand behind them 101%. I am a retired Police Officer as well as a 23 year Veteran in the United States Air Force. My sons are not a threat to the community. They have paid the price to come home. It has been a long 20 years.

As a caring mother, wife, daughter, sister and aunt I am requesting my sons be released from prison at this time. My parents' health is not the best, and would like to reunite with their grandsons.

Thank you very much.
Barbara Robinson

When I was incarcerated, I was 19 years young with no education and no intentions on getting any because I thought I didn't need it. At whatever rate, it wasn't long before I realized that being dumb wasn't cool nor beneficial to a meaningful life.

After earning my HSED in 1998, I've achieved certificates such as: Baptism, Workplace Success, Occupational Communication, Student Success, Vocational Math, Tutorial Literacy Training, Welding & Production Welding and other miscellaneous certificates.

Now at 38 years young, I can say with certainty that education is a must for all people, being knowledgeable and skilled in many areas you have the wherewithal to make better life choices.”

Lawrence Williams III (#315678)

~Lawrence is currently not eligible for parole until June 2028.
To give you a little background on myself, I've been incarcerated in maximum security prison for approximately 20 years now. I was convicted on 4 counts of armed robbery as a teenager and sent to prison at the age of 18. I will be 38 years old November 19, 2015.

As a juvenile, I suffered from certain pressures around me. Consequently, I "thought" as a juvenile would. However, I do know that I am not the same person who participated in the commission of my crimes, have paid my debt to society, and all while learning a most needed lesson in regards to ethics and manners. I once thought I knew everything there was to know about life. The truth, in short, I was ignorant, immature, uneducated, impressionable and very much underdeveloped. The manner in which I justified my actions as a young teen was that, no one was being hurt physically so what I was doing was okay. In my mind, I could only associate "pain" with someone who was being hurt physically.

Today, as a refined, mature, educated, grown adult, I'm able to identify and recognize 'errors in thinking' I simply wasn't able to grasp as a teenager. When one knows better, one does better ... I now associate "pain" with anyone who is hurt physically, as well as mentally and emotionally. Where there is pain, there are no words. All pain is the same. And as such, the impact is felt the same.”

Shulbert Williams (#258920)

~Shulbert is currently not eligible for parole until December 2020.

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections released reports entitled “Parole Eligible Inmates on 12/31/2014” and “Parole Eligible Inmates PowerPoint on 12/31/2013.” These reports do not include statistical information on inmates who have missing offenses and sentence dates. The reports also appear to not include data on inmates who have not yet reached their initial Parole eligibility date. Very little is known about inmates such as Andrae Bridges, Lawrence Williams III and Shulbert Williams.

My name is Marvin Wilson, I’m 37 now, I was only 20 years old when I was sentenced to 50 years in prison. I was convicted of 2nd Degree Intentional Homicide…oh and I’m innocent. At my PRC and parole hearings, I give staff a copy of the evidence of my innocence, but they say since I was convicted, that is what they go off – my being convicted. But I tell them we’ve all heard of the cases of guys convicted through innocent that do 20 or 30 years and get the case overturned. I don’t want 20 years or more to pass before this wrong is righted. Innocent people are in prison.

I first saw the parole board in 2010, after 12 ½ years of being innocent but incarcerated. I got a 48 month deferment the second time, a 24 month deferment in 2014. I am scheduled to see the parole board again in October 2016. Despite being innocent, I have no faith in the Wisconsin parole board to release me. I don’t have a bad prison record. I stay positive despite my situation. I’ve completed maybe a dozen programs, not that I need them, but because I like to learn and use what I’ve learned to help others. I
mentored troubled youth in the BRICK Program. But none of this matters when the parole board has a vested financial interest in parole eligible prisoners.

The majority of Wisconsin’s 22,000 prisoners are TIS (Truth in Sentencing). Only about 2,700 are Old Law, Parole Sentenced Inmates. Once these 2,700 are paroled the six or seven parole board members will have to seek new employment. Parole functions and positions will be obsolete once these 2,700 are paroled. So what the board does is deny, deny, deny parole for 2,4,10 or 20 years for job security. Every case is “an unreasonable risk to the public if released.” Why is the reason the same with everybody? That means that it’s not true and something is wrong with this system. I’m no threat to the public. I do beadwork, write books and I am currently learning to play the keyboard. The worse of the worst don’t do that. They find something bad to get into. Yes, there are some bad guys under parole law, but I’m not one of them. For one reason, I’m innocent and not supposed to be in prison at all and two; I’m not the unconscious 20 year old I was when I was sentenced to 50 years in prison for a crime that I did not commit.

I dread getting older in prison. When I was turning 30, I was stressing badly. Now almost another decade later, I’m innocent and still in prison and still being denied parole because I’m said to not have served sufficient time for the punishment and release at this time would be an unreasonable risk to the public when punishing an innocent man is really unreasonable.

Revealed by Marvin D Wilson (#297343)

I received a 40 year sentence for 1st Degree Reckless Homicide, 30 years for 1st Degree Reckless Injury, 10 years consecutive for Drunk Driving and 1 year concurrent. I’ve served 21 years of that sentence and seen the parole board 9 times. Each time it’s been “insufficient time for the crime.” The crime I committed was fueled by anger and alcohol and because of it, one person died and four people were injured, my stupidity changed the lives of a lot of people.

Prior to my auto accident, my criminal history was a misdemeanor theft in 1967 and a misdemeanor possession in 1973, 4 drunk driving and an OAR. I did a victim impact program. I participated in two veterans PTSD programs. I completed the residential AODA and Anger Management and recently I completed Thinking for Change. I have completed all of the pre-release modules. In July, I received my 2nd eight month deferments from the parole board with “insufficient time for the crime.” I signed a letter of commitment to McNaughton Correctional Center. It was the only way to get here.

Parole eligible people are treated just like Truth in Sentencing. My MR date is 2021 so OCI won’t consider me eligible for work outside the fence or on work releases unless I get a 6 month defer and a PRI or I’m within 3 years of mandatory release. In 2008, I think, the daughter of the victim herself wrote the parole board and said I’d done enough time and should go home. At the same time the wife of the victim wrote and said she had moved on and that she had no problem if parole released me. I’ve given up on parole. They say there’s no appeal on their decision.

Good luck in your endeavors,

Steven Winters (#61511)
A broken parole system in Wisconsin

I read with interest the recent editorial by the Journal Sentinel ("A broken parole system leaves the inmates behind," July 18). The story of Anthony K. Brown is not unique. In fact, I have been corresponding with one such inmate for the past two years who is trying to get an early parole hearing.

Andrae was convicted of a brutal murder when he was 15, received a mandatory life sentence and has been in prison since 1994. He is seeking an early parole release hearing in 2017. This does not mean he will be released in 2017, but he could become eligible for release. Without the hearing, he may have to wait until 2037 before a release is possible. If he is not released until 2037, he will cost the taxpayers an additional $700,000-$800,000. Is this cost worth it?

If we as a society are solely retributive in our reactions to serious crime, then Andrae deserves only punishment, and in his case, the maximum punishment under law is what he received and the cost may be irrelevant to us. But do we not want correctional systems to do more than simply punish, and in the case of eligible parole cases (offenders who have done what was asked of them in prison), how has our practice of parole denial and protracted incarceration become nothing short of institutional cruelty? The only way out of this dilemma is to ask more of our correctional systems and to refocus efforts away from being simply retributive and vindictive and recognize atonement and an opportunity for redemption. When we go beyond legitimate punishment, as we have in our faulty parole system, we diminish ourselves and respect for the law diminishes.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, we have more than 1.8 million people in prisons in this country. We have learned that we cannot spend any more of our limited dollars on correctional efforts that not only dehumanize offenders, but, more important, serve no good purpose for the prisoner or society.

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Starting November 3, 2015 visit our new website at

www.rocwisconsin.org

“ROC Wisconsin: Restoring Our Communities – Beyond 11x15” will continue to promote an end to excessive incarceration in Wisconsin, including a fair chance for parole-eligible prisoners to return home. The four primary aims of ROC Wisconsin are:

- For Wisconsin to invest in the programs and strategies that will end the racial and economic disparities that fuel mass incarceration.
- For Wisconsin to reduce its prison population to 11,000, and to reduce the number of people on extended supervision.
- For Wisconsinites to view people who have been convicted of a crime as human beings, members of families, and assets to the community.
- For formerly-incarcerated people to be restored to full participation in our communities, our economy and our civic life.