

Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and National Lifers of America, Inc.

MICHIGAN

Lifers Report

Newsletter

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2023

GOVERNOR GRETCHEN WHITMER'S STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS FAILED TO INCLUDE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONS

Willis X. Harris

Our Governor Gretchen Whitmer gave a beautiful State of the State Address. It was uplifting for most members of society in our state, but not fully accepted by all members of the State Legislature. It was not accepted by an omitted/ignored class of citizens called prisoners, inmates, convicts, trash, and other degrading names designed to dehumanize them to the status of damaged goods and should be neutralized (Death-By-Incarceration).

There are no public safety nor law enforcement benefits from incarcerating human beings, both men and women (and teenagers) in prison up to and surpassing 50 years. Such duration negates rehabilitation and release and leaves the prognosis of Death-By-Incarceration.

Being a former prosecutor for Ingham County, perhaps Governor Whitmer, who sent many citizens to prison--including lifers--never gave a second thought to reforming our criminal justice system in general and our correctional system in particular. Could it be that she, too, saw lifers and other long-termers as "trash" or "damaged goods" and must be neutralized to unsure public safety?

Yes, these men, women, and teenagers did commit offenses and should be punished. However, the question has been asked more than 50 years: When does punishment end and rehabilitation begin? It seems as though neither our governor, legislature, nor our department of corrections and parole board can answer this question.

Keep in mind, people, this is not just a Michigan issue or problem, it ... (Cont. on p. 3)

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**MICHIGANS LIFERS REPORT
NEWSLETTER**

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(Limit articles to 600 words)

February/March 2023

**FROM THE NATIONAL CHAIRMAN'S DESK
NATIONAL LIFERS OF AMERICA, INC.**

This brief report is an update on our progress and lack of information circulated statewide to our Local Chapters.

Some of our membership in various NLA Chapters, Women's Huron Valley in particular, were curious about the lack of information they receive concerning the NLA's direction statewide.

I truly know and understand your concerns and feelings about what is happening. You feel "let down" and "forgotten". You want updates on criminal justice reforms in Michigan. I promise we will correct our faults and do better.

I would like to remind you who were instrumental in writing the first Second Look Sentencing Bill. It was NLA National Vice-Chairman Jamie Meade and The Adolescent Redemption Project (TARP) Executive Director attorney Christian Wiesenbergl.

At the moment, many NLA Local Chapters are still being held back from membership meetings because of COVID restrictions. We are hoping as progress is made with loosening the COVID stranglehold, Local Chapters will be able to get back to normal operations.

I regularly communicate with Sybil Padgett giving her updates on what is transpiring with the Second Look Sentencing Bill so she can update chapter membership. My goal is to communicate with all NLA Local Chapter presidents so they can also update their membership.

Alexandra Bailey of The Sentencing Project (TSP) has informed our National Vice-Chairman Jamie Meade and National Director of Relations with TARP Joshua Puckett that the Second Look Sentencing legislation will be officially launched on April 12, 2023, at the State Capitol in Lansing, Michigan. There will be a news conference and the United Church of Christ Michigan Conference leadership will be in attendance. This is a makeup for the ice-storm cancellation of the Day of Empathy on February 22, 2023. We are encouraging you to ask your family and friends to attend this event. While not everyone will be able to speak to their state representative or state senator, we want your family and friends to try. Have them tell your story and their experience having a loved one incarcerated.

When the Second Look Sentencing Bill gets introduced, hopefully within the next couple weeks, I will personally have that information published in the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter so all Local Chapters around the state will receive it to share with their membership.

... (Cont. on p. 3)

(Governor Gretchen Whitmer's State Of The State Address, from p. 1) ... is a national problem.

Lifers, locally and nationally, are changing for the better. Aside from being remorseful and showing sincere empathy, they are going to school, earning their high school/GED diplomas, associate, bachelor, and master degrees, learning useful vocational skills and other social skills to benefit society if given a second chance.

Employers in society are begging for workers with starting pay of \$16.00 per hour and with an education and skills. But we have a problem. Many men don't want to work, have no education nor skills, and want to rely on SSD (Social Security Disability) and SSI (Supplementary Security Income). Those getting SSD have mental problems and personality disorders mostly, while a few have actual physical disabilities.

There are thousands of good paying jobs out here. Workers are needed in corrections, schools, transportation, hospitals, casinos, maintenance and electrical workers, construction, bus drivers, landscaping, mail carriers, bars, restaurants, janitors, trash pick-up drivers, law enforcement, and fire fighters. Most of them are available to parolees and ex-offenders.

Did Governor Whitmer mention this in her carefully picked topics in her State of State Address?

Released lifers can fill many of these positions if given a second chance.

Who can help solve these problems? Our governors and states' legislatures. Unless disabled and elderly, released lifers, both life without the possibility of parole and with parole, and other long-termers who were excessively sentenced, can fill these positions, making a contribution to society, their communities, and themselves.

Why reform or rehabilitate if not given an opportunity to show the change or transformation?

To restate, we heard nothing from our Governor Gretchen Whitmer during her state of the State speech on prison, parole, or corrections reforms, nor recommendations to our state legislature to repeal MCL 750.316 and cap life at 20 years. She said nothing about how MCL 750.316 is contrary to Michigan Constitution of 1963, Article 4, Section 46 that prohibits the state legislature from enacting any law that provides a penalty of death. This is exactly what MCL Sec. 750.316 does. It clearly provides a penalty of death. Any type of sentence that negates or invalidates parole is a Death-By-Incarceration sentence.

(From The National Chairman's Desk, from p. 2) ...

Also, we are currently working on a NLA National Agenda for all Local Chapters to collectively focus their attention. I would like to thank all Local Chapters who sent ideas for the National Agenda.

In addition, as a juvenile parolable lifer who has served 35 years, I will be returning to court for re-sentencing and possible release pursuant to People v. Montez Stovall that ruled it is unconstitutional for a juvenile to be sentenced to a parolable life sentence.

With my upcoming re-sentencing, it is imperative we remain focused on our National Agenda and the pending and upcoming criminal justice reform that will end mass incarceration in Michigan. National Vice-Chairman Jamie Meade and I are working together to finally bring the NLA (all Local Chapters) together as a unified front to achieve the long awaited for change in the criminal justice system in Michigan.

All Local Chapters will be receiving updates from Jamie Meade and myself keeping everyone abreast of what we are working on and what we need help with. We (NLA) are a collective force for change.

--Eddie "Malijah" Gee

BEST PAROLE RISKS

Robert Alfiero

Recidivism is defined as a convicted criminal's likelihood to commit the same or similar offense within a designated period of time following their release from prison. According to the Department of Justice, the two lowest recidivism rates are homicide and sex offenses. However, the public has been misled as to the potential of these two types of offenses to reoffend, especially sex offenses.

Politicians, police, prosecutors, anti-crime advocacy groups, and the media are the main sources of this misinformation and the likely creators of the stigmas attached to these offenses.

If you were to listen to them, you would believe that these offenders cannot be rehabilitated and are a waste of taxpayers money and resources. The truth is quite the opposite.

Criminologists and behavior psychologists will tell you that most people who commit homicide and/or sex offenses do not have a criminal mentality. That means that besides these instant offenses, they are basically hard working and law abiding people. This is because most have genuine remorse and regrets for their actions.

This also means they are typically more willing to accept responsibility for their offenses and will do whatever it takes not to repeat their previous behavior.

That is why programming designed to help them gain insight into their past behavior and develop the tools to reduce their likelihood to reoffend has such a high success rate, especially compared to offenses with significantly higher recidivism rates.

High rates of recidivism are claimed by politicians and those who wish to justify longer prison sentences for sex offenders and to never release homicide offenders. This is done without any realistic evidence and is contrary to

statistics put out by the Department of Justice which say the opposite.

These advocates use misinformation, half-truths, outright lies, and fear mongering to justify their harsh attitude towards these offenders. There is also a great deal of undue prejudice towards sex offenders made by those who were victims of a sex crime, but refuse to let go of their victim mentality.

Therapists try to encourage past victims of sex offenses to get rid of their mentality and see themselves as survivors. This way they can heal and move forward with their lives. Living in the past is counter productive and inhibits personal growth.

What is needed is for the public to be educated as to the realities of these offenders. Politics and the media should stay out of the criminal justice system and stop deliberately misleading the public.

The United States has approximately 5% of the world's population, yet has around 25% of the world's prison population. This should tell you that our approach to criminal justice is not working. We should be focusing on prevention and not excessive punishment, except under aggravating circumstances. There is no quick or easy solution to this embarrassing problem. However, steps need to be taken to resolve this problem and remove this embarrassing stigma from our country.

What will it take to have these public servants speak the truth, instead of deliberating misleading the public? Who will have the wisdom and courage to take that first step? Those are the questions politicians should be asking, not how do we keep prisoners locked up longer. Most reasonable people would prefer to have these prisoners become taxpayers rather than tax burdens.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Robert Alfiero is a former Michigan prisoner and correc- ... (Cont. on p. 8)

SYSTEMIC RACISM IN AMERICAN PRISONS

JERRY METCALF

A few days back, I sat in my cell listening to two white prison guards hold a conversation about systemic racism outside my window. One of them outright refused to acknowledge systemic racism might exist, claiming that it was all fake news, misinformation, and propaganda conjured up by left-wing Democrats, while the other mostly agreed, though he did finally concede that if systemic racism does exist in government "even a little bit" then it "definitely doesn't exist in American prisons."

I chuckled when I heard that. Not because I think any kind of racism is funny, but because two seemingly sane people could believe such nonsense with so much evidence to the contrary.

Later that night I tossed and turned as I replayed their conversation in my mind. The more I considered it, the more I didn't like the idea of people thinking the system I'd been held captive in for more than 26 years was anything but racist. I tried to devise a way to prove how institutional racism does exist in prisons across America, but finally realized that I needed more information.

The next morning I asked several prison guards whether they felt as if institutional racism existed in American prisons. Almost all the white guards believed it did not, stating things like: "the system is fair" or "the system treats everyone equally." A few of the younger ones did disagree with their co-workers, but when I asked them to elaborate, or give me an example they couldn't.

On the other hand, the black guards all held a different view. Most of them believed that institutional racism does exist inside prisons and in all other forms of government. And when I asked them to describe the racism in prisons, or give me some examples of it, they almost all pointed to the fact that the majority of incarcerated individuals in

America were black, yet the majority of America's population is white.

I find this to be a compelling argument, but I think it points to systemic racism in other areas of government. America's prison population is overwhelmingly black, but I believe this imbalance is mostly due to systemic racism in our policing and judicial policies.

Next I walked the prison yard and talked to incarcerated men of all races, hues, religions, and sexual orientations. Almost everyone felt that institutional racism exists in prison. Even the few hardcore white racists I reluctantly approached believed it, and (surprisingly) one of them pointed me in the direction I needed to go.

"Have you ever wondered why they classify us as White, and Blacks as non-White?" he asked me. "It's because they don't consider them human."

This hardcore racist's horrible words gave me pause. We prisoners have been called "Whites" and "non-Whites" for so long that we've all (guards and prisoners alike) grown accustomed to the idea of it. But after taking the time to really reflect on this stunning revelation, I realized how screwed up and racist this system of classification truly is.

Imagine if we applied this logic to any other part of the world. We'd have lions and non-lions. Which means the beauty of tigers and leopards and cheetahs wouldn't exist. We'd also have baseballs and non-baseballs. Which means the diversity of basketballs and footballs and soccer balls wouldn't exist.

Here in Michigan prison we have Whites and non-Whites, which means the beauty and diversity of Blacks and Hispanics and Asians doesn't exist. Here they're just non-white.

This was the ... (Cont. on p. 8)

GOVERNOR WHITMER GRANTS

18 COMMUTATIONS AND 4 PARDONS

Dwight Henley, M.B.A.

In 2021 Governor Gretchen Whitmer commuted the sentence of a female serving time for drugs and weapons. Because of this female's age and positive prison record, she would have been paroled within two years without any commutation. As a result, the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter published an article questioning whether the commutation was a political move for the upcoming election. Based on Governor Whitmer's recent commutations, she was not playing politics, and the Michigan Lifers Report staff commend her for making a gracious number of commutations. Why do we say this, and can anything be gleaned from Governor Whitmer's recent actions?

Most Governor's do not grant commutations until his or her last year in office. Nevertheless, Governor Whitmer chose to grant a generous number of commutations and pardons within the first month of her final 4-year term. Such timing suggests she believes in second chances and will most likely continue to use her executive power to grant future commutations. But which cohorts of prisoner stand to benefit from any future commutations?

When it came to covid, Governor Whitmer professed to follow the science. But it seems as if personal values, not science, is guiding her commutation choices. Based on her commutations thus far, it appears as if Governor Whitmer is more partial to drug dealers, women, and people whose conviction raises a question of innocence. While open to providing a second chance for these cohorts of incarcerated people, Governor Whitmer appears opposed to granting commutations for male offenders serving life sentences and who are clearly guilty.

Governor Whitmer's commutations appear more value based, because the types of sentenced she commuted have higher recidivism statistics than cohorts of incarcerated people she shied away from. That is, people who commit crimes for fi-

nancial gain, such as drug dealers, have a much higher recidivism rate than those serving life without parole. The former group has a recidivism rate ranging from 30-40 percent while the latter group has a two percent recidivism rate. Although her current commutations fall in a higher recidivism cohort, these commutations do not raise the emotional passion and challenge people's sense of justice as would commuting the sentence of men serving life sentences for violent crimes.

Nobody knows whether Governor Whitmer will continue to let her personal values guide future commutations decisions. If public safety takes the focus, perhaps Governor Whitmer will start following the science and let recidivism statistics guide which cohorts of incarcerated people get a gracious second chance. One thing for certain, time will tell if it is personal values or the science that dictates the Governor's commutation decisions.

NEW COURT RULINGS UNDO LONGSTANDING MICHIGAN JUDICIAL PRACTICES

Mario Cavin

A juvenile lifer recently approached me regarding which avenue to pursue for expediting his resentencing. "Should I file for resentencing or a 6500?" he asked. (The latter referring to a Motion for Relief from Judgement governed by Michigan Court Rule (MCR) 6.500 et seq.) At the time, I had no answer but decided to do some digging. Here's what I uncovered.

Michigan courts had a custom of re-characterizing pro se motions seeking relief into a Motion for Relief from Judgement regardless of the type of relief sought. Then the courts deny the motion on procedural grounds for failing to follow the rules governing 6500 motions. In the end, the defendant's appeal likely never gets a substantive response. But no more!

Appellate courts in Michigan have recognized this trend and sought to put an end to it by modifying the Michigan Court Rules and setting new ... (Cont. on p. 7)

(New Court Rulings Undo, from p. 6) ... judicial precedent. One criminal defendant filed a "Motion to Remand" raising an issue appropriately within the court. The court recharacterized her motion as a Motion for Relief from Judgment, denied the motion on procedural grounds under MCR 6.500, and circumvented addressing the merits of her claims. The Michigan Court of Appeals vacated the trial court's order and remanded for further proceedings. See People v. Travis, No. 359877; 2022 Mich. App. LEXIS 2416 (Mich. Ct. App., April 29, 2022).

The Court of Appeals in Travis noted that the trial court failed to follow MCR 5.502(D) which requires a trial court to notify defendants "of its intention to recharacterize the pleading as a motion for relief from judgment; inform the defendant of any effects this might have on subsequent motions for relief...; and provide the defendant 90 days to withdraw or amend his or her motion before the court recharacterizes the motion." Travis, 2022 Mich. App. LEXIS at 1-2.

Similarly, in People v. Campbell, No. 359494; 2022 Mich. App. LEXIS 1531 (Mich. Ct. App., March 17, 2022), the Court of Appeals vacated the trial court's order and remanded for reconsideration. The Court of Appeals held that the trial court incorrectly characterized Campbell's prior Motion for Sentence Reduction as a Successive Motion for Relief from Judgment, improperly applied the procedural requirements of MCR 6.502(G), and failed to provide Campbell with the required notice or opportunity to amend or withdraw his motion. In reaching this conclusion, the Campbell Court highlighted, "In a number of other orders, the Supreme Court has made clear that trial courts should not re-characterize pro se motions seeking other forms of relief as motions for relief from judgment. [Emphasis Added] See, e.g., People v. Ford, 503 Mich. 856 (2018); People v. Young, 505 Mich. 994 (2020); and People v. Giuchici, 503 Mich. 383 (2018)."

While I'm not authorized to provide "legal advice," I would seriously consider the pros and cons of any motion you seek to file. Remember, some court rules specify

untimely motions must be presented as a Motion for Relief from Judgment. However, based on recent court rulings, I would file the motion under the appropriate court rule/statute and require the trial court to give adequate notice if the motion is to be recharacterized.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Mario Cavin (#326204) is serving a 37-year sentence in the MDOC and is housed at the Macomb Correctional Facility, 34625 26 Mile Rd., Lenox Township, MI 48048. He is a certified paralegal, a board member with the NLA, and an active member of The Adolescent Redemption Project (TARP).

THROW OFF THE SHACKLES OF SHAME AND BE FREE

Bryan Noonan

Guilty! The gavel slams down on the judge's desk. For some, it's the end of a long fight, and a strange sense of relief almost comes with it. For others, it's like a nail in a coffin.

The judge's (or jury's) declaration is one of status. An offender is declared guilty or not guilty, and this verdict directs the next steps for the one on trial. For some prisoners, they themselves declare the verdict through a plea agreement. The result is the same, though. One's status changes after the verdict. Without minimizing the importance of this judicial declaration, what may be even more important is just how the person feels about the declaration made against him or her. One can certainly be guilty without FEELING guilty. One can also be guilty and feel ashamed or be guilty without feeling shame.

Guilt, itself, says something about a person's behavior. It says, "I did something wrong" (violated my own values or the values of my community).

Since guilt says something about a person's behavior, it is not a permanent condition, though its consequences might be. But guilt can be resolved. That's, in part, what the judicial system is for.

Resolving one's guilt includes:

... (Cont. on p. 8)

(Best Parole Risks, from p. 4) ... tions officer. He can be contacted at 715 Clinton River Drive, #7A, Mt. Clemens, Michigan 48043.

(Systemic Racism, from p. 5) ... proof I'd been searching for.

Now I needed to figure how to present it in a way the system couldn't refute. I started with what I knew. The prison system has always been very heavily divided racially, and for good reason as far as the government is concerned. Division of any kind makes us incarcerated individuals easier to control. In prison we have White jobs and Black jobs; White religions and Black religions; White gangs and Black gangs; and every six months we hold elections to elect White unit-reps and non-White unit-reps to our Warden's Forum. These were things I knew existed, but couldn't prove existed because there is no paper trail for such.

Someone then suggested that I scour all the many government forms to see if what I needed might be there. So I did, and he was right. Plenty of government forms list incarcerated individuals as either White or non-White. None that I could find list a Black man as being Black. The Program Classification Report, the Program and Work Assignment Evaluation Report, and the Prisoner Time Disposition Sheet all have this little box on them marked "Race". And in that box on every filled-out form I examined dwelled either a W for White or a NW for non-White. Here is the proof of "Institutional Racism" really does exist in American prisons, or at the very least, in Michigan prisons.

Imagine having to go through life as a non-White. Imagine having your whole existence predicated on someone else's existence. A Black man in prison can't just be a Black man, he has to be a non-White man. he cannot take pride in his heritage or skin color unless he acknowledges the White man and his skin color first. How do you expect him to rehabilitate himself and grow to be a better human when the system doesn't even acknowledge his existence as a man, but as a non-man.

Surely this system of labeling a Black man as a non-White came into being many

decades ago, when Black men weren't assigned any real worth as people, yet here this archaic classification system still exists today, in plain sight, yet no one sees it for what it is: Institutional racism at its finest.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jerry Metcalf is a contributing writer for PrisonWriters and The Marshall Project. Find him at www.facebook.com/jerryametcalf.jr.

(Throw Off The Shackles, from p. 7) ...

1. Stopping the wrong behavior.
2. Analyzing and correcting thinking errors that led to the behavior.
3. Making amends to the one(s) wronged (prison is a forced amends).
4. Reinforcing accepted value systems with pro-value behaviors.

Shame, on the other hand, says something about who a person is. It says that I or others perceive me as flawed, either because of what I have done, because of what others have done to me, or because of factors I believe reflect poorly on me (family origins, ethnicity, behavior of others connected to me, etc.). Shame may be temporary or permanent. Much of its permanence depends on whether or not one internalizes shame messages and beliefs. All of us, at one time or another, have felt some level of shame.

Shame is much more difficult to resolve than guilt. The judicial system does nothing to resolve shame, but rather perpetuates it by creating a permanent second-class citizen status. Felonies follow people for life, and some felonies even have explicit civil punishments that follow a person for life after incarceration.

Nevertheless, even while making amends for one's guilt (serving a prison sentence, for example), one can find freedom from the bondage of shame.

Resolving one's shame includes:

1. Accepting one's imperfections as commonly human.
2. Checking one's self for feelings of superiority (humility is good, shame is bad).
3. Correcting flawed behavior (accountabil-

... (Cont. on p. 9)

(Throw Off The Shackles, from p. 8) ... ity), if my own behavior is to blame. Or, removing one's self from situations where others' behavior is causing my shame (abuse, etc.).

4. Forgiving (self and others), which releases one's sense of "brokenness".

Permanent shame comes from entrenched thinking. When one violates a value, it leads to believing one cannot change (or is now permanently flawed). This fixed thinking reinforces bad behavior or self perceptions. It may also lead to masking in order to keep others from seeing one's shame. Unfortunately, inauthenticity traps people in cycles of shame.

Finally, then, being stuck in a shame cycle leads to resignation. Surrendering to a shame identity results in doubling down on feelings of brokenness or worthlessness, perpetuating the damaging cycle.

The prison system offers no tools to address shame, but it's critical that incarcerated people address shame and its damaging consequences. Whether one remains behind razor wire fences or not, shame is just another form of bondage. So, throw off those shackles, and be free!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Bryan Noonan #739416 blogs about prison at HopeOnTheInside.blogspot.com, and he co-authored [Insider's Guide to Prison Life](#). Bryan was awarded a bachelors from Calvin University in 2021. He is housed at Parnall Correctional Facility, 1780 E. Parnall Rd., Jackson, MI 49201.

MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE CONSIDERS BILLS TO ABOLISH LIFE SENTENCES FOR JUVENILES

Steve Neavling

Democrats in the State House and Senate introduced legislation this week to abolish life sentences for juveniles.

If passed, Michigan will join 26 other states that have taken steps to comply with the U.S. Supreme Court's 2012 ruling, [Miller v Alabama](#), which declared that a

life sentence for a juvenile was considered a violation of the Eighth Amendment, which bans cruel and unusual punishment.

"The United States Supreme Court and the Michigan Supreme Court have ruled that automatically sentencing youth to life without parole is cruel and unusual punishment. Michigan law needs to recognize that juvenile offenders deserve a chance at rehabilitation," Senator Jeff Irwin, D-Ann Arbor, said. "We shouldn't turn our backs on juvenile offenders and throw away the key. Instead, we should ensure that Michigan's juvenile justice system provides a chance for rehabilitation, reintegration, and redemption."

Under the legislation, felons under the age of 19 cannot be sentenced to more than 60 years in prison. The bills also allow for a parole review after 10 years to consider the juvenile's age and immaturity, family home environment, circumstances of the offense, and the role of peer pressure.

"The law clearly distinguishes children from adults--this is why ending juvenile life without parole is necessary," Rep. Amos O'Neal, D-Saginaw, said. "These are kids' lives we are talking about. I can't stress the importance of this legislation enough. It's the difference between life behind bars and the opportunity for redemption, grace and mercy."

O'Neal also said the onus is on the state to help young people when they leave prison.

"The state should provide the necessary help, resources, and training for these young people to re-enter society," O'Neal said. "We must move from a punitive-focused corrections system to one centered around restorative justice."

The lawmakers point to research that shows significant developmental differences between youth and adults that impact decision-making, impulse control, and susceptibility to peer pressure.

"The Supreme Court has made Clear that life without parole sentences for young people should be rare," Sen. Sylvia Santana, D-Detroit, said. "The Michigan Supreme Court has placed the burden on the prose-

... (Cont. on p. 10)

(Michigan Legislature, from p. 9) ... cutting attorney to prove by clear and convincing evidence that a young person is one of the rare people who should receive a life without parole sentence."

A study by the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office found that juveniles who had been sentenced to life in prison but were later released had a recidivism rate of just 1.14 percent.

"As the Supreme Court has recognized, children are constitutionally different than adults for purposes of sentencing because they have less culpability than adults--a conclusion that is supported by both social science and brain science documented in Supreme Court decisions," said John S. Cooper, Michigan Executive Director of Safe & Just, a nonprofit advocating for criminal justice reforms. This package of bills supported by Safe & Just Michigan positions our state to join 26 other states and D.C. in ending the cruel and unusual practice of sentencing children to die in prison."

The bills are supported by the Michigan Center for Youth Justice, Safe & Just Michigan, The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, and the Michigan State Appellate Defender Office.

"Michigan has a moral imperative to step up and join the majority of other states that have stopped sentencing young people to die in prison," Jonathan Sacks, of the Michigan State Appellate Defender Office, said.

SOURCE: Detroit Metro Times, March 8-14, 2023 Issue, pg. 11.

UPDATE

SECOND LOOK SENTENCING LEGISLATION

Alexandra Bailey, of The Sentencing Project, has informed the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter that April 12, 2023, will be the official launch of the Second Look Sentencing Legislation in Michigan. An official press conference will be held in Lansing, Michigan, at the State Capitol. We are asking our incarcerated readers to

please inform your family and friends to attend this event and try to speak to their state representatives and state senators. For our civilian readers interested in criminal justice reform in Michigan, please attend this event and show your support for second chances in Michigan.

Senator Stephanie Chang, D-Detroit, will be sponsoring the legislation. We need those incarcerated to write letters to your state representatives and senators telling your story and how the Second Look Sentencing legislation would affect your lives. We need all civilian readers with family or friends in prison to tell their story of having a loved one in prison and how it has affected their lives over the years. Request your state representative and senator to support Second Look Sentencing legislation.

--Jamie Meade, Editor

TIPS FOR PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILY WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS

Prisoners

- 1) When writing to legislators/lawmakers, identify yourself and your home political district (House and Senate Districts). If your relatives are registered voters, this information is on their voter registration card.
- 2) Be thoroughly informed on the topic you are writing about. Stick with the topic. Use one topic.
- 3) Ask the legislator to take a specific action and why--supporting or rejecting a piece of legislation. Request a written response that gives your legislator's position on the issue and why.
- 4) Make your points quickly and convincingly to have a greater impact.
- 5) Use your own words when writing about an issue. Spell words correctly and use good grammar.

REMEMBER: Politicians aren't interested in the opinions or suggestions of people who ... (Cont. on p. 11)

can't or don't vote for them. Inform your relatives and friends.

Citizens

If you are not a registered voter, some lawmakers care less about your issues, opinions, or suggestions, even those who represent or misrepresent your political district, House or Senate.

Legislators believe that if you don't vote (and your vote is your voice and vice-versa), there is no need for you to complain about anything.

If you are not a registered voter, please sign up so those elected to office will take time to listen.

Courtesy of The Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and The National Lifers of America, Inc.

MICHIGAN LIFERS ASSOCIATION, INC. 2023 INITIATIVE AND PROPOSALS FOR THE MICHIGAN STATE LEGISLATURE

- 1) Cap all life without the possibility of parole sentences at 20 years unless there is documented and reliable evidence to retain them longer not to exceed 25 years.
- 2) Place the Michigan Parole Board back under the State Civil Service Commission by state law as well as all corrections employees.
- 3) Release all elderly prisoners age 60 and over who suffer from multiple mental and physical conditions.
- 4) Cap second-degree murder and criminal sexual conduct at 20 years and mandate immediate involvement in both therapeutic and psychiatric programming.
- 5) Mandate rehabilitation by state law.
- 6) Invalidate MCL 750.316. It violates Article 4, Section 46 of Michigan Constitution of 1963.
- 7) Review life files every two years, not every five years.
- 8) Mandate the Michigan Parole Board to inform all lifers and other prisoners why

they have "no interest" in reviewing their files and what the lifers and other prisoners must/should do to reverse their negative parole decisions.

9) Remove all discriminatory programming practices and offer equal programming to all prisoners inclusive of educational, vocational, therapeutic, and other programming is needed.

10) Community involvement in all programming such as group counseling, religious counseling, college graduate student and prisoner counseling, to name a few.

We can achieve meaningful reformation or rehabilitation if meaningful and effective is implemented and facilitated by qualified correctional staff.

We are willing to work with our state lawmakers in drafting appropriate legislation. Contact us at (734) 748-0920.

Willis X. Harris
Founder and President
Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.

NOTICE TO PRISONERS

The Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. regularly receives letters from prisoners nationwide requesting placement on our "free to prisoners" mailing list. We don't know where that misinformation originated, but be advised that no such mailing list exists.

Prisoners who claim to be indigent (having less than \$50.00 in their account) must get an official letterhead statement from the prison accounting office stating the status of your account. The statement must be current, not more than 30 days old, and sent to us with your request.

Keep in mind that we do not always have extra copies, usually no more than 10. Each newsletter cost approximately 0.90¢ to mail. We now have 225 paid subscribers, which consists of prisoners, civilians, correctional staff, attorneys, and community organizations. Our monthly cost for xeroxing, envelopes, and postage run ... (Cont. on p. 12)

between \$450s to \$500s.

We do not have a lot of money. Our paid members or subscribers pay our overhead.

We will gratefully accept donations from anyone, payable to the Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.

--Willis X. Harris

PRISON ACTIVIST RESOURCE DIRECTORIES

The Prison Activist Resource Center (PARC) is now, and has been, offering FREE National Prisoner Resource Directories to prisoners nationwide to assist them in finding or locating information and contacts they may need. Examples: Innocence Projects or Clinics, basic principles, books, education, food guiding principles, to name a few.

To obtain your free copy of the PARC Directory, write to:

Prison Activist Resource Center
P.O. Box 70447
Oakland, CA 94612

The materials contained in the Resource Directory are presented to aid in the rehabilitation of prisoners, as per federal and state laws. It is a 24-page Directory.

ATTENTION CIVILIANS

Both CURE Life-Long, Inc. and The Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. are looking for Associate Directors. Must have some experience and communication skills. Age not important, but must be over 21.

Interested persons should apply by contacting us at (734) 748-0920 or write to the address below:

Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.
Board of Directors
4417 2nd Avenue, Ste. 211
Detroit, Michigan 48201-1214

--Willis X. Harris, Director

NEWS BITS ABOUT PRISONS

Coldwater, MI - Opening night of the Freep

Film Festival will take viewers inside a high-quality, high pressure culinary school where students learn to prepare gourmet meals.

These students learn the French mother sauces, service a la russe, and how to pour and discuss wine--all inside Lakeland Correctional Facility in Coldwater.

SOURCE: Detroit Free Press, March 5, 2023, p. 2A.

National - As COVID-19 Gripped U.S., Death Swept Through Prison System.

Deaths in state and federal prisons across America rose nearly 50 percent during the first year of the pandemic, and in six states they more than doubled, according to the first comprehensive data on prison fatalities in the era of COVID-19.

The tremendous jump in deaths in 2020 was more than twice the increase in the United States overall, and even exceeded estimates of the percentage at nursing homes, among the hardest-hit sectors nationwide. In many states, the data showed high rates continued in 2021.

While there was ample evidence that prisons were COVID hot spots, an examination of the data by the New York Times underscored how quickly the virus rampaged through crowded facilities, and how an aging inmate population, a correctional staffing shortage and ill-equipped medical personnel combined to make prisoners especially vulnerable during the worst public health crisis in a century.

SOURCE: The New York Times, Sunday, February 19, 2023, pg. 1.

TO OUR READERS

I apologize for the delay in this double issue of the Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter. With the new year came many responsibilities. As you can see we have changed the overall look of the Newsletter and want to know what you think. We want to hear from you. Tell us what type of articles you would like to see. We are open to all suggestions from our readers. I hope you enjoy this issue.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

The expressed purposes of the Michigan Lifers Association, Inc. and the National Lifers of America, Inc. to publish the "Michigan Lifers Report Newsletter" are to educate and uplift the lifer population, to seek changes in laws that restrict clemency and parole, to educate the general public, and to encourage criminal justice reform, especially in corrections.

PRISONERS

PRISONER'S FULL NAME: _____ Number: _____

NAME OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITY: _____

COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ Zip Code: _____

CIVILIANS

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ APT. _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ Zip Code: _____

PHONE NO. () _____

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

(Yearly Subscription 10 to 12 Issues)

PRISONERS: _____ \$15 Yearly CIVILIANS: _____ \$20 Yearly

ORGANIZATIONS: _____ \$25 Yearly LIFE MEMBERS: _____ \$100

DONATIONS: _____

SEND SUBSCRIPTION PAYMENTS & DONATIONS TO:

Michigan Lifers Association
4417 Second Ave.
Suite 211
Detroit, MI 48201-1214

