

**INSIDE  
THIS  
ISSUE**



**NO VOICE IS TOO SOFT WHEN  
THAT VOICE SPEAKS FOR OTHERS**

Dear Iowa CURE members and friends. I am writing to you as my last days as the Iowa CURE President have come to an end. I have had the up most pleasure being in an organization that put incarcerated people first. I have had the greatest joy in leaning from our past president, Jean Basinger, who has shown noting but leadership. She has shown me by her example of what it means to be an ally in the fight for the rights of incarcerated people. We are definitely at a time where people are dying because of a lack of leadership in our state and our country. It is also true that we have seen a shifting of how we treat people who are, or have been incarcerated. We need to remember that everyone deserves a second chance to become the best version of themselves, no matter what their past. It is with an eye for the future that we continue to hold ourselves, and our elected officials, to the task of healing our communities, and country. We work for the continued fight of our sisters and brothers who are incarcerated. I hope you are all staying healthy during these scary and exciting times. We must not let our guard down. I am truly grateful for my time as the President of Iowa CURE. I hope more people will do all they can to help support the work.

Sincerely,

Carla A. Dawson

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- PG.2** – Iowa CURE
  - PG.3** – Iowa Coalition for Juvenile Justice, Voices to be Heard, Iowa Department of Corrections
  - PG.4** - Nonprofit prospect, Lifer Review Bill Team
  - PG.5** –Iowa Board of Parole, Mothers on the Front Line, Iowa Justice Action Network, Hip Hope
  - PG. 6** – ACLU, Inside Out Reentry
  - PG.7** – Personal testimonials
  - PG. 8** – Felony Voting, Hope Camp
-

## Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants

The Board of Iowa CURE would like to thank all of our member for your support. This year has been different than many other years due to the COVID 19 pandemic. We appreciate everyone's flexibility with moving meetings on to the ZOOM feature. Hopefully we can all meet in person someday soon. Iowa CURE is attempting, to the best of our abilities, to keep up with the evolving technology changes, and methods that we are communicating with our members. We recently implemented a new email, iowacure@gmail.com. We have also been using the Facebook platform to send out more events and meeting notices. One item has not been utilized recently is our website. The host system that our site is on is over 10 years old. We are having issues with navigating the folders and files. We are reaching out to see if there is anyone that is able to assist with updating the website. If you are able to assist please let us know.

Iowa CURE is committed to advocacy and the success of our inmates. The board members of CURE have been attending the monthly meeting for the Iowa Department of Corrections. We are looking for people who can attend these meetings, or watch them via ZOOM, and provide the board feedback about what was said in the meeting.

Our focus group, Iowa Coalition 4 Juvenile Justice, is recruiting new members to join the mission. Currently the members attend parole board hearings for juvenile lifers that now have the possibility of parole. After the review is completed a report is sent to the group. If there are findings or inconsistencies with the review they will investigate further. Currently they are looking to expand the platform to advocate for educational resources for children to stay in school and not fall victim of the school to prison pipe line. If you have a background in education, social work, law, and would like to join the team, please let us know. If you do not have a background in those fields, and would still like to join, please let us know.

Due to attrition, and the unfortunate deaths of our board members Anne Bickell, Sheila Crosby, and JoAnne Talarico the board has several openings. If you are interested in becoming a board member please let us know.

## REFLECTIONS ON 25 YEARS OF WORKING FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

The closing down of the Justice Reform Consortium and my retirement as President of Iowa CURE has caused me to reflect on my twenty-five years of working for criminal justice reform in Iowa.

My involvement with this work began when I was on the board of Hansen House of Hospitality for men coming out of prison. I became involved in the CJM Pen Pals program and participated in 11 of the 13 Prison Awareness Walks sponsored by Hansen House. Each year we walked from an Iowa prison to Des Moines or vice versa. We spoke on the conditions in Iowa prisons in churches along the way and raised money for the operation of Hansen House. I believe that I walked a total of about 1000 miles during those walks.

My husband Bill became the guardian of Bill Kelly, one of the HH residents. He served 40 years and 2 months, Iowa prisons before being paroled to Hansen House. Bill was responsible for his care until he became too ill to live there and Bill arranged for him to go to a nursing home and then the hospital. He also arranged for his body to be given to the Des Moines Osteopathic Medical College per Bill K's request.

For several years I worked with Rep. Ed Fallon. I visited men and women in all Iowa's prisons. I had many interesting experiences, but the one that stands out is a visit that Rep. Ako Adul Samad and I made to the Newton CF. shortly after he was elected. After the tour we met with an incarcerated person whom I knew. We were put in one of the glass booths used by lawyers. The prisoner was brought in in chains and a guard dog and his handler were also brought in. It was a tight fit. We visited for 30 minutes with the dog's head on my lap. We learned that right after our visit my friend was released back into the general population.

In 2000 the Rev. Carlos Jayne and I started the Justice Reform Consortium. We started with 3 members and in 2018 when we closed the organization down there were 19 members. We worked on many issues including the shackling of women during labor and delivery, the high cost of phone calls, elimination of life sentences for juveniles and preventing the reinstatement of the death penalty. We often say that perhaps are biggest "success" was preventing the passage of bad bills or enhancement of bad bills. It has been a great privilege to be involved in this work and I hope others will continue to advocate for justice reform in our state and nation.

**A note about Iowa CURE:** We are an organization with members in and out of the prison system. We cannot offer legal services or accept phone calls from prisoners. Letters will be answered to the best of our ability. Do not send us your legal documents. In joining CURE, you are **NOT** entering into a contract for services

## Board of Iowa CURE

Carla Dawson - President

Wendy Wittrock – Vice President

Sue Hutchins – Co-Vice President

Richard Nordin – Treasurer

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Jean Basinger – Board Consultant

Christine Lockhart – Juvenile Justice Liaison

Melissa Gradischnig – Juvenile Justice Liaison

Jackie Robinson – Event Coordinator

Larry Smith – Inquiry Analyst

Caroline Uhlenhake-Walker – Event Coordinator

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

The next meeting for Iowa CURE will be on August 9<sup>th</sup> at 2pm via zoom. You will be sent an email link to join. We will have a guest speaker from the Ombudsman's office. We hope you are able to join us.

Iowa CURE  
PO BOX 41005  
Des Moines, Iowa 50311  
iowacure@gmail.com  
www.iowacure.org/



# VOICES TO BE HEARD

## GROUP FLOURISHES DURING PANDEMIC

# IOWA COALITION 4 JUVENILE JUSTICE

## COALITION SEEKS TO EXPAND

"Juvenile Lifers. Deputy Director Bill Sperfslage provided data related to juvenile lifers that was requested at the last meeting. Individuals sentenced to life in prison without parole as a juvenile were given the right to the possibility of parole in 2015. There were 52 individuals impacted by this change. Since then 36 are still incarcerated and 16 have been released on parole. The recidivism rate for this group is currently 0.0%:"

The Iowa Coalition for Juvenile Justice is recruiting members to advocate for juvenile issues. If you yourself, or you know someone that is interested in juvenile sentencing reform, education, and intervention or have a back ground in education, social work, law, please email us at iac4jj@gmail.com.

If you are a juvenile lifer that was impacted by the Miller v Alabama case, we would like to hear from you.



Due to the unfortunate circumstances with COVID 19, Voices to be Heard has not been able to meet face to face. However, with technology we are able to have meetings via ZOOM. Everyone is missing seeing each other in person. Hopefully the pandemic does not last as long as they say it will.

Currently we are looking for a new location to host our meeting. One possibility is Hope Church that is located on 25<sup>th</sup> and University. This is a central location and is right by one of the metro bus lines. If you know of any locations willing to host us, please let us know.

We received money from United Way. This allowed us to get new brochures, and pay our facilitators working with kids and in our school groups. This money also is used to do training for the Des Moines Public Schools. The school district has asked us to facilitate training on what signs to look for in youth that could possibly have a family member or friend incarcerated. This training was originally going to be in person training. Due to the circumstances with COVID 19 we have been doing training via ZOOM.

Since most of our meetings have been on ZOOM we have been able to record the session and post it so that others who were unable to attend can watch.

The Des Moines Public Schools has not announced their plans for this fall and returning. At this time, it is unknown what our program platform will look like if the children do not return physically to the school.

If you would like to know more about Voices to be Heard, or have ideas or suggestions, please contact Melissa Gradischnig at vtbihiowa@yahoo.com.

*"Families of prisoners are the forgotten victims"*

## Iowa Department of Corrections

### DEPARTMENT AUTHORIZES VIDEO VISITS

The Iowa Department of Corrections had a swift response to the COVID 19 pandemic. Difficult decisions had to be made to keep the community, inmates, and staff safe. On March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Director Beth Skinner announced that all visiting would be suspended until further notice. The department understood the strain this would cause to families and inmates. To keep families and inmates in contact the department implemented video visitation on google meets. This allows inmates and families one hour a week to visit via video. They also authorized 5 free minutes of phone time for inmates to call families and friends.

### IOWA IMATES EARN \$1.15 PER HOUR PRODUCING COVID 19 SUPPLIES

One of Iowa's most reliable sources of personal protective equipment to fight the coronavirus has been a statewide prison labor program that can pay inmates as little as 58 cents per hour. Prisoners across the state have helped make 98,000 masks, 40,000 gowns, 17,000 face shields and 24,000 gallons of hand sanitizer in recent weeks, the Iowa Department of Corrections says. Inmates and staff at several prisons have been working weekends and nights, including 12 hours on Easter Sunday, to produce the supplies, which are being used to protect themselves, the guards, state employees and health care workers.

### COVID 19 CONFIRMED AT IOWA INSTITUTIONS

The department has confirmed over 175 positive cases of COVID 19 at the Fort Dodge Facility. There has been one reported fatality. Ray Allen Vanlengen passed away on July 6 and Ronald Eugene Holdworth, passed away on July 12th due to coronavirus complications. Dr. Beth Skinner has been updating the department website with updates. For more information please go to <https://doc.iowa.gov/families-during-covid19>.



#### Future meetings

August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020

September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020

October 2, 2020

November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Due to the COVID 19 Pandemic meetings have been held via ZOOM then uploaded to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

## New Non-Profit Prospect

Research shows that family involvement with an incarcerated individual increases their changes of not recidivating when they leave prison. For children it is a chance to be with their loved one that suddenly had to leave. Many people drive on average 3-5 hours one way to visit a loved one in prison. There are also people who live out of state or even out of the country. Approximately only 50% of the incarcerated population in Iowa get one visit a year.

There are eight correctional facilities in the state of Iowa. At this time there are currently no non-profit family lodging or hospitality houses for families who travel from a far distance. There is currently interest in incorporating non-profit hospitality houses where the institutions are located in Iowa to assist families that live far away, or are unable to afford the expense of a hotel when they come to visit. To get the project started it will take a lot of work and a small army of people.

In order for this nonprofit to exist the article of incorporation and bylaws need to be presented to the Secretary of State. For articles of incorporation to be presented there must be 4 directors listed. At this time there is only one individual named on the articles of incorporation.

If you are interested in being a director on the non-profit project please email Wendy Wittrock at [wlwittrock@gmail.com](mailto:wlwittrock@gmail.com). Once there are four directors, and the articles are sent to the Secretary of State, then the search is on for the real property.

If you are unable to be a director, but interested in volunteering, there are a wide variety of ways that you can help. If you are able to assist with the following please let us know. Any help is appreciated.

*Background in real estate*

*Small business administration*

*Grant writing*

*Fundraising*

*Accounting*

*Legal/law – assist with tax reporting and nonprofit laws.*

Once the non-profit is set up, and the real property is purchase we will need help with:

*Landscaping*

*Electrical*

*HVAC*

*Contracting*

*Plumbing*

*General maintenance and upkeep*



**“All of our dream can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.” – Walt Disney**

## The Lifer Review Bill Team

*by Sue Hutchins*

Using House File 2433 (HF2433) which made it into the Public Safety sub-committee in 2020 as our foundation, our Lifer Review team developed a more specific and thorough proposal for Iowa’s men and women who have been sentenced to Life W/O the Possibility of Parole to obtain a second chance. This is a House of Representatives Bill and has bipartisan support. We are a team of 6 and have met weekly via Zoom since late in March to prepare the draft for this Bill.

Representative Terry Baxter has joined us on several occasions whenever he was available. He is dedicated to seeing this effort become a reality. We share that dedication, vision and hope.

Currently the Bill is in the hands of legislators and it is being distributed to DOC officials We will make it available to lifers and then to the public later this summer. If you are interested, please feel free to contact me.

Sue Hutchins - Vice President of Iowa CURE

(575) 343-0202 or [hutchins\\_sue@yahoo.com](mailto:hutchins_sue@yahoo.com)



Many returning citizens assume their state restricts their right to vote. But that's not true! Most states restore the right to vote to people after they complete their sentences. In fact, up to 17 million Americans with past convictions can vote right now - they just don't know it because felony disenfranchisement laws in every state can be confusing. Campaign Legal Center has launched a website and on-the-ground campaign to help people with past convictions in all 50 states know their rights. We have researched the felony disenfranchisement laws in every state and are here to help.

Restore Your Vote is a project of Campaign Legal Center. Through litigation, policy analysis and public education, Campaign Legal Center, based in Washington, D.C., seeks to protect and strengthen the U.S. democratic process across all levels of government.

(202) 857-0314 or (888) 306-8683 (toll-free)

Email [RestoreYourVote@campaignlegal.org](mailto:RestoreYourVote@campaignlegal.org)

<https://campaignlegal.org/>



## Iowa Board of Parole

The Iowa Board of Parole is now doing their annual parole reviews and interviews via the internet. This includes those who were sentenced to life without parole as juveniles and now are eligible for life with the possibility of parole. If you would like to listen to a review or interview, please contact Marilee Mitchell at the Iowa Board of Parole to sign up and get the information about how to connect. She can be reached at 515-725-5757 and Marilee.mitchell@iowa.gov.

Early this year the parole board started doing interviews with class A felons who had applied for commutation of their sentences and several were completed, but we understand that those have been put on hold due to the pandemic. The people who had been interviewed were not approved for commutations. This may be an indication that the governor does not plan to take a positive approach to such applications. There are only 3 juvenile reviews scheduled for this month. There will be a number who come up for their annual reviews in October.

## IOWA JUSTICE ACTION NETWORK

### ADVOCATES ATTEND LOBBY DAY

The board of IJAN would like to thank all of the members of CURE who participated in our annual lobby day at the capitol. This year was our largest turn out. We heard stories from many former incarcerated individuals that included their struggles and triumphs. Dr. Skinner, Director of the Department of Corrections, was the keynote speaker. She provided insight on how important our advocacy helps people who are incarcerated and are re-entering the communities.

After lobby day we have been working on justice issues. Recently we have been focusing on the disproportionality of African Americans among the incarcerated. We are actively looking into the role that both the police and prosecutors have in decision making that can impact this disparity. There is a particular interest in the correlation that Black Hawk County has with the disparity.

We will have a webinar in August. More information will be provided on the CURE Facebook page and via email on the time and date. We hope you can participate.

If anyone would like to share their personal stories of what you perceived as unequal treatment based on race, we would like to hear from you. Please email us at allen.hays@uni.edu with your stories.



### Mothers on the Frontline

#### Areas of Focus

Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and School-Prison Nexus that disproportionately targets children of color and children with disabilities – particularly in cases of intersectional oppressions (e.g., disproportionate seclusion, restraint, suspension, and expulsion of black boys with learning disabilities, developmental disabilities (e.g., autism) and mental health conditions.)

Access to culturally appropriate and competent mental health and educational services.

Centering the knowledge and wisdom of mothers in the envisioning and creating of restorative and collaborative systems for our children.



Hip-Hope Inc. is a non-profit organization, with 501(C)3 tax exempt status, whose mission is to utilize arts and culture to promote, advocate and support Hope wherever symptoms of hopelessness are prevalent. We define hopelessness as: “Being unable to function or maintain a desired quality of life due to lack of knowledge, resources, mental health and/or access to solutions.”

Our primary focus is on addressing community safety concerns and disparities as they relate to economics, health, incarceration and education among “at-risk” and “high-risk” youth ages K-12 in the greater Des Moines area.

**“Listen with the intent to understand!”** Hip-Hope Inc. assesses the needs of the community through the perspective of the youth. We promote hope for our future by giving youth a voice through arts and culture. Their insight allows us to accurately address their needs.

Hip Hope has a new home at the Eddie Davis Community Center 1312 Maple, West Des Moines. There are two programs that just started Monday July 6. They are Microsoft Office Leadership Development Executive and Hustlenomics Wells Fargo understanding Financials. They are also partnered with Evelyn K Davis Center. There will be eight young adults that will be sharing HipHope stories on Social Media platforms that include Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram.

P.O. Box 248  
Johnston, Iowa 50131  
Tel: 515-409-2234  
<https://hiphopeinc.wixsite.com/hiphopeinc>





## DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, IOWA PRISONS AND JAILS NOW LESS FULL

### ACLU IOWA

It's nearly impossible to socially distance in prison and jail, so as the COVID-19 pandemic began to affect Iowans in March, the ACLU and 25 other organizations called for rapid "decarceration," that is, allowing as many people as reasonably possible to avoid or leave jails or prisons to friends, family, and other safer environments.

At the prison level, we asked for releasing people who were slated to leave in the next 1 to 2 years, those who were held on relatively minor charges, or people whose health conditions made them especially vulnerable to the disease.

At the county jail level, we asked for reforms to policing, arrest, bail, charging, and sentencing that would reduce the number of people going into jails in the first place and allow many of those in jail to get out. We applaud state and local leadership for responding. While further action is needed, in particular by Iowa prisons, important steps were taken to reduce incarceration in our state to protect public health.

Iowa's jail populations vary daily, but overall, compared to pre-COVID-19 populations, the number of people in Iowa's jails has been significantly reduced, and prison populations, while remaining beyond capacity, are also declining. The Iowa state prison population has been reduced about 10 percent, primarily because of early parole and a halt to most incoming transfers from county jails.

At the county level, many of the larger jails are reporting reductions of between 25 and 50 percent. This keeps not only the people who were released safer from COVID-19, but also protects people who remain incarcerated, staff, and surrounding communities.

There's still much work for jails and prisons to do. Advocacy and legal organizations have received numerous complaints from inmates and their loved ones about the lack of sanitation and hygiene supplies and the lack of even the slight social distancing that could reasonably take place in a jail or prison. State prisons are still—even after significant reductions—over capacity. The state DOC, Board of Parole, and Governor's Office should be releasing far more low-risk prisoners. And now that the state has started to open up, even though we continue to see many new cases of the virus daily, it's important that our public officials double down on efforts to reduce inmate populations and to keep those who are not released as safe as possible. *ACLU Requests Information on COVID-19 in Iowa Prisons*. (June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020). ACLU of Iowa. <https://www.aclu-ia.org/en/news/aclu-requests-information-covid-19-iowa-prisons>

### Inside Out Reentry Community

Inside Out Reentry Community is based in Iowa City and serves people returning to Johnson County after incarceration. They also work with individuals incarcerated throughout the state to help them develop re-entry plans. Regardless of where they plan to live after release. Returning to an becoming an active member of society after being in prison is tough, and we strive to get these individuals every possible chance to build productive lives. Our entire community benefits when a returnee finds work, a place to live, and becomes positive, contributing citizens.

## HOPE CAMP



**Giving children of the incarcerated the foundation they need to grow by planting seeds of *hope*.**

### Who we are

A Summer Camp for children of the incarcerated. As Jesus said "Whoever welcomes one child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me" – Mark 9:37

The purpose of Hope Camp is to provide -- free of charge -- a week of Christian camping for children of prisoners. The aim is to expand their worlds in a special fulfilling way at Wolfe Ranch. Our philosophy is to demonstrate unconditional love to campers who never before have been offered or accepted that gift from their family, teachers, or peers. For many of them, there has never been a gift given without something expected in return. The camp consists of daytime and evening activities, horse riding, music, arts and crafts, swimming, fishing, storytelling and quiet time. There is always fun with a focus on teamwork with a work project for the week. The program always revolves around a theme or song.

This is a fantastic camp experience during which campers will get to enjoy the low ropes course, rock wall, canoe, go for a horse ride, and so much more. Campers will have the opportunity to learn more about themselves and their faith through daily Bible Study times! This camp is generously supported by the Iowa U.M. Church, The Board of Church and Society, and many other individuals and churches across Iowa!

Hope Camp's aim is to make a difference in the lives of these children by showing them love and planting seeds of *hope*.

### History and Vision

Hope Camp was started five years ago by Trinity Episcopal Parish and Faith temple in Waterloo, Iowa. It is a summer camp for youth that are between the ages of 6-12 and have one or both parents in prison or the county jail. It is held at Wolfe Ranch near Marshalltown, Iowa, and it is free for the youth. Children will learn how to take care of horses and even how to ride them. They will go swimming everyday, fishing, do many crafts, and will have a project to do for the week. There will also be time for basketball and other activities. We have a study time to learn how God loves all of us. We work to become a community by helping each other. The youth will work with the cooking and cleaning up after each meal.

#### Contact information:

4535 Kimball Ave. Waterloo, IA 50701  
**Email:** [ldaecon59mchsi.com](mailto:ldaecon59mchsi.com) **Tel:** 319-830-6371  
<https://www.cedarvalleyhopecamp.com/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/cedarvalleyhopecamp/>

## FELONY VOTING

Iowa CURE is part of a coalition of organizations that has been working on the felony voting rights issue. This coalition is led by Daniel Zeno, public policy director for the ACLU of Iowa. Hundreds of letters have been sent to members of the legislature, and to the governor asking them to support a constitutional amendment to restore voting rights to returning citizens when they have completed their sentences. We wanted to get this passed during the recent session so that it could move the process forward. Unfortunately, HJR 14 did not pass.

Recently the Black Lives Matter movement has taken on this cause. Representatives of this movement met the governor and other community leaders. The governor stated that she would sign an Executive Order for restoration of voting rights for returning citizens in August or early fall. She said that it would take time for her and her staff to compose the order. It has been suggested that she should use the order signed by Governor Vilsack. Members were hopefully that she would issue the order on the 4th of July.

Supporters are now waiting to see her order. We hope that it will not be required that restitution, fines and fees be fully paid in order to get voting rights restored. Supporters of the order feel that would be considered a poll tax and would, no doubt, be challenged in court as it was in Florida.

Please continue to contact the governor and your legislators regarding this important issue.

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## U.S Department of Justice proceeds with executions

### Iowa native has been executed

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to halt the execution of Dustin Honken. He was convicted in 2004 of murdering five people in Iowa. The victims included two girls aged 10 and 6. Honken was executed on July 17 at the U.S. Penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana. Even though Iowa does not have the death penalty, Honken's crime fell under federal jurisdiction which allows the death penalty. He was 52. His co-conspirator, and former ex-girlfriend, Angela Johnson was convicted also and sentenced to death. In 2014 her sentenced was overturned and she is now servicing a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

#### Iowans Against the Death Penalty

PO Box 782  
Des Moines, IA 50303  
515-229-4578

[info@iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.org](mailto:info@iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.org)



I have one of the happier stories you may read. My 49-year-old son was granted early parole in October 2019. He still had two more years until his MRD, but he was diagnosed with brain cancer while he was still incarcerated (December 2018). He had brain surgery, radiation treatments, and chemo during 2019. While he was still inside and receiving treatment at the University of Iowa Hospital, the officials at Iowa Medical and Classification Center treated my son (and me) very well. In fact, Amber Martinson, my son's case manager, and Dr. Kosinsky, the head of the medical staff at IMCC, spearheaded the effort to get the rare compassionate release accomplished for my son.

I was also immensely impressed with the medical staff and case manager, Jamie Frits, at Newton Correctional Facility who worked with me to get my son the proper medical attention, after his initial manifestation in December 2018, which was a seizure. They took my son's case very seriously and acted immediately to get him to U of I Hospital for a diagnosis, and then to get my son transferred to IMCC, so he would be closer to the hospital for all the medical appointments and procedures involved with his care and treatment.

My son has MRIs every 3 months now and the last few have been "stable," which means the tumor isn't growing, but it's also still there. My son is on daily anti-seizure medication and hasn't had another one since that initial episode. The U of I doctors and health care staff have been stellar in treating my son with dignity and in giving him proper medical attention, as well.

I'm so happy to have my son living with me. I purchased a house in Martelle, Iowa, once it became clear that the parole board was going to approve his early release.

The parole board members also impressed me, not only with their seriousness and professionalism, but also with the compassion they showed to my son and to me. After my son's parole interview, which I attended in person, two of the three board members made the effort to come into the room where I had been observing the interview via closed circuit TV. They were the nicest ladies! They spoke words of encouragement to me and even gave me hugs! I was flabbergasted, to say the least!

So, my son is doing amazingly well, even with brain cancer. He's receiving SSI payments, which are crucial for me to be able to afford this humble little house, where I watch him like a hawk for any signs of sickness. The only things that are manifesting themselves right now are that he gets tired easily and he has a tiny bit of a short-term memory deficit. Other than that, it's nearly miraculous that he's doing so well.

I'm very grateful for so many wonderful people, including you and the other CURE members, who have demonstrated they truly care about others. Iowa is full of people with good hearts!

Sincerely,  
Cheryl D. Floyd



## Renewed Minds

*By: Michael E. Blackwell, Sr.*

At twenty-one I murdered two people. I was sentenced to life in prison, called a "Lifer." I will be fifty-one this year.

After spending three decades here, I have gained a unique insight into the Negative/Enslaved mindset. A mindset that says, "Prison operates this way, so you have to." Combine that with humans enslaved by anger, bitterness, secret shame, and hopelessness, and you have people who will conform instead of transform; drowning in this perpetual mental cesspool. Breaking that connection is laborious. A connection disconnecting humans from humane, and produces irrational rationalizations that justify a disregard for human life.

Why should you care? This mindset is present in, and could soon return to, a neighborhood near you. A movie theatre. A shopping mall. A restaurant. A convenience store. A sidewalk. A country road. The Negative/Enslaved mentality dominates prison societies. On both sides. Very few men engage in the struggle to change. That tug-of-war between the familiar vs. fear of the unknown. Those who try must endure characters assassination, ostracism, and hatred for deserting the status quo. My transformation taught me that. Those trials strengthened my resolve to change lives for the better. That is why I founded a mentoring program called, Negative2Positive.

For a lifer to escape the Negative/Enslaved mentality, prison provides us with the opportunity for an out-of-body experience. Some of us seize the chance to separate from crowds and cliques to effectively see ourselves clearly. In doing so, the flaws in our thought process become visible through others, and we mentally fix what we physically see.

A changed lifer possesses the in-depth skill of getting to the nucleus of anger, pain, denial, and secret shame, to restore hope. We started with our own. We will teach people how to navigate through it and emerge better. Convey our unique understanding of freedom's value -- gained by losing it for life.

In January of 2019 I applied for commutation to Governor Reynolds. Commutation is a request to have my sentence of life without parole changed to life WITH parole or to a term of years. In the Des Moines Register article "Hearing set on Lifer's bid for release," William Petroski informed us that 224 death or life sentences have been commuted in this state since 1949. He wrote, "On average, these prisoners had served 24.5 years... only four of the 224 went on to re-offend... three of the inmates were later paroled again." That is a 0.0178% recidivism rate.

Why is recidivism so low among lifers given a second chance? Time. After 20-25 years, seeing ourselves in hindsight through the youth today - the know-it-all attitude, false bravado, and impulsive decision making, gives birth to perspective. Combine this with remorse, maturity, the death of family and friends, reflection, missed milestones and epic failures in our children's lives, and you find men who comprehend that human life is priceless.

Commuting the sentences of, releasing, and utilizing as mentors, lifers who have changed their thinking will save lives. It will also save taxpayers 32,000 dollars a year per lifer, reduce recidivism, and dissipate the rage in society today. Help before prison is key because once here, the prison environment is a tsunami of negativity detrimental to positive change.

Some of us wish to save more lives than we have taken. Commutation by the Governor is the most effective way for us to do so.

History confirms we are not likely to waste the chance.



# Resources

Organization	Phone Number	Email	Website
ACLU Iowa	515-243-3988	info@aclu-ia.org	<a href="https://www.aclu-ia.org/">https://www.aclu-ia.org/</a>
Angel Tree	1-800-55-ANGEL	info@pfm.org	<a href="https://www.prisonfellowship.org/">https://www.prisonfellowship.org/</a>
Anthony Graves Foundation			<a href="https://www.anthonygravesfoundation.org/contact">https://www.anthonygravesfoundation.org/contact</a>
IA-NE NAACP - Betty Andrews	515-288-7171	iowanebraskanaacp@gmail.com	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/iowanebraskaNAACP/">https://www.facebook.com/iowanebraskaNAACP/</a>
Coalition for Juvenile Justice	202-827-9751	info@juvjustice.org	<a href="http://www.juvjustice.org/">http://www.juvjustice.org/</a>
CURE International - Charlie Sullivan			<a href="mailto:cure@curenational.org">cure@curenational.org</a>
CURE Sort - Sex Offenders Restored Through Treatment		wbowers8@cox.net	
Cure for Vets		Jcautilli2003@yahoo.com	<a href="http://www.vets-cure.com">www.vets-cure.com</a>
Friends of Iowa Womens Prisoners - Kirk Kinesset	515-225-8349	knesset@preludeiowa.org	<a href="http://www.friendsofiowawomenprisoners.org">www.friendsofiowawomenprisoners.org</a>
HipHope	515-409-2234		<a href="https://hiphopeinc.wixsite.com/hiphopeinc">https://hiphopeinc.wixsite.com/hiphopeinc</a>
Iowans Against the Death Penalty		info@iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.org	<a href="http://www.iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.org/">http://www.iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.org/</a>
Inside Out Community Reentry Community	319-338-7996	insideoutreentry@gmail.com	<a href="https://www.insideoutreentry.com/">https://www.insideoutreentry.com/</a>
Interfaith Alliance of Iowa	515-279-8715		<a href="https://interfaithallianceiowa.org">https://interfaithallianceiowa.org</a>
Innocence Project	212-364-5386	development@innocenceproject.org	<a href="https://www.innocenceproject.org">https://www.innocenceproject.org</a>
Iowa Coalition for Juvenile Justice - Wendy Wittrock	912-674-7061	iac4jj@gmail.com	<a href="http://www.ia4juvenilejustice.org">www.ia4juvenilejustice.org</a>
Iowa Justice Action Network - Al Hayes		iowajusticeactionnetwork@gmail.com	<a href="https://iowajusticeactionnetwork.com/">https://iowajusticeactionnetwork.com/</a>
League of Women Voters	641-990-4684		<a href="https://www.lwvia.org">https://www.lwvia.org</a>
Life Long CURE - Willis Harris	313-442-3929	everyonesmom4@comcast.net	
Living Beyond the Bars - Sue Hutchins		LBTBTSue@yahoo.com	<a href="https://www.livingbeyondthebars.org/">https://www.livingbeyondthebars.org/</a>
Mothers on the Front Line		MothersOnTheFrontline@gmail.com	<a href="https://mothersonthefrontline.com/">https://mothersonthefrontline.com/</a>
National Juvenile Justice Network	202-878-6656	info@njjn.org.	<a href="https://www.njjn.org">https://www.njjn.org</a>
Office of the Ombudsman - Kirstie Hirschman	515- 281-3592	ombudsman@legis.iowa.gov	<a href="https://www.legis.iowa.gov/Ombudsman/">https://www.legis.iowa.gov/Ombudsman/</a>
Prison Fellowship/Angel Tree	1-800-206-9764	info@pfm.org	<a href="https://www.prisonfellowship.org/">https://www.prisonfellowship.org/</a>
Proclaim Justice	512-605-7525	info@proclaimjustice.org	<a href="http://proclaimjustice.org/">http://proclaimjustice.org/</a>
Project Iowa	515-280-1274	office@projectiowa.org	<a href="https://www.projectiowa.org/">https://www.projectiowa.org/</a>
Sentencing Project	202-628-0871	staff@sentencingproject.org	<a href="https://www.sentencingproject.org">https://www.sentencingproject.org</a>
Voices to be Heard - Melissa Gradischnig	515-280-9027	vtbhiowa@yahoo.com	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/voicestobeheardofiowa/">https://www.facebook.com/voicestobeheardofiowa/</a>



Iowa CURE  
PO Box 41005  
Des Moines, Iowa 50311

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## Iowa CURE Membership Application

### How do I join?

Fill out the application form below and mail it with your membership fee to the Iowa CURE office address below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please remove me from this mailing list

### Why should I join CURE?

Being a CURE member gives you access to experienced staff, reputable research, political action, community organizing, leadership and strategy development as well as informative fact sheets, action alerts, legislative and issue updates.

**Please feel free to photocopy this newsletter/application to pass along to interested friends, family, associates or loved ones in prison.**

### Annual Membership Fees

Prisoner	\$2	Sustaining	\$50
Individual	\$10	Life	\$100
Family	\$20		



**IOWA CURE**

**P. O. BOX 41005**

**Des Moines, IA**

**50311**

**IowaCURE@gmail.com**