

December 1, 2021

TO WHO MAY BE INTERESTED:

After being one of the primary organizers on the inside for the October 14, 2021 NLA/TARP Criminal Justice Reform Rally, after participating in several Zoom meetings planning the Rally, and after listening to many speakers at the Rally, I'm compelled to write this letter to you and to many others involved in criminal justice reform and social justice work because I'm baffled why people are not rallying behind me supporting my release, using my case as the example why reform is needed in Michigan. It's unquestionable my sentence is fundamentally unfair. If reform is our goal because we are keeping people in prison way too long, then why isn't my continued incarceration a concern for everyone?

In 1993, at the age of 19, I was convicted of accessory to felony murder and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), also known as Death-By-Incarceration. I did not possess a weapon, nor did I "intend to kill." The principal defendant, who was 18-years-old, who possessed the weapon, and who fired the fatal shot, was given a 12-year sentence.

Retired 3rd Judicial Circuit Court Judge Sharon Tevis Finch (sfin2000@aol.com), who tried and sentenced me, supports my release and stated in letters to the Parole Board (see enclosed) my sentence was not fundamentally fair and if she had the discretion she would have only sentenced me to 12 years for my role in the crime. Judge Finch also said her hands were tied because of the mandatory minimum sentencing laws and that she did not believe my culpability rose to the level deserving LWOP.

Since my incarceration, I've earned a Bachelors in Interdisciplinary Studies with Concentrations in Criminal Justice and Legal Studies from Adams State University. I'm currently pursuing 2 graduate degrees, a MBA in Leadership from Adams State and a Master of Divinity (MDiv) from the Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS). I've also completed Certificate Programs in Paralegal Studies, Alternative Dispute Resolution, and Victim Advocacy. In addition, I've completed 3 MDOC vocational trades and over 50 rehabilitative programs.

I'm the first incarcerated person to be approved to participate in an online graduate program in the MDOC. The MDOC and CTS have collaborated to develop a pilot project to allow me this opportunity. CTS developed a scholarship program titled, "Proclaiming Release: A Program for Theological Education Behind Bars". CTS, in collaboration with the Woodside Church of Flint, has provided me a full scholarship.

I'm also the first incarcerated person to be officially registered as a Member in Discernment by the United Church of Christ (UCC) Michigan Covenant Association Committee on Ministry on a path to Ordained Ministry. In addition, I'm a Member of the Woodside Church of Flint.

ACLU Investigative Reporter Curt Guyette, who broke the Flint water crisis