



CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY COALITION

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(Town)

LIFE WITH HOPE – EVERY PERSON IN PRISON DESERVES A PAROLE HEARING

A life sentence holding out the possibility of parole would motivate more individuals to commit themselves to meaningful growth and would recognize that healing can take place in all people. Life sentences offering no chance for parole are cruelly inconsistent with the humane standards we believe our state and nation should uphold. They impose an unnecessary financial burden on Massachusetts taxpayers and do nothing to improve public safety.

WE THEREFORE CALL UPON THE MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL COURT TO REPLACE ALL CURRENT LAWS IMPOSING LIFELONG PRISON SENTENCES OFFERING NO POSSIBILITY OF PAROLE WITH LEGISLATION PROVIDING FOR PAROLE REVIEWS AT 25 YEARS.

signature

printed name

address and email/phone

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LIFE WITH HOPE

"I had a very difficult time accepting the fact that I had killed another human being," Arnold King has said. "I was embarrassed, ashamed and disappointed in my behavior and its consequences. Denial was the initial reaction."

King has been confined inside Massachusetts prisons for more than 45 years, serving life. A high school dropout, King was in Boston one night seeking pills and heroin when he shot a man. "A man dies alone in his car of a gunshot to the head," he has written, "and societal norms demand punishment."

King's later actions, however, are what have prompted many community leaders and even parole board members to advocate for his release. Besides earning bachelor's and master's degrees from Boston University, he has received awards for his leadership and community service. He counsels at-risk youth and writes widely on prison issues and countering violence.

Despite these accomplishments and accolades, King is ineligible for parole.

Today there are more than 1,000 men and women in Massachusetts serving lifelong prison sentences that offer no hope of parole. Such sentences assume that these individuals are incapable of personal redemption and rehabilitation, and of becoming productive members of society.

How can anyone – judge, jurors, prosecutors – know what changes will happen to an individual a decade later? Two decades hence? Life presents most of us with challenges, often when least expected. Some of us change, some don't. For us to expect a court to decide that individual is forever beyond redemption is to expect that court to have a gift of prophecy no one on earth has.

Jerry Dunton has a bachelor's degree from Boston University. He worked for decades in institutional maintenance. He has helped retired seniors, and made toys for Toys-for-Tots. He has counseled high school students on how to make the right choices, and stay out of prison.

He has done all of these good works, and more, from behind bars. Dunton is currently serving a life sentence.

"I came to prison in 1981 and immediately began therapy to find out why I had become violent," he says. "I took all the programs available dealing with anger, self-image, conflict resolution, resolution of past traumas, and getting involved with meditation."

And he's used what he learned to give back in all the ways he can, despite being in prison. For life.

Prisons should be houses of healing for all within. A life sentence holding out the possibility of parole after 25 years, available to all so sentenced, would motivate more individuals to commit themselves to meaningful rehabilitation and would recognize that people can change. Lengthy sentences could become an avenue for growth rather than solely a means of retribution.

"Daddy, when are you coming home?"

That young, loving voice over the phone helped a convicted murderer turn his life around. Turned it from "a very dark place," to one devoted to Christ, to improving himself, and to acknowledging the violent past that had put him behind bars.

Jose Rosario was 23 in 1999, living, as he puts it, "a double life: holding down an honest job during the day and running the streets at night." Then it all came crashing down: Convicted of first degree murder, he was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison.

Rosario's daughter, "instilled in me a new hope for my life. Broken and ashamed, I first began working on my soul.

"I could finally face my past and strive to create a better future," he says. "I gave my life to Christ, and promised to work each day to spread His message of love and forgiveness – a promise I keep to this day. ...My sentence of life without the possibility of parole erased all hope in my life. My daughter – my princess – and my son gave me that hope back."

An extensive discussion may be found in the publication *Life Without Parole: A Reconsideration* (<http://www.cjpc.org/uploads/1/0/4/9/104972649/life-without-parole-a-reconsideration.pdf>). Hardcopy available upon request.