

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

MICHIGAN

Lifers Report

Newsletter

JUNE 2023 SPECIAL SECOND LOOK ISSUE

OPINION: SECOND LOOK SENTENCING - SMART, FISCALLY-RESPONSIBLE, AND EVIDENCE-BASED CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Jamie Meade

In recent weeks, there has been a surge of misleading narratives surrounding Second Look Sentencing (SLS) legislation that has gripped public discourse. It is disheartening to witness the spread of misinformation and the creation of false narratives that distort the true intentions and impact of this legislation. This politically-motivated fear mongering is merely designed to inflame and divide. In this opinion piece, I aim to shed light on facts, dispel the falsehoods, and encourage a more nuanced and informed discussion.

SLS is smart, fiscally-responsible, evidence-based legislation that factors in public safety. SLS creates a re-sentencing mechanism based on merit and is extended to individuals who have demonstrated change according to specific guidelines that are reviewed and decided by a judge. This law, if adopted, would provide an opportunity to adjust and implement more appropriately measured sentences to deserving, rehabilitated citizens.

Over the last 30 years, Michigan has taken a punishment focused approach to the harms present in our communities. Rather than address the root causes of violence, the State of Michigan has collectively decided that mass incarceration and extreme punishment are the answers. Three decades later we know that these "solutions" actually create worse outcomes, and we live with the great fiscal and human cost.

According to The Sentencing Project, Michigan now ranks fourth in the U.S. for the number of women serving life without parole ... (Cont. on p. 9)

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**MICHIGANS LIFERS REPORT
NEWSLETTER**

Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.
4417 2nd Ave., Ste. 211
Detroit, MI 48201-1214

National Lifers of America, Inc.
P.O. Box 18023
River Rouge, MI 48218

Willis X. Harris
President
Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.

Gina DeAngelo
Executive Assistant
Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.

Eddie "Malijah" Gee
Chairman, National Board
National Lifers of America, Inc.

Constance Garner
Vice-Chairwoman, State Board
National Lifers of America, Inc.

Jamie Meade
Editor

Writers

Mario Cavin
Michael Fletcher
Dwight Henley
Richard Kilbourn
Jerry Metcalf
Bruce Micheals
Bryan Noonan
Sybil Padgett
Scott Wynne

Cartoonist

Terry Young

Send articles to:

Michigan Lifers Association, Inc.
Attention: Willis X. Harris
4417 2nd Ave., Ste. 211
Detroit, MI 48201-1214

(Limit articles to 600 words)

PUTTING HARDENED CRIMINALS BACK ON THE STREET?

Doug Tjapkes

Beware! Democrats want to put hardened criminals back on the street in Michigan!

That's the essence of a warning in a recent Detroit News column. Just for the record, I'm not a novice. I'm an old-school editorial writer. In my career as a broadcast journalist spanning nearly 3 decades, I wrote and aired hundreds of editorials about issues in my community. I think there was a clear difference between my opinion pieces and those being written in newspapers and aired on TV these days.

On occasion a listener would chide me for trying to persuade people to think my way. My immediate and strong response was NO. Instead, I simply wanted people to think! Period. I raised the issue, and expressed opinions, to prod listeners into doing their own research on the topic allowing them to reach an informed opinion.

I get the feeling that too many of these cable news commentators and flaming liberal or conservative columnists have goals of high ratings, integrity be damned. Many seem intent on stirring the pot.

I don't remember who the columnist was in the Detroit News, and I don't care. However, because I'm in the prisoner advocacy business, I care a lot about inaccurate and inflammatory statements.

What the man was talking about was proposed Second Look legislation in Michigan.

In explaining the topic, Safe and Just Michigan states: This initiative would give people serving long sentences the ability to have a judge review their sentence after 10 years. In doing so, judges could rethink overly harsh sentences or bring new research on brain development to consideration.

I quote from an S&J blog piece: Second Look legislation is crucial in a state like Michigan where Good Time has been abolished and we still have a Truth in Sentencing law that demands 100 percent of a minimum sentence be served before parole can be considered. Second Look would serve as a bulwark against Michigan's dubious distinction as the state with the longest minimum prison sentences. While we have made progress in reducing Michigan's overall prison population, most of that has come from reducing the number of people serving shorter sentences. Meanwhile, Truth in Sentencing and a lack of Good Time have made sure that people serving longer sentences have remained incarcerated. As a result, the average minimum sentence of a person incarcerated ... (Cont. on p. 10)

SOLDIERS DONT CRY.

HOW DID I GET HERE?

HOW DID I FALL THIS FAR!!!

YOU ARE NOW PART OF A TIME HONORED TRADITION, FIGHTING FOR THOSE WHO CAN NOT FIGHT FOR THEMSELVES...

WORK TOGETHER MEN... NO ONE GETS LEFT BEHIND!!!



CONGRADULATIONS!

LETS GO!
LETS GO!!

RUSH!

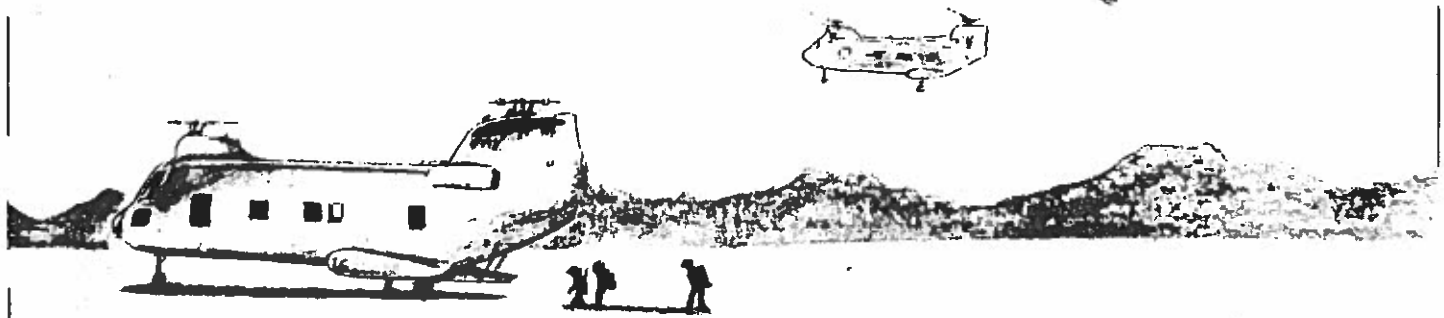
FROM THIS DAY FORWARD YOUR ACTIONS WILL MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE YOUR EFFORTS WILL SECURE FREEDOMS TO THOSE WHO WOULD OTHERWISE BE FORGOTTEN!
HOO...RAA!!!



OUT THERE SOMEONE ALWAYS HAD MY BACK.



NO OBSTICAL WAS TOO HIGH, NO RIVER TOO DEEP. WE HAD EACHOTHER, NO MATTER WHAT...

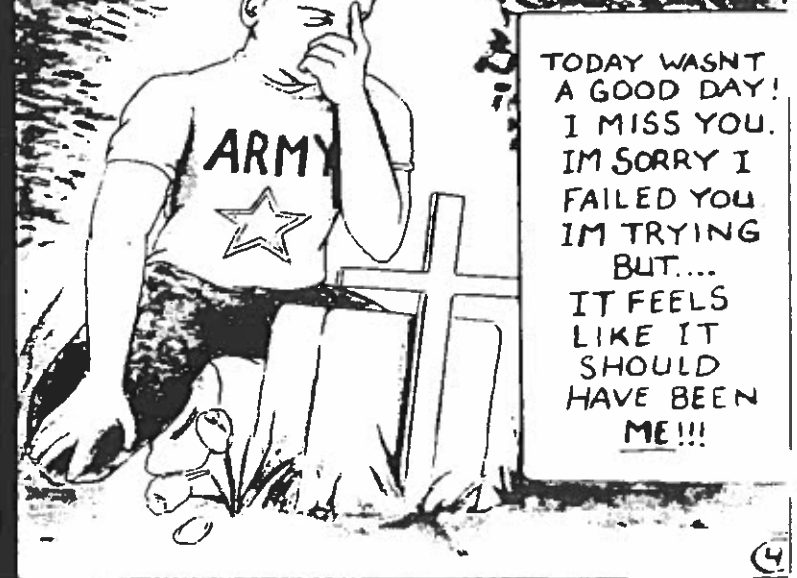
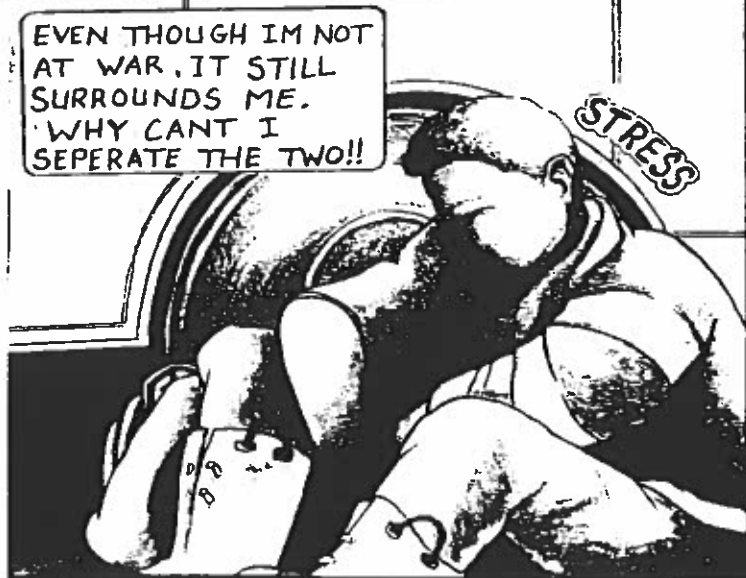


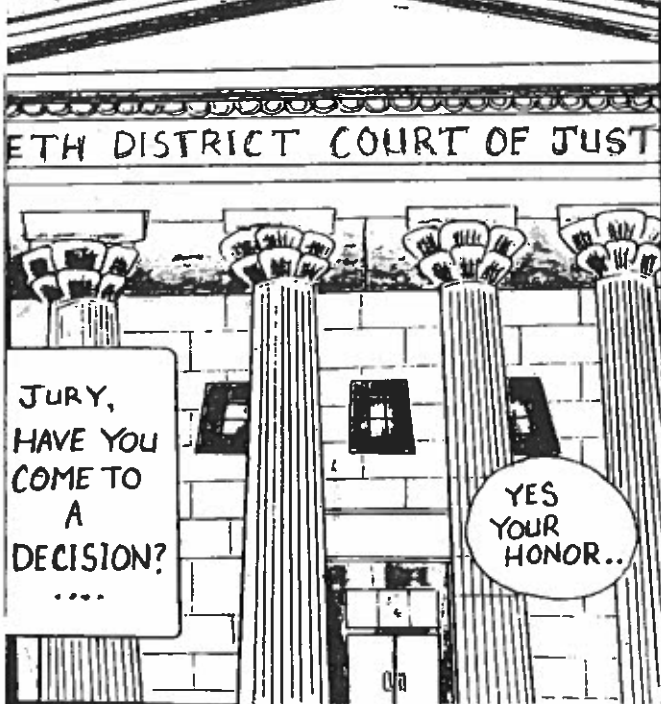
EVERY DAY THERE WAS PURPOSE, THERE WAS A MISSION. SOMETHING BIGGER THAN MYSELF. (2)

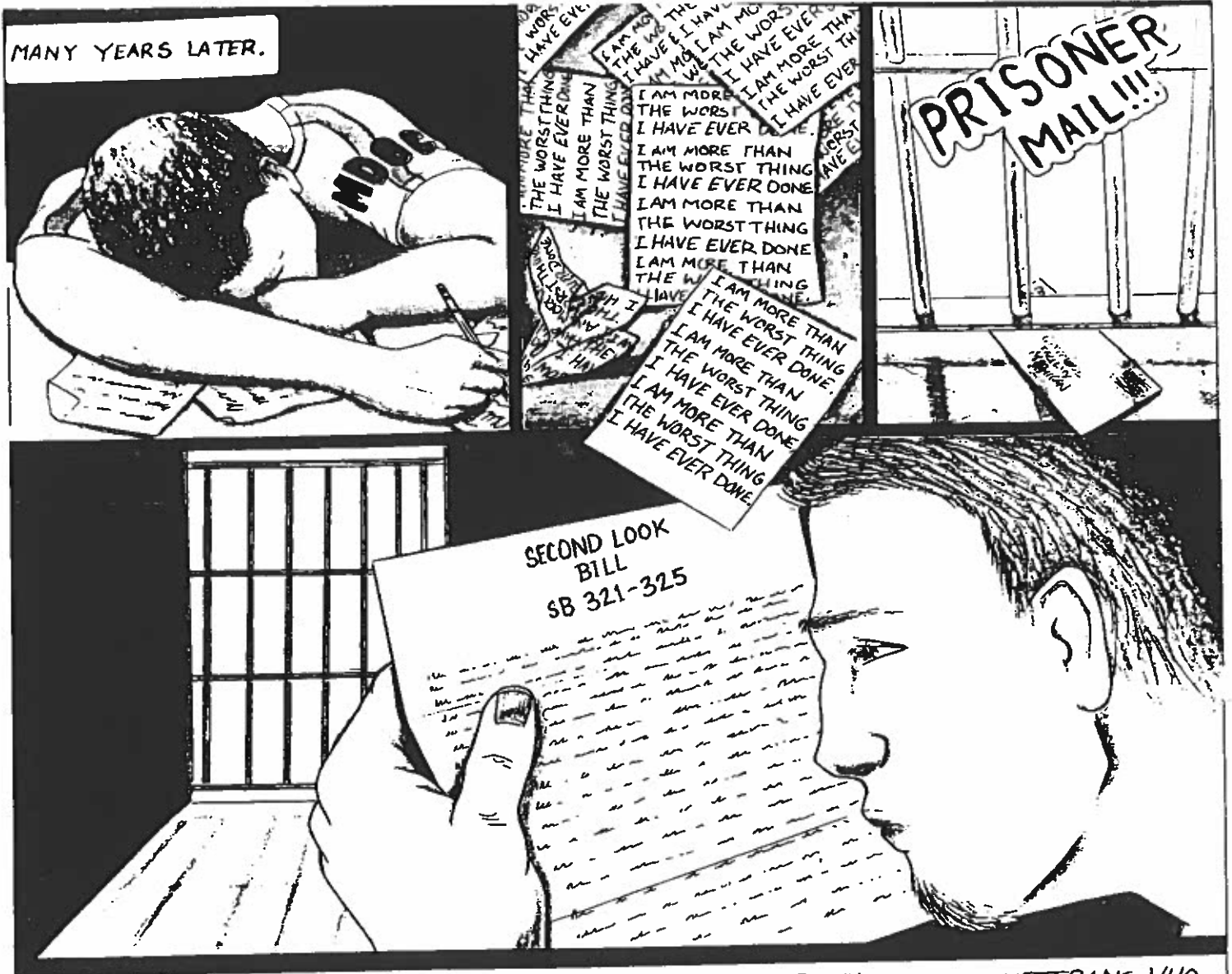


MY TIME IN SERVICE WAS NOT WITHOUT ITS SACRIFICES WHILE MY SCARS TELL STORIES, THE LOSS OF MY BEST FRIEND HIT ME THE HARDEST. NOTHING WOULD FEEL THE SAME AGAIN. PART OF ME WILL REMAIN THERE WITH HIM!









ACROSS MICHIGAN'S DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF VETERANS WHO HAD SERVED THEIR NATION AT ITS GREATEST TIME OF NEED. AND NOW ARE LEFT BEHIND AND FORGOTTEN. MEN AND WOMEN, SONS AND DAUGHTERS, FATHERS AND MOTHERS ALL TORN AWAY FROM THEIR FAMILIES BECAUSE OF THEIR MISTAKES WHILE REINTERGRATING BACK INTO SOCIETY. THE SECOND LOOK BILL OFFERS THOSE UNSUNG HEROES SOMETHING THAT WITHOUT YOUR HELP WOULD NEVER COME TO BE. A SECOND CHANCE.

EVERYONE LOVES A COME BACK STORY. BE PART OF THIS WITH US. TOGETHER, LET US SHOW THE WORLD THAT WE ARE MORE THAN OUR GREATEST MISTAKES AND THAT OUR SACRIFICES WON'T BE FORGOTTEN. PLEASE HELP YOUR VETERANS BY SUPPORTING THE SECOND CHANCE BILL #SB321-325. HELP US IN OUR GREATEST TIME OF NEED.

ARTWORK BY JOHN HAMMOND
 STORY AND CONCEPT BY J. HAMMOND, DOUG STEWART
 SPECIAL THANKS TO TARP AND NADIA

TO ALL MY BROTHERS OUT THERE, STAY STRONG. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

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(Second Look Sentencing, from p. 1) ... (LWOP) with 170-plus imprisoned (see also Michigan Department of Corrections 2021 Statistical Report, p. C-36, for the number of women imprisoned). Also, as reported by Preston Shipp, senior policy counsel for the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, Michigan has now "become a global outlier, with one of the biggest population of people serving [juvenile] LWOP in the U.S." (Ban life without parole for juveniles, The Detroit News, p. 2C, June 22, 2023).

Unfortunately, Michigan, along with California, Florida, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania, imprison "[h]alf of the national population of people serving LWOP . . .", according to Ashley Nellis in The Sentencing Project's June 2022 Report, Nothing But Time: Elderly Americans Serving Life Without Parole (p. 4). Nellis further reports, 58 percent of people serving LWOP in Michigan are 50 and older and 86 percent of the elderly LWOP population have served 20 years or more (Table 1, p. 5; Table 2, p. 7). With such an aging lifer population, cost to house them will significantly rise, fiscally straining the Michigan Department of Corrections' budget, and requiring an increase of funds to be allocated in years to come.

In addition, Michigan's punishment focused approach has disproportionately impacted the poor and people of color. People of color, who identify themselves as non-white, make-up 54.4 percent of Michigan's prison population (Michigan Department of Corrections 2021 Statistical Report, p. C-71-C-74), while only representing 26 percent of the state population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts Michigan (retrieved from www.census.gov, access date, July 9, 2023). Disproportionately locking up people of color and the poor decimates minority families and communities of low economic status and perpetuates the cycle of crime and mass incarceration.

Michigan needs to radically address the root causes of violence and harms in our communities: addressing root causes of violence and harm is a more effective and lasting way to end those cycles in our com-

munities. Tax-payer's dollars wasted on long sentences that don't deter crime could be better invested in our communities through community policing and crime prevention, quality education and job training programs, mental health and substance misuse treatment, quality housing, and more.

Locking people away in prison for a long time does not stop violence in our communities or deter crime. According to a Department of Justice fact sheet, "prison sentences (particularly long sentences) are unlikely to deter future crime," and "Laws and policies designed to deter crime by focusing mainly on increasing the severity of punishment are ineffective partly because criminals know little about the sanctions for specific crimes."

SLS proclaims we want something better for Michigan. Scientific research shows us that people change. They mature. They age out of criminality and grow out of the mistakes of youth that lead many people to prison. They cultivate new tools for dealing with conflict, even while living in an often violent place, prison. The majority of people serving life and long sentences are statistically proven to not be a threat to public safety. Rather, these same people will either be elderly neighbors dedicated to growing old in peace, or these individuals can serve as positive influences whose lived experience can guide our communities in a better and more peaceful direction.

In Michigan, our prisons are designed to warehouse and control people. There is virtually no state-run programming for people unless they are within two years of their release dates, leaving incarcerated individuals who better themselves without guidance, which they succeed admirably considering these factors. They participate in volunteer-run programs and enroll in college education programs when possible. Experience with long-serving people has shown us that these persons are self-educated, creative, productive, and accountable people.

Passing SLS in Michigan is good for public safety, it is smart, fiscally-responsible, and ... (Cont. on p. 10)

(Second Look Sentencing, from p. 9) ... evidence-based criminal justice reform moving Michigan beyond the punishment focused approach. One would imagine all law makers regardless of which side of the aisle they sit would support such reform. Now is not the time to play party politics.

(Putting Hardened Criminals, from p. 2) ... inside a Michigan prison has grown 34.8 percent from 8.9 years in 2011 to 12 years in 2021.

That is an example of researched and responsible opinion writing.

I encourage you to speak with your state legislator about the Second Look concept. We need it in Michigan. Be assured there's no one in political office who wants to put hardened criminals back on the street

Just ignore those wild-ass assertions of a Detroit News columnist.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Doug Tjapkes is the founder of Humanity For Prisoners. This article was originally published on June 27, 2023, on the Humanity For Prisoners Blog.

SECOND LOOK BRINGS SECOND HOPE

Mario Cavin

Over the last 20-30 years, misinformed citizens believed that incentives to prisoners meant rewarding negative behavior. This led to the MDOC adopting a policy/custom of "let's take this from them" and "they don't deserve that".

After years of losing many things from good time and disciplinary credits, to clothing, to educational programming, to rehabilitational programming, and being told that "life means life", the mentality on the inside became "I don't have \$@*! else to lose. Why should I care?" This led to an increase in violence and drug use throughout the state prison system. And not just the lifers! Even the over nighters (those serving 10-years or less) began adopting an "I don't give a \$#*&" attitude.

But now that Second Look Sentencing

and Good Time are real possibilities in Michigan, mentalities on the inside are likewise shifting. I recently overhear two lifers - both known for gang and drug involvement - discussing the need to make changes. These conversations are most likely happening around the state at other correctional facilities.

So, to our esteemed Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Legislators, and MDOC Officials, please remember that taking is not the answer. Hope develops the desire to change and hope gives people something to strive for, something to live for. This hope also extends to our loved ones - your constituents - who have otherwise given up had it not been for an opportunity at a "Second Look".

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Mario Cavin (Prison No. 326204) is serving a 37-year sentence in the Michigan Department of Corrections and is housed at the Macomb Correctional Facility, 346215 26 Mile Rd., Lenox Township, MI 48048. Mario is a Certified Paralegal, a Local Board member with the National Lifers of America, Inc. and an active member of The Adolescent Redemption Project (TARP).

NOTICE TO OUR READERS

We have historic legislation pending in the House and Senate in Michigan. I've been incarcerated for over 30 years and I can't recall a time when significant criminal justice reform was this close. The Second Look Sentencing affects most lifers (both without parole and with parole) and long-indeterminate sentenced individuals who have served over 10 years. I know most of us who have been incarcerated for decades have lost hope over the years, but I want to tell you this time it will happen.

Don't get me wrong, we are in for a fight. But what I want to ask of you is to reach deep down inside and ignite that fire that once burned inside of you. We need all hands on deck for this fight. We need your family and friends to stand one last time.

The National Lifers of America, Inc. will be hosting events around the state. We need your family and friends to attend.

CITIZENS FOR SECOND LOOK




Rally held on the front steps of the Church, Evergreen Corner of Grand River. Join our host **Pastor Samuel Stephens** show your support for, and learn about, Second Look Legislation. Come out and learn how this Second Look Legislation will impact our Citizens and Community!

SATURDAY JULY 22
10AM-1PM

WHERE

The Historic Pure Word MBC
20011 Grand River Ave
Detroit, 48219

 313 862 5900

 pastorstephens@yahoo.com



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Join us at our community event and show your support for Criminal Justice Reform! Bring your signs and yourself and be a part of our gathering to learn about Second Look Legislation.



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PRISONER'S FULL NAME: _____ Number: _____

NAME OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITY: _____

COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS: _____

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NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ APT. _____

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