Stateville Speaks

Voices from the Inside • 2014 Special Edition

Murder Victim Family Member Supports HB 3668

By Jeanne Bishop

I am a family member of three murder victims: my younger sister, her husband and their unborn baby were murdered in their own home. The person who killed them received a mandatory sentence of life without parole for killing the adults and a discretionary sentence of life without parole for killing the baby.

When the judge gave him those sentences, I was glad. I told myself the terrible crimes he committed justified it. I also believed that to never see him again, never have to think about him, would free me to do good in the world to honor my murdered family members. I could focus on that, not on him.

Over the years, people I loved and respected disagreed with me on life without parole sentences. Bill Ryan, whose work against the death penalty helped bring about abolition of the sentence in Illinois. Sister Helen Prejean, Catholic nun and author of Dead Man Walking, who says this: A person is more than the worst thing he has ever done.

Because people like Bill and Sister Helen are a moral compass for me on so many things, I had to ask myself: Are they right? Am I wrong? Still, I wasn't convinced that a sentence such as life without parole--which denies to the defendant any possibility of release in the future, no matter what he does or who he becomes--wasn't a fair response to heinous crime and a necessary protection for victims' family members.

Then, my heart changed. I read a chapter by an academic and pastor who wrote that Christians have an obligation to work to reconcile with those who have wronged us. I was incensed. It seemed too much to ask; why should I have to try to reach out to someone who has done harm to those I loved, someone who had never apologized? I called the pastor to ask him: What would that even look like? His answer: "It would look like Jesus on the cross." The pastor was reminding me of what Jesus did: he prayed for the very people who were killing him in that moment.

I wrote to the person who murdered my family members. He wrote back and apologized. We are visiting and talking. It is a good thing.

It has given me a new perspective on the laws that keep so many prisoners behind bars for so long. So has my work: since the murders of my family members, I have been an assistant public defender in the State court system. I see firsthand the effects of harsh mandatory sentences and lengthy prison terms. I understand that some people in prison are extremely dangerous and need to stay there; others, however, would never reoffend if given the opportunity of release.

All of which brings me to the Elderly Sentence Adjustment Act. The proposed law would give prisoners who have reached at least age 50 and who have served at least 25 consecutive years the chance to apply for sentence modification. There are things I like about the bill in its current form, and things I don't.

Like: giving people who are remorseful and rehabilitated and no longer a threat, and who have a solid re-entry plan, a second look at their sentence. The guarantee that this is not a "get out of jail free" card: people can be turned down for release. Bill Ryan himself recognized this, in written testimony which states, "I have met prisoners who are truly reformed and changed, and others who are not. Elderly Sentence Adjustment is not for everyone nor should it be."

Dislike: the rights of victims in the process need to be spelled out and strengthened. There should be a definite time period by which victims and their families must be notified of any attempt at changing a sentence. They should have a right to be notified

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Give Wiser Prison Policies A Chance

Chicago Sun-Times Editorial, September 5, 2013

Gov. Pat Quinn said in a radio interview last week that Illinois prisons are not overcrowded. But the state still incarcerates too many people, and its prisons hold some 50 percent more inmates than they were designed to handle. It's costing a broke state a fortune.

A number of sensible initiatives to reduce the state's prison population are in place, with Quinn's support, but the state has much to do to follow through on those programs and to add new ones. For example, a bill introduced Wednesday by state Rep. Arthur Turner (D-Chicago) would enable some inmates older than 50 who have been in prison for at least 25 years to get hearings for release. That's an idea that makes sense for offenders who no longer are a danger to the public. The prison gates wouldn't automatically open, but the inmates would be given a chance to make their pitch.

On a promising note, Adult Redeploy Illinois, which helps communities treat offenders without sending them to prison, is one of the few state programs that actually got an increase in this year's state budget.

Across the nation, states are turning away from a lock-'em-up policy to fight crime. On Thursday, in fact, the PEW Charitable Trusts reported that state policy revisions across the country, a decline in juvenile arrests, and changes in the youth population have brought down the juvenile commitment rate to about half its peak in the late 1990s.

The situation in Illinois, though, is closer to that in California, where the prison population also exceeded its design capacity by about 50 percent, according to the John Howard Association of Illinois. A federal court has ordered California, which already has reduced its prison population by about 46,000, to lower its total by an additional 9,600 inmates by the end of the year. Illinois would be wise to avoid a similar legal battle in which it becomes hard to make progress, because every step must be approved by a court.

Prisons take a $1.3 billion annual bite out of the state's highly stressed budget. When so much of the money goes to operating prisons, too little is left for programming to cut recidivism, job training and drug education, which also can reduce crime. Almost all prisoners eventually are released, and we have a strong selfish interest in helping them avoid re-offending.

As part of his efforts to reduce prison spending, Quinn has closed two youth incarceration facilities and two adult prisons. Political opponents already are saying that's contributing to overcrowding, although the two shuttered adult prisons together housed only about 1,500 inmates.

We need political leaders of all stripes to support the idea of diverting nonviolent offenders to destinations other than prison. It's an issue easy to demagogue because some people who leave prison inevitably again commit crimes, no matter how carefully the risks of release are assessed. Serial rapist Julius Anderson, for example, on Wednesday was sentenced to a new 75-year term because he attacked three women in Bucktown shortly after his 2009 release on parole.

Part of what drove Illinois' prison numbers so high was an outcry that doomed the state's now-defunct Meritorious Good Time early-release program. Last winter, a replacement early-release program offering "supplemental sentence credits" went into operation, but so far has not released enough inmates to significantly bring down the overall population.

Illinois finally has begun moving in the right direction on revising its incarceration policies. It's an effort that requires a long-term commitment and constant prodding. ■

It's time to consider prison sentence modification for older inmates

By Bill Ryan, published in the *Chicago Sun-Times*

I write in support of the Sun-Times Sept. 5 editorial with regard to House Bill 3668, which would enable some older prison inmates to get hearings for release. I work with a coalition, Project 1-11, focused on criminal justice and prison issues. We are named for the section of the Illinois constitution that sets the goal for correctional facilities: "to return individuals to useful citizenship."

HB 3668, sponsored by state Reps. Art Turner (D-Chicago) and Chris Welch (D-Hillside), would apply only to prisoners who have reached age 50 and served 25 consecutive years. This population is the least likely to re-offend. An eligible prisoner would apply to the Prison Review Board (PRB) for sentence modification, and the PRB would have to determine that this individual is not any kind of threat and has a clear re-entry plan. Victims' families would be notified whenever a person applies for sentence modification.

Many elderly prisoners are sick, and prisoners generally show signs of being 10 years older than there actual age. In Pennsylvania, a study concluded that people over 50 who had served at least 25 years had a 2% recidivism rate. None of these offenses was for violent crimes.

Illinois prisons are overcrowded, with an increase from 27,000 to 49,000 in two decades. Among people over 50, the increase has been from the increase has been from 1,030 to 7,162. If this trend continues, the state will need three geriatric prisons within the next 20 years. Among people over 50 who have served 25 years, the increase was also dramatic: from 32 to 900.

If just one of 10 eligible people were released, the DOC budget would see a reduced cost of $7.5 million in one year. Given the relative we small number of eligible people who would be approved for sentence reduction, it would be easy to track their progress.

In the past 15 years, I have come to know many men and women imprisoned in Illinois. Not everyone I know is reformed but some surely are. Keeping elderly, rehabilitated people in prison is unnecessary, costly, and in violation of our constitutional requirement to return prisoners to useful citizenship.■

Support Sentence Modification in Illinois

In 1978, Illinois abolished parole. Today people convicted of felony offenses and sentenced to prison have no hope of getting out. Even if they rehabilitate themselves, are no longer a threat to public safety, are disabled, and are costing the state millions of dollars for continued incarceration, Illinois does not provide them with a mechanism for earning back their freedom.

Most people believe that parole still exists in Illinois. That is not the case. Parole, as most people think of it, means "discretionary parole" and involves a prisoner coming before a parole board to determine whether the prisoner has rehabilitated himself or herself. Other than for the 200 aging C# prisoners, parole is unavailable for anyone incarcerated in Illinois' adult prisons[1].

We believe this is fundamentally wrong. We believe that prisoners should be encouraged to rehabilitate themselves and participate in programs that may aid in their rehabilitation. We believe rehabilitation not only make prisons safer for prisoners and staff, but also has a direct effect on public safety. We also believe that people who have demonstrated their capacity for change and who no longer threaten public safety deserve a chance at earning back some of their freedom.

We are not in favor of releasing everyone from prison; but we steadfastly believe that Illinois should have a mechanism in place to differentiate between prisoners whose continued incarceration does not serve the interests of justice, fairness or public safety and those whose incarceration is needed to incapacitate them from committing future crimes. Our position and advocacy for parole reform is not a popular one. Much of this is due to lack of education, but some of it is also due to a lack of political will on the part of our legislative leaders and policymakers. We have the power to change that. ■

[1]Approximately 250 prisoners, sentenced prior to 1978, remain incarcerated under the old laws and routinely come up for parole. They are called C# prisoners. Others, sentenced to a term of years, do a term of Mandatory Supervisory Release, following their release from prison. This is often mistakenly referred to as parole.

Fundraiser Benefit for Sentencing Reform

Project I-11* invites you to join us at a benefit to celebrate the 80th birthday of Bill Ryan and to launch our campaign to bring smart sentences to Illinois.

The event will take place at the fabulous home of our friend, Len Goodman.

"A Day at Stateville" will be presented.

Thursday, March 6, 2014
5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
3000 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60657
(corner of Lake Shore Drive and Wellington)

Donations: $100 or whatever amount you can afford

RSVP: 25.50Bill@gmail.com
or contact a member of the steering committee.

Steering committee: Bill Ryan, Jim Chapman, Aviva Futorian, Rory Guerra, Cynthia Kobel, Chuck Schiedel, Jean Maclean Snyder and Tricia Teater.

* Article I, Section 11 of the Illinois Constitution states: "All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship."

House Bill 3668 Talking Points

By Aviva Futorian

Representative Arthur Turner (D-IL)

- Illinois no longer has parole (i.e., eligibility to be released early for good behavior) for adult prisoners.
- Illinois prisons are overcrowded, operating at a crushing 144% of capacity. The number of prisoners over 50 years of age in the IDOC has grown from 1,030 in 1990 to 7,162; the number of prisoners who have served over 25 years in prison has grown from 32 in 1990 to 1,009.
- House Bill 3668 would enable an elderly prisoner who is 50 years old or older and has served 25 or more consecutive years to petition the Prisoner Review Board (PRB) for a modification of his/her sentence.
- Families of crime victims will be notified in a timely manner of each petition and board Hearing. Families will be afforded opportunity for input into the sentence modification process.
- The Elderly Bill is not "a get out of jail free" pass. The PRB could order the release of a person only if it finds that the petitioner has transformed his/her life in prison and poses no threat to public safety.
- This bill puts a mechanism in place to distinguish those elderly and long-term offenders who over decades have turned their lives around and become fully rehabilitated, from those who have not changed and are not rehabilitated.

Economic, Social, and Moral Benefits of HB 3668

- This legislation will save money. Many elderly prisoners are sick, bed ridden; need dialysis and other expensive treatment, and require time and attention from an already overburdened staff. The cost of housing a prisoner over 50 years old is approx. $70,000 per year (as compared to $23,000 for inmates under 50). Medical costs for prisoners constitute one-third of IDOC's $1.2 billion budget. This figure will continue to escalate as the prison population continues to age.
- The number of prisoners currently eligible to apply for sentence reduction under the Elderly Bill is hardly 900. If only 100 such prisoners or about 1 in ten was released, the State would save $7.5 million; if 200 or 2 in 10 were released, the State would save $15 million.
- It will make prisons safer for staff and inmates by providing an incentive for good behavior by prisoners. Prisoners will stop focusing on gang loyalty or anger at staff and start making sound choices. Under Illinois' former parole system (abolished in 1978), prisoners were known to warn staff of impending danger.
- It will reduce overcrowding, increasing opportunities for greater security and more vocational and educational programs.
- National studies demonstrate that prisoners over 50 years of age who have served long sentences have virtually no recidivism rate for violent crimes – and a negligible recidivism rate for violation of parole agency rules.
- Inmates recently paroled under the old system (those sentenced before 1978) have a recidivism rate of 2% -- compared with the average IDOC rate of over 50%.
- There is no social good in keeping such people in prison at a cost to taxpayers of $70,000/year.
- The requirements for modification are stringent and will only be met by the truly rehabilitated petitioners.
- The Illinois Constitution mandates the purpose of incarceration is to return prisoners to "useful citizenship." (Article I, Section 11) ■

HB 3668 Short summary

SYNOPSIS OF BILL

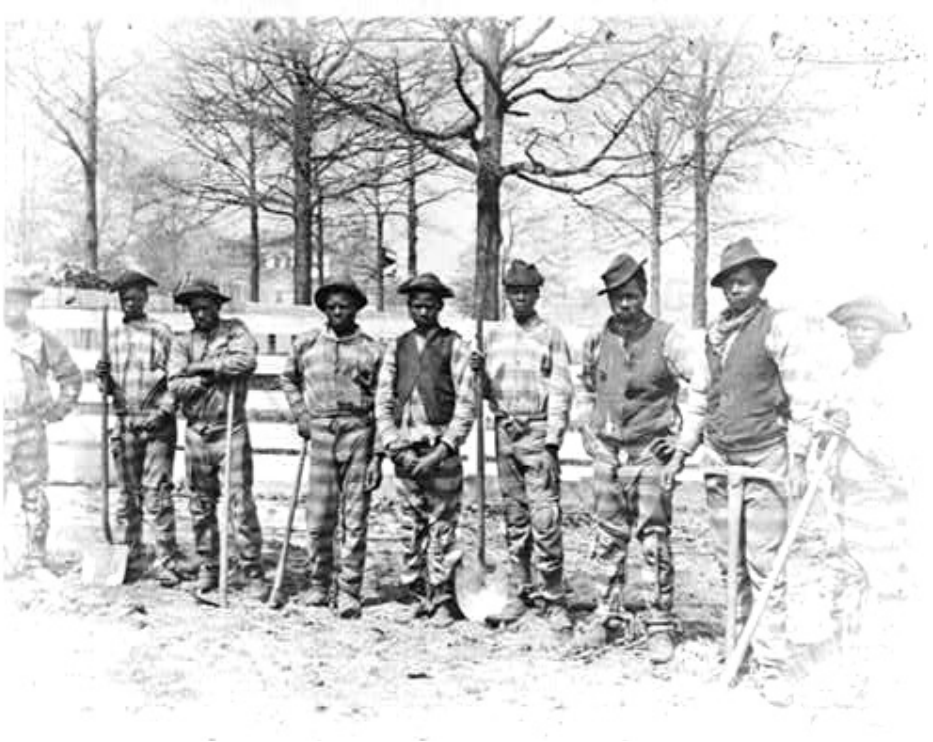
- Provides that a prisoner who is at least 50 years of age and who has served at least 25 consecutive years of imprisonment may become eligible to petition the Prisoner Review Board for parole.
- Victims receive notification of petition.
- PRB must find that the prisoner poses no threat to public safety.
- PRB may set conditions on release, including participation in programs and wearing electronic monitoring device.

HB 3668 Long Summary

SYNOPSIS OF BILL

(from state website)

- Amends the Unified Code of Corrections.
- Provides that a committed person who is at least 50 years of age and who has served at least 25 consecutive years of imprisonment in a Department of Corrections institution or facility may petition the Prisoner Review Board for participation in the Elderly Rehabilitated Prisoner Sentence Modification Program.
- Provides that if the committed person files the petition, the victims and the families of the victims of the committed person's offenses shall be notified in a timely manner after the filing of the petition.
- Provides that the Board shall consider the petition in its entirety and shall not order the release of the committed person if it finds that the committed person poses a threat to public safety.
- Provides that if the Board determines that a committed person is eligible for participation in the Program and that the committed person should participate in the Program, the Board shall set the conditions for the committed person's release from prison before the expiration of his or her sentence.
- Provides that when granting participation in the Program, the Board may require the committed person, for a period of time upon release, to participate in community service or to wear an electronic monitoring device, or both. ■



What's the Point?

By Terri L. Mascherin

More than thirty years have passed and the discussion still haunts me. I was taking a college seminar on Oral History and one of my classmates reported on her project. She had recorded oral histories of elderly prisoners in North Carolina's only geriatric prison. Those old men, all or nearly all of them black and relics of the Jim Crow south, had lived out their entire adult lives in jail – from young adult years spent on chain gangs to octogenarian years in the equivalent of a prison nursing home. I picture the old men, with their walkers and wheelchairs, still behind bars, and I ask, "What was the point?"

Illinois has its own growing population of elderly and infirm prisoners. The Department of Corrections (IDOC) reports that 13 percent of the inmates in Illinois prisons are over the age of 50, and that number is growing. According to the IDOC website, 80 of those inmates who suffer from multiple medical problems are housed in the State's only geriatric unit at the Dixon Correctional Center. Many others serve out their time in prison infirmaries throughout the State. Meanwhile, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics 2010 Report of Prisoners, Illinois prisons operate at a crushing 144 percent of capacity. For this growing generation of geriatrics in Illinois prisons, there is no possibility of parole. Meanwhile, the State houses and cares for them, at an estimated cost of $75,000 per inmate per year – as compared to $23,000 per inmate in the general population. What, I ask, is the point of keeping these elderly and infirm prisoners behind bars?

Today, the majority of those serving time for felony offenses have no hope of sentence modification -- Illinois abolished parole in 1978, and all inmates sentenced since then must serve out their terms. The elderly and infirm will die in prison, even if they have rehabilitated themselves and are no longer a threat, and even though their continued incarceration and, essentially, nursing home care, is so costly to a State that is broke, or nearly so. If nothing changes, in a few decades Illinois will need three geriatric prisons.

This year the Illinois legislature has the opportunity to enact common sense reform to address this issue. House Bill 3668, sponsored by Representative Art Turner, would allow a prisoner who has served at least 25 years and is over the age of 50 (less than 2% of the IDOC population) to apply for a sentence modification. This would be no guarantee that the inmate would be released. The Prisoner Review Board would evaluate the inmate's behavior and education record, consider whether he or she has expressed remorse for the crime, take into account the victims' views and recommendations from prison staff, and evaluate whether the inmate continues to pose a danger to society. Statistics are telling here. Not surprisingly, the recidivism rate among older prisoners released from prison is very low—among so-called "C#" parolees (those sentenced before 1978), all of whom are older, only 3 percent have returned to prison on new charges, as compared to a reported 30 percent of prisoners younger than 50.

So, I ask, "What is the point?" Why continue to incarcerate the old and infirm, those who no longer pose a threat to society, but whose care is so intense and costly to the State? There is value, surely, in the retribution that society can exact by requiring a prisoner to live out his life behind bars. But why not do the common sense thing, the merciful thing, and allow these prisoners to seek early release?

Author's Note: Terri L. Mascherin is a Past President of the Chicago Bar Association and member of the CLEAR (Criminal Law Edit, Alignment and Reform) Commission. Ms. Mascherin is a partner in Jenner & Block LLP. ■

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of and to attend all Prisoner Review Board proceedings about their perpetrator's petition and have the right to submit a victim impact statement if they wish. They should have the option of obtaining an order of protection barring a released offender from having any contact with them whatsoever.

I know that the bill is being discussed and negotiated even as we speak, and that is a good thing, too. Talking to stakeholders and legislators will, one hopes, result in legislation that will consider the needs of victims and their families, prisoners and their families, the safety of society, the demands under which our prison system and its staff labor, and the interests of Illinois taxpayers. It is a conversation we need to have. ■

Give Elderly Chance at Parole

Bill Ryan's Letter to the Chicago Sun Times, published November 13, 2013

A bill is being considered by the Legislature, HB 3668, that would permit elderly prisoners to apply for parole. People may wonder who are these elderly people?

Miss P. is 63 years of age. She is confined to a wheelchair, unable to walk but a few steps alone. She has COPD, congestive heart failure. Miss P. is a first-time offender, very remorseful. She has served 26 years with a life without parole sentence having been found guilty of murder but insane.

Miss R. is 58 years of age. She uses a walker and has a spinal condition along with other health issues. Miss R once dreamed of being a nun and in prison has completed many Bible study courses.

Miss R. is a first-time offender who has served 18 years. Miss R. is serving a life without possibility of parole sentence.

Miss E. recently was told one kidney had failed and the other is deteriorating fast. She has had five major surgeries.

Miss E. is 66 years of age and has served 25 years. She is an accomplished pianist and artist whose paintings adorn walls in Logan.

Here are statements from other prisoners:

I am a 58-year-old man and 28 years into a life sentence. When I was high on PCP, I broke into a house and beat a woman to death. My first offense. The police had no idea who committed this crime, but I felt so guilty I turned myself in. I am not bitter. I did this to myself. I have taken every opportunity in prison to better myself.

I am 59 and have an innocence claim. I have been in prison for 28 years. I am a very sick man. I have hereditary diabetes and am slowing dying here.

I was 19 and admitted to a horrible crime committed during a botched robbery while high on PCP. I take full responsibility for my life and don't blame anyone. I have gone from reading at a fourth-grade level to getting a bachelor's degree and will be an ordained minister shortly. I am 52 years old and served 23 years.

I am a 65-year-old man. I have hypertension, a broken clavicle, enlarged prostate, hepatitis C and because of inadequate medical care am slowly dying in prison. I have participated in many programs and written several books.

Currently Illinois' prison population is at 130 percent of capacity. Allowing some elderly to be paroled will reduce expenditures by about $70,000 annually for each person. It is estimated about 900 elderly would be eligible for parole if this bill becomes law. This is not a get-out-of-jail-free card, as each will have to demonstrate they are reformed and no longer a threat to anyone.

Bill Ryan
Westchester

How We Got Here

By Jean Snyder

Too many men and women are housed in Illinois' prisons for too long. And the number of long-termers is growing. That's a dilemma that some of us outside the prison walls have been thinking about. Led by Bill Ryan, *Stateville Speaks*' founder, our group has asked the Illinois legislature to enact a bill to ease this problem.

House Bill 3668, called the Elderly Rehabilitated Prisoner Sentence Modification Program, provides a chance at parole for those who have served lengthy sentences. The bill is not a get-out-of-jail-free card; instead, it allows prisoners who are at least 50 years old and have served at least 25 consecutive years to petition the Illinois Prisoner Review Board for parole, by showing that they deserve a second chance.

Our group calls itself Project I-11, which refers to the section of the Illinois Constitution saying that prison sentences should aim to restore the prisoner to useful citizenship, as well as to punish. We know that some prisoners have turned their lives around and even have concrete plans to enable them, if paroled, to live peacefully and productively. Others are sick and wish to end their days with loved ones who will care for them; they too, deserve a chance at parole.

House Bill 3668 was introduced last spring by Rep. Art Turner (D. Chicago). We helped draft the bill, and now we are talking to legislators about it, as well as taking other steps to get out the word, such as helping with this issue of *Stateville Speaks*. Here you will find pieces explaining and supporting the bill written by folks inside prison as well as outside. So please read and enjoy. And let your friends and family know about the bill, so that when it comes up for a vote, the answer will be yes.

Please contact your representatives and senators. If you can't actually talk with anyone, leave a message and urge support of HB 3668. The calls are very important and legislators do pay attention, especially to their constituents. If information is needed, please contact:

Bill Ryan,
2337 Sunnyside Ave.,
Westchester IL 60154
nanatoad@comcast.net. ■

A Chance to Speak

By Janet Jackson

I will be 60 in 2014 and working on my 28th year of incarceration. In 1986 I was given a life without possibility of parole under the accountability theory. I did not kill my abusive husband. My two co-defendants accepted pleas (one was a former foster child who lived in our home) and were given lesser sentences than mine.

I would not accept a plea as did not see how I could be found guilty of something I did not do. This is my first and only criminal offense.

My husband was abusive toward me. He was physically and verbally abusive for years. During my trial the judge ruled evidence of abuse could not be introduced as evidence. Thank God this is no longer possible. Congress passed and President Bush signed legislation mandating evidence of spousal abuse be considered by the court. This law was effective in 1992. Unfortunately the statute was not retroactive. Illinois has not taken action to make statute applicable in cases heard prior to 1992. I am one of several women with cases similar to mine who have never had abusive treatment considered by court.

The years passed. Then decades. I learned and learned, grew and grew. My own mental illness brought on my abuse had a name…battered woman syndrome. I received treatment in prison. I may flinch at loud voices but I no longer cower in a corner shutting down

I have forgiven my abuser, forgiven those who murdered my husband, and asked for forgiveness for myself.

I have given my life to God. Starting with a high school diploma I earned an Associate Degree from Lincoln College. In 1995 I was awarded a Bachelor Degree from Lewis University. In 2011 I was awarded a Masters in Divinity degree from Shalom Bible College. In 2013 I earned a Doctorate in Christian counseling. I am an ordained and licensed minister.

I also earned a paralegal certificate. I am an approved graduate from the Americans with Disabilities Attendant program. I am part of very new and effective Disability program in Logan prison.

My prison record is excel-

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Change Happens

By Tom Odle

My name is Tom OdIe and I am writing as a member of the population of men doing life without the possibility of parole. When I entered this system I was 18 years old and now this year I will turn 47 years old. At the young age of 18, anger and blame, coupled with the inability to accept responsibility, ruled my existence. This was my life for a good many years. Unfortunately and as shameful as it is to say, it took a good many years for me to come to an understanding about myself.

For some reason, still unknown to me, I am a stubborn breed of individual who initially shuns those understandings and does not assume responsibility for my actions. Eventually I came around though because it got tiring and I realized that change must first come within myself before change can come from other places. I realize the value of human life just from the way my own life has been directed. There is loss, shame, guilt, alienation from family, and many other forms of emotional trauma I experienced; but this by no means outweighs anything felt by my victims. I also came to an understanding within myself that helped me to empathize with my victims.

Unfortunately, 90% of us doing these long term sentences were very young at the time of our offense and left to serve the rest of our natural lives without any value whatsoever, and all hope for redemption erased. Most of these offenses were done in the heat of the moment. We all know when we are young we act more on emotion than intelligence. Through growing up, we learn more how to act after thinking than acting before thinking, and for the most part we hope to be forgiven because of our youth. Change happens, which is what this bill gives everyone a chance to see.

It does not allow for immediate release at 25 years or at 50 years old, but it gives a chance for review of that change. Did we change? Change for better or for worse? Would we be an asset to society? Questions like that would be asked and answered by the courts, D.O.C., and even the person on review. Restorative justice programs thrive in many other states that helps both of-

See CHANGE, page 11

Letters

My name is Jeff Bartik. I'm 52 years old and I'm 29 years into a Natural Life sentence for murder. I beat a woman to death in her home while high on PCP although I couldn't prove the last part. I was about as messed up as a person could be, but I wasn't far enough gone not to realize that I had done something horribly wrong and it haunted me. The police didn't even consider me a suspect in the crime. I could have gotten away with it, but I was so torn up inside over what I had done to that poor woman that I turned myself into the police and even gave up a non-negotiated plea of guilty to murder in court. I am also a first-time offender and that along with my non-negotiated guilty plea did me no good come sentencing time. If you know anything about the Circuit Court in Du Page County, then you know why.

I'm not bitter though. I did this to myself. A good person who had every right to feel safe and secure in her own home is dead because of me. The depth of sorrow my heart feels for that leaves no room for any bitterness over my circumstances. In fact, I consider that the Lord has blessed me far beyond what I could ever have dreamed possible for me. My blessing has a name; it is Denise. We've known each other since we were 12 years old and have been married since 1996. It is her unflinching love and dedication demonstrated over the last 30 years that has inspired me to be a better person and aspire to be the person she believes I can be. There is no greater motivation than love, not the physical kind but the self-sacrificial kind. Consider that for the last 29 years I've had no practical hope of ever seeing the streets again, yet there is a burning passion inside of me that drives me to be all that I can be because my love for my wife and her love for me will accept nothing less.

I've tried to take advantage of the opportunities that have been provided to improve and rehabilitate myself. I've gone to Barber College and gotten my barber's license. Even though arthritis in my hands is a problem, I enjoy providing a valuable service that can make people feel better about themselves. I have a strong work ethic and have had a job during almost all of my incarceration. I took some college courses when they were available and accumulated 30 credit hours with a 3.6 GPA. I'm currently enrolled in the American Bible Academy's correspondence course. I'm active in my church. I tutor fellow inmates who are studying for their GEDs. And I haven't had a disciplinary report against me for the last ten years.

My sentence, which requires that I spend the rest of my life in prison, serves no useful purpose to anyone other than to perpetuate the human warehousing industry. I am not a criminally minded person. I abhor the criminal mindset that I have been subjected to for the last three decades. I hate it when people brag about their criminal exploits. All I want is the chance to be a proper husband to my wife, to make a contribution to the community, and to prove that I can be of value to society. I believe that I can factually demonstrate my ability to comply with the requirements of the elderly sentencing bill. That's not an easy thing to do. A person would have to have been working for years towards the ends it demands and that with no carrot on a stick to motivate him or her. Those of us with a healthy and realistic view of the world do not expect that the prison gates will be thrown open for us, but we welcome the opportunity to prove that we can stand above the stereotype.

Jeff Bartik

My husband was sexually abusing my daughter Kimberly. She was his step-daughter. Yes, I realize I was not supposed to take the law into my own hands. I feel terrible because both of our families suffered from my actions. I wish so much I could turn back the hands of time because of all the pain and suffering I caused but that is impossible. My charge is murder with solicitation/conspiracy. I came from DuPage County with a sentence of 75 years. I am a first time offender and was a solid, stable member of my community. My co-defendant (the trigger man) got a 20-year sentence. I am here because of accountability. I have been locked down since June, 1984 with an outdate of 2021. As the years go by, my medical needs are numerous. I am 60 years old.

Sincerely,

Diane Maletta

I am a 67-year-old female who has been imprisoned since 1979 for the crime of murder. Not a day has passed that I don't think about the man I shot or the terror I created. I shot a man while on a shoplifting spree because he attempted to stop me. I pray each day for the victim's loved ones and friends whom I know still miss him. My life has been consumed with guilt, and I have thought of that one day over and over, replaying its events and wishing that miraculously its outcome could be changed. In my heart I harbor the deepest regret and remorse.

I could not see the remaining years of my own life as salvageable and for that reason it's excruciatingly hard to write about my own accomplishments, but I did pick up what was left of my life perhaps for my mother or my children, or my grandchildren. Perhaps I felt that eventually my story would change the outcome of another woman's life. For whatever dignity has been stripped from me, I still have the ability to touch another person's life. I think because I was allowed to lose and give back in some way that I mustered the strength to carry on and to even excel.

I have achieved my AA and AAS Degree, then a BES Degree, a Tutoring Certificate, Safety and Sanitation License, Restaurant Management and computer classes, and 6 years of on the job training in Prison Industries, where I was taught to operate and use many high powered machines used in the manufacturing of prison clothing and guard uniforms which are used statewide. Now at 64 years of age I am medically unassigned because of bronchial asthma and COPD, plus a bulging spinal disc that has restricted movement.

I reside in a Maximum Security Prison, Logan Correctional Center. The population is roughly around 2,000. It would be a great kindness to elderly prisoners who are no longer able to work or obtain a release from overcrowded and sometimes volatile conditions which exist in prison.

My children are adults who reside in other states too far away to afford the expense of traveling to visit. My only means of contact is through letters, and I write many letters to keep in close touch. I do have friends who would provide me with a home to go to in the event I was released. I am grateful to everyone who reads this, and I pray you will support the change we ask for.

Pearl Tuma

HOW MATURE LONG-TERM PRISONERS TRANSFORM THEMSELVES

By Jim Chapman

To the right is a poem by William Jones, a prisoner serving a natural life sentence at Stateville Correctional Center near Joliet, Illinois. I know Jones very well. He was in the Stateville Communications class I taught as a volunteer for six years. In his letter, he details the path he followed from street gangster to his present, mature, giving status.

Bill is a gifted communicator. But there were 30 other men (subject to change) in the class. All were doing natural life or virtual life-straight sentences—so long they cannot expect to be alive on their outdate. Most were in their 40s and 50s and had been imprisoned for many years, some over 25 and some, besides Bill, had been on death row.

In all those years, I had only enthusiastic cooperation from the class participants. All the time I was in a closed classroom with them and no c/o's present or often even close by. Never a hint of an incident.

These men had matured. They collectively created programs about aid to youth at risk in urban communities, a monthly newsletter for prisoners, virtual classes that could be taught on the prison's tv network, and "A Day at Stateville" and the Changing Minds Campaign, statewide programs around the state to educate the public about dysfunctional prisons.

The men presented to the then Warden of Programs a detailed summary of their accomplishments and plans. The Warden, at the program's conclusion, was very quiet, appearing almost dumbfounded. He slowly rose from his chair, looked at the men directly and spoke: "You men are an enigma to me, a mystery. How could you create something so positive in a hell hole like Stateville?"

My class, one of the only two (besides a few faith-based classes) at Stateville at the time, simply provided a vehicle where these men could manifest and act upon the maturity and wisdom they already possessed. And based on the long waiting list for the class, I know there are many other prisoners who possess the same maturity and wisdom that they could express if given the chance to aid youth at risk in our communities. just like so many released long term prisoners do now.■

FREEDOM

by Williams Jones

To be free one must live how
he or she like,
It shouldn't make any different
if he is white or black.

To be free one must have
a love for life,
always taking into consideration the
next man's advice.

To be free is to believe in yourself,
and considering also the next man's
health.

You can't live without your fellow
man,
The best part about freedom is being
able to lend a helping hand.

I had my freedom but I so foolishly
gave it up,
I thought freedom was in the form
Of a hundred bucks.

Author's Note

I remember before I came to death row I use to laugh at the freedom I had. But now that same freedom seems so far away.

My readers, what saddens this author's heart, is all the people who are not in prison but yet are confined as though they were. These are the prisoners of the heart. Their prison is in the love of their family, their country, their job and their children.

People have longed for freedom since the dawn of time. No man or woman wants to be imprisoned by anything, not even love.

To be free in life one doesn't need a lot of space to walk around in. To be free one doesn't need a lot of money. All a person needs to be really free is to believe in his or herself. Take some chances in life and follow your heart. For your heart will never lead you wrong nor will it lead you to a prison. ■

Stateville Speaks **is generously supported by Cynthia Kobel & the Kenneth and Harle Montgomery Foundation**

From the Editor

Thank you for reading this very special edition of Northeastern Illinois University's *Stateville Speaks*. I think you will agree when I say this may be the most important issue to date.

Appreciation should be given everyone that has worked so hard to get this HB introduced. The courage of Representative Art L. Turner, Assistant Majority Leader (D-9), to sponsor, along with co-sponsors Emanuel Chris Welch (D-7), William Davis (D-30), Mary E. Flowers (D-31), and Naomi Jakobbsson (D-103), should be applauded. Also commendable are the commitments from Barbara Flynn Curie (D-25) and Elaine Nekritz (D-57), Assistant Majority Leader.

While many have worked hard to get the HB3668 this far, the real work is just beginning. It will require both support and compromise from all parties involved. And if there was ever a time in which your voice and the voice of friends, family and supporters need to be heard, this is the time. We encourage you to both support and ask everyone you know to take a stand and support HB3668. At best it is decent and humane; while at worst it simply follows the Constitution by judiciously "restoring the offender to useful citizenship." ■

Illinois Constitution
Article I Section 11

LIMITATION OF PENALTIES AFTER CONVICTION

All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship.

No conviction shall work corruption of blood or forfeiture of estate.

No person shall be transported out of the State for an offense committed within the State.

(Source: Illinois Constitution.)

Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting enthusiastically supports HB 3668

As Quakers, we believe that there is that of God in everyone. We believe in the redemptive power of that divine spark; thus, we know that individuals who have committed crimes have the potential to change and become useful members of society. We advocate for providing opportunities for those who have demonstrated their rehabilitation to return to their communities.

After U-C Friends Meeting agreed to support HB 3668, three members met with our state representative, Naomi Jacobsson, who agreed to co-sponsor the bill. We were delighted with this news! We are doing all we can to further promote the passage of the bill. We are contacting other religious organizations whose members are committed to making positive changes. Over the last 18 months, Champaign-Urbana Citizens for Peace and Justice challenged an initiative by the sheriff, the states attorney, and several members

of the county board to build a new jail and thereby changed the public conversation towards funding a re-entry program and other prevention measures in an effort to reduce the jail population. We believe public sentiment in our community has shifted towards a more just and cost-effective criminal justice system. Another organization, the Education Justice Project, provides college-credit courses to prison inmates at the Danville Correctional Center. EJP is based at the University of Illinois and enlists university professors, students, and community members as volunteers.

One of our strengths as Quakers is that we are organized from the bottom up. We participate in the Illinois Yearly Meeting, which includes meetings in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Missouri. Thus, we are able to use the structure of our religious organization to inform other Meetings in Illinois about HB 3668, to ask them to support it, and to contact their representatives. We have many Meetings and Worship Groups in the Chicago area, and several down-state, including Bloomington, Champaign-Urbana, Carbondale, McNabb, Springfield, and Decatur.

We are eager to be part of this needed change. ■

Stateville Speaks
Staff • 2014 Special Edition

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A Special Tribute

We acknowledge with gratitude the many contributions made by Cynthia Kobel, our publisher, to the furtherance of prison reform and prisoners' rights. Her commitment and generosity to prison reform began many years ago, and she has been consistent in her dedication, both individually and through the Kenneth and Harle Montgomery Foundation, to the rights of the men and women in prison. We have all benefitted because of her presence. ■

SPEAK, continued from page 7

lent. My mental issues have been resolved. I do not have major medical issues but do have usual deterioration caused by age.

HB 3668 offers me an opportunity to prove myself worthy and give something back to the community. I have been assured a job awaits me at Sojourn House serving battered women in Springfield.

I do not know if others agree but just to have an opportunity to address the Prisoner Review Board would be a jewel beyond measure. So many of us value the opportunity to speak whether we are approved or not. ■

CHANGE, continued from page 7

fender and victims come together and express emotions because you cannot cure hate with more hate.

Along these lines also comes the very small recidivism rate for people being released after serving 20 or more years. We learn about what is expected of us in society, and the fact we don't want to come back to prison because we cannot put our loved ones or ourselves through something like that ever again. All we ask is that we be seen for who we are now, not the person who first came to prison because that person is a shameful mark on our lives that we want to forget. We do not want to diminish the seriousness of our offense, but have others see how we have changed.

I thank you for your time and hope you give serious consideration to this bill. ■

Thanks to Illinois Prison Talk (IPT) for support and further dissemination of *Stateville Speaks* and your tireless reform efforts. Visit www.illinoisprisontalk.com to learn more.

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