

November 1, 2016

To whom it may concern,

I Lawrence Dotson, (92-A-5744) am writing this letter as a means to express my sincerest concerns about the nature of the current parole procedures.

During my 25½ years of incarceration I have witnessed many instances of injustice concerning the denial of parole. On May 18 2016 I had the unfortunate opportunity to experience it first hand when I appeared before my initial parole board. As a result, I strongly believe, now more than ever, that reform is necessary.

In an attempt to highlight some of the areas I believe the current parole structure is weak in, I would like to use my own experiences--unbiasedly--to do so. Please understand, I do not, nor have I ever, proclaimed to be an angel. On August 8th, 1991, I was celebrating my 18th birthday with a group of friends, (Including the deceased) We were all drinking and things got out of hand and I senselessly took Mr. Clark's precious life. I was indicted, tried, and found guilty of murder in the 2nd degree. I received 25 years to life for my shameful actions.

I entered the state penitentiary in June of 1992. Being I was young and never been incarcerated before I had a very hard time adjusting to prison life. Early on, I received many misbehavior reports. These tickets ranged from fighting to "disobeying direct orders." With so much time ahead of me I never thought of the consequences or repercussions, because, at the time, I truly believed my young life was over.

Fortunately for me, I began to mature. I not only reflected on all of the pain and hurt I caused, through my selfish and reckless behavior, but how I could make myself a better person with something to offer to society. I was at Green Haven Corr. Fac. when in 2007 Bard college started a pilot program there. I took the entry exam and was accepted. I earned my Associates degree from Bard. Then I went on to earn a Bachelor's degree from NYACK college in 2015.

Despite what the parole board says, I am not the same person I was 25½ years ago. Today, I am an intelligent, thoughtful, happy, respectful, loving, and caring, 43 year old man who looks forward to rejoining his family and being a productive member of society.

I believe the parole board denied me the opportunity to prove I can be a productive member of society. With proper reforms in place to address issues such as: For instance, the parole board said my institutional record was horrendous, (24 tickets) Granted, that may be quite a few, but change does not occur over night. They never took into account that 20 of the 24 tickets happened in the 90's. (7 in '94 alone) Not to mention, being realistic, many tickets are trumped up, or out right falsified. These are issues that should be considered when they review institutional records. (2) They use the "Risk Assessment", but how accurate is it? It states: "Clients strengths" High school graduate or GED? This gets factored in, right? So why does it not have higher education? Statistics show an individual with an AA is 87% likely not to recidivate; BA, 95%, MAsters, 99%. So what about people who earn degrees? I believe that should be factored in as well, considering the statistics speak for themselves. (3) The Parole Board denied me parole mostly due to the nature of my crime, "To release would trivialize the senseless loss of life which you caused." I feel horrible for taking Mr. Clark's life. My actions have haunted me ^{for} many years. If I could change what I did I would not hesitate. But unfortunately, myself or anyone else can change the past.

(4) When they denied me parole, I was given 24 months. Why two years? What can be done in two years that cannot be done in six months or a year? What justifies so much time? The Parole Board should have to justify why two years, basically a new sentence, is warranted. (5) How can such a serious decision be made so quickly and with such a lack of thoroughness? Commissioners should spend more time interviewing applicants and reviewing their cases instead of the meager 8-12 minutes they do. (6) Also, I truly believe it is unfair that applicants have to have their parole interviews conducted via T.V. monitor, while other applicants, in other facilities, have the luxury of a "live board", (conducted in person.)

In person commissioners have the opportunity to "feel" a person's sincerity. An interview via T.V. monitor is cold and impersonal. This practice definately gives the applicant a disadvantage.

These are some of my experiences and thoughts on the issues of parole and the need for parole reform. To the individuals who took the time to read this and other letters like it, I truly appreciate it. I understand that parole is, in fact, a privilege but the current methods the Parole board employs, however, makes it extremely difficult, and in most cases, unclear how to achieve parole.

As a man who has served 25½ years and been rehabilitated, I can honestly ~~attest~~ that positive change is possible. I truly look forward to reform to the current parole structure, so I can one day be paroled, be with my family, and prove that I can be a law abiding productive citizen.

Respectfully

Lawrence Dotson