

Sheena King / OC231C
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Dear Jonas,

Here is my statement and you may follow up for related purposes if you choose.

My childhood was plagued with abuse, both sexual and physical. I was 18 years old when I committed my crime and my lone accomplishment was my GED before I was sentenced to die this slow death.

In my determination to become someone who wasn't an easily manipulated shame filled teenage torn by remorse, regret, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence, I strove to accomplish something of worth and value. It was critically important for me to evolve into someone I could love and accept and my children could be proud of. It seemed impossible to forgive myself so my journey was one of introspection. I needed to understand how my life led to this and that invariably led to a spiritual journey.

While I am proud of my apprenticeships

in Food Service, Construction and Maintenance, and Certifications in Computer Aided Drafting and Design, as well as International Computer Driving License and writing and publishing four books (two of which were cathartic for me). My proudest achievements are obtaining an Associates Degree in Religious Education and a Bachelors in Christian Counseling. I have worked extremely hard to rebuild and rehabilitate myself, yet I know that it is God who does transformative work.

It is indeed a peculiar position to stand in the balance between hope and despair, and dreams versus the reality of LWOP. This is precisely where I stand now, almost 31 years later, hoping that Commutation or legislative bills allowing the possibility of parole to become a reality, and working in Ministry more than a daydream.

Hope in the commutation process occurs in waves. It is reminiscent of the ebb and flow of the ocean tides. There is a moment when it appears as if the door to freedom is opening in great swells and it trickles to nothing as denial for commutation and pardons

in accordance with political sway.

Laws that would allow this agonizingly slow death by incarceration to change, should be enacted because the sentence becomes retaliatory. In no way are those most affected by crimes of violence aided because of those sentences. A man spoke in opposition at my Public Hearing. He later said he never wanted to attend the Hearing but was made to feel that he was required to. He was shaken to his core and no one followed up in concern for his well-being. He requested presence was solely punitive and retaliatory. Sentences of DBI do not allow for true acts of atonement for a changed life, nor does it aid in the healing process for those affected by these crimes.

Sentences of DBI do little more than warehouse people far beyond the age of recidivism which serves no purpose except exorbitant costs to taxpayers. Communities do not feel safer and thousands who are languishing in prisoners were first-time offenders who had experienced short, less than ideal lives. People can and do change. Not all are incorrigible.

In my daily interactions, it is obvious that at almost 50, I am 360° different (inside and outside) than the child I was at age 18.

For crime, there should be accountability and punishment, but this should be sensible. LWOP sentences could be changed by a Federal standard or parole eligibility could be implemented. Consideration of an applicant for parole would in no way compromise the safety of the public. The parole process has safeguards to protect the public and the Department of Corrections has standards which must be met prior to their recommendations for parole. This works in other states, it would most certainly work in states like Pennsylvania whose harsh and archaic practices don't permit a parole possibility for life sentences.

The possibility of parole hearings would create safer environments for prisoners and prison staff. When there is an atmosphere of hope and expectancy, people are kinder and the mass majority are not willing to jeopardize their opportunity to be considered for the possibility (not probability), of parole.

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