

Be strong and
very courageous
Deuteronomy 31:6

Daughters

Inspired Women
Inspiring Women



Cover Portrait of Sheena' King by Chris St. Pierre.

Here are some more pieces from our Ljfe Cycles Towards Freedom art show this past fall.



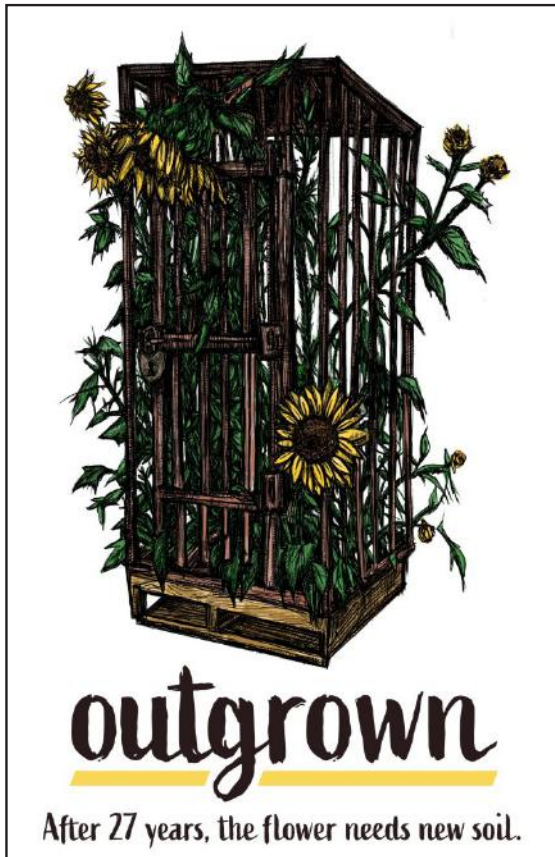
The Key by Todd (Hyung Rae) Tarselli



Uprising by Lataya Johnson



Self Portrait by Melanie Ray



Outgrown by Sara Lee Coffey & Lonsesome Daughter



What We Lose by Elena House-Hay

Inside Daughters:

Message from the Editor	1
Daughters Speak: Interview with Nahesa Gray	2-3
Prisons & Addiction: Maya Schenwar's book <i>Locked Down, Locked Out</i>	4
Daughters Speak: Interview with Trisha Dippery	5-6
Addiction, Treatment, & Women with Stephanie S. Covington, PhD	6
Menopause: The Nemesis of Eve	7
Understanding & Managing Menopause	8
Rhythm From The Heart: Shh by Angela Hellman	9
Spotlight Features: Unintended Consequences by Heather Lavelle	10
Commutation Hearing Statistics by Elaine Selan	11
The Chat Bar hosts a Chat Poem at the Board of Pardons Debrief	12
Poem by Sarita Miller	12
PA Prisoners File Challenge to Parole Restrictions	13
Film Release: Wide Open	14
2020 Merit Review Sessions	15
2020 Commutations	16
Hey Board of Pardons, Be the Board of Pardons!	17

Daughters is a faith-based, political publication founded by Sarita Miller (SCI Muncy) that aims to illuminate issues and perspectives, specifically those of women, pertaining to the crisis of mass incarceration in this country. A platform for us and by us, *Daughters* will be a pathway to the expression of our fears, our struggles, our pain and our needs. Although for now we are confined, our spirits and voices soar free.

We are looking for articulate bold writers from the inside or outside who wish to express and expose the need for change in our criminal justice system and in the Department of Corrections. Poets and artists also welcome.

Let's Get Free is supporting the publication for at least 2 years, alternating it with our general newsletter.

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Message from the Editor

God bless you everyone! Hello, my name is Sarita Miller. I'm so humbled that you are reading our very first issue of *Daughters*, and when I say ours I mean every incarcerated woman who is enduring the hardships and the oppression of being imprisoned. Whether it be the brig of our minds or our bodies held in confinement, the number of women coming into the penal system is staggering. What are our issues? What are our struggles? How are we perceived as women serving time? Are we being identified by the meaning of re-formation and strength or by our circumstantial vulnerabilities at the time of our crimes?

Serving this life sentence for 17 years has given me a priceless experience and a sound perspective on the multicultural epidemic of women being incarcerated. Almighty God has given me the vision to believe in the power our written voices will have on those who can and want to make a difference in our lives. I believe *Daughters* can be that outreach for us. Throughout my time, I have heard a multitude of complaints from my peers relating to gender bias within the criminal justice system and the Department of Corrections. Most incarcerated women have expressed concerns that our needs within the DOC are not being met, but are instead overlooked or just plainly ignored.

Compared to our male counterparts, our medical needs are different. Our housing issues are different as well, especially when it comes to dealing with male officers who work on our housing units. Our psychological and mental health issues are distinct since a lot of women coming into the prison system are mothers dealing with the traumas of sexual abuse, battering and drug addiction. Even our nutritional issues are different. As women age in prison, going through the change of life, this is only scratching the surface of the challenges we face being incarcerated. So ladies I invite and implore you to make your needs and concerns heard through *Daughters*. Teamwork makes the dream work!!

Finally a publication just for us! Much love and appreciation for the awesome support from Let's Get Free! etta, thank you for believing in *Daughters* and stepping out in faith with me. I'd also like to send out my appreciation and gratitude to the wonderful ladies who have helped to make the first issue of *Daughters* a reality. God bless you Heather Lavelle, Nahesa Gray, Trisha Dippery, and Angela Hellman. To Stephanie M and Andrea Dusha for their amazing artwork for the cover of *Daughters*. Without your willing participation, *Daughters* would not be a reality.

Giant shout-outs to our men who are also enduring the vicissitudes of incarceration. You are also invited to write to *Daughters*. Thank you to our soldiers who have paved the way. God bless you!

Sarita Miller
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Daughters Speak

Out of the heart flows the issues of life. | Interview with Nahesa Gray

Women and girls in America have become the new face of incarceration. We are incarcerated at twice the rate of our male counterparts; it raises serious questions to be pondered. What are some of the resistances women face when leaving prison? What pulls them toward cycles of criminal behaviors? Sure we can research and find computer-generated statistics; and although these accounts may have some accuracy, the core issues of women and girls in prison have gone neglected and overlooked.

In this publication of *Daughters* we are humbled to bring to our readers real life narratives shaped by women here at SCI Muncy. Their courage and boldness gives us yet another incentive for change in a criminal justice system in need of serious reform.

• • •

Interview with Nahesa Gray, OZ-8742

Daughters: God bless you and thank you for sharing your experience and struggles with incarceration and addiction. I would first like to ask you your age, and if you have any children.

Ms. Gray: I'm 45 years old and I have six children ranging from the ages of nine to 26 years.

Daughters: Is this your first time in prison and if so, how old were you when you first came into the prison system?

Ms. Gray: Not my first time in prison and I was 25 years old when I first came into prison.

Daughters: Can you please share your story with our readers on the factors that brought you in and out of the prison system?

Ms. Gray: My addiction started with marijuana and led to crack cocaine. I watched my father's addiction to crack; becoming a product of that environment, it drew me to the streets at a young age, having to support myself by having sex for money with much older men, living on the streets. There was no other way that I knew.

Daughters: Have your struggles with childhood trauma & drug abuse affected your self-esteem?

Ms. Gray: My self-esteem became lowered through the filth in my deeds, when I'm actively using.

Daughters: Do you feel that the centers and halfway houses made available by the state provide safe and structured environments for returning citizens in recovery?

Ms. Gray: No.

Daughters: Can you explain why you feel this way?

Ms. Gray: A lot of ex-offenders do not have home plans and have no options but to go to centers. A lot of returning citizens may have not spent a lot of time in prison to help with recovery and are thrown into centers with heavy drug use inside the centers. There is a Community Corrections Center, Kintock that is located at E & Erie Avenue in Philadelphia where I was a resident, and there were a lot of women that were clearly intoxicated and even offered me to get high. Pills are frequently used. One woman overdosed in the bathroom. Heroin usage is common inside the center. Most staff are aware of the drug use among the residents.

Daughters: What changes do you feel are necessary for safe centers for ex-offenders?

Ms. Gray: Need of body scanners, do inspections on residents, because what some people bring into the centers (DRUGS) can hurt someone else, because not everyone is on drugs. I think that when residents do have passes they need to go through inspection to make sure they are going exactly where they say they are going. To ensure the safety of other residents, so someone won't die. Centers weren't always infested with drugs. There used to be a lot of people involved with recovery. Training with staff is necessary to deal with the high level of women dealing with mental health issues and drug addiction. There should be stages of levels of care in dealing with residents.

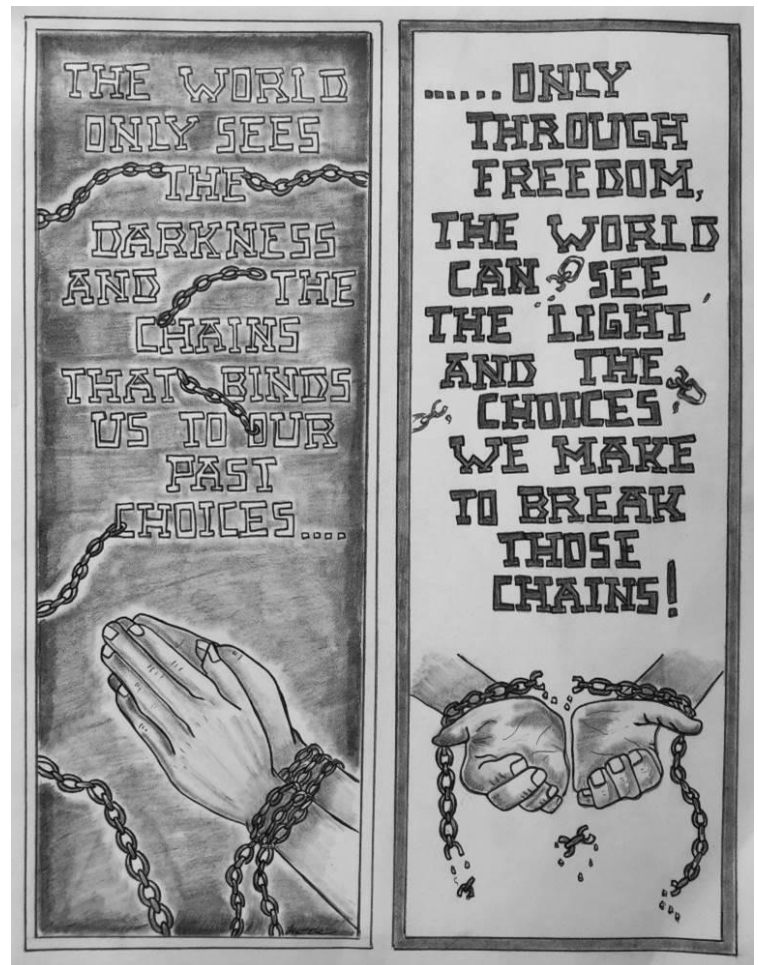
Daughters: How have the challenges you faced in returning home helped or hindered you?

Ms. Gray: Challenges hindered me by not being safe. I wasn't placed in a safe environment. No structure or counseling on living life on life's terms. Centers could have more narcotics anonymous meetings, adjustment programs. There are no activities or classes to network programs. Most residents just sit during the day.

Daughters: Will you have to go to a center or halfway house? And if so how will you face the possibility of being exposed to drug infestation inside the center again?

Ms. Gray: Yes, I will have to go back to a center and this time I'm willing to go and make some changes while I'm here. By preparing myself before I leave prison. And if I'm confronted with drug use in the center again, I will report it and contact my parole agent.

Daughters: Nahesa, thank you for your willingness to share some of your life struggles with us. We at *Daughters* appreciate you!



Only Through Freedom by Kristen Edmundson, for Life Cycles Towards Freedom

Prisons & Addiction

Excerpt adapted from an interview with Maya Schenwar about her book *Locked Down, Locked Out*

"Prison is built on a logic of isolation and disconnection," Maya Schenwar writes in her book *Locked Down, Locked Out: Why Prison Doesn't Work and How We Can Do Better*. Deftly weaving her own personal experiences with her sister's incarceration alongside the stories of prisoners who she has been writing to over the last eight years, Schenwar illustrates the devastating effects of prisons on those who are incarcerated, their families, and our communities:

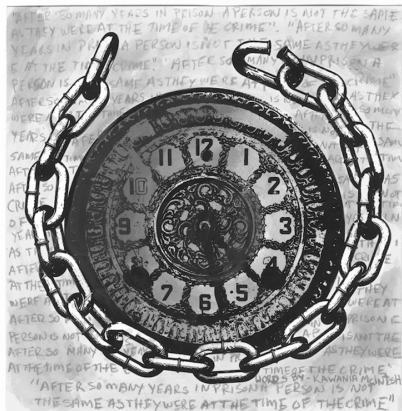


"One of the things I discovered [...] with my sister was that there's a trap set for anyone who has an addiction and doesn't necessarily want to get better right away. There's a system set up that you have to do illegal things in order to keep living your life as a person dependent on a drug in order to survive the way you know how and the way you don't want to necessarily change. When you're in that situation, you're less likely to seek healthcare. You're less likely to announce when you're in danger. You're less likely to try to have safe habits. You're less

likely to respect other people's property. It funnels you into a lifestyle that makes prison the thing that puts you in a "better" situation.

Later in the book I quote Andrea Smith. She says something like prison abolition doesn't mean getting rid of prison right now. It's creating structures that we want to exist so that prison is not a solution that people are using. I think that's really important. Drug addiction is just one of the many situations that would need to be addressed. In a case where people could openly talk about their drug problem and seek help in a legal, public, healthy manner, prison would never be a solution. It's so violent and destructive and has done so much damage to my family and others.

I don't think that prisons can be fixed and I don't think the system surrounding prisons can be fixed. [Abolition] also means putting prisons in the context of why they exist. It means recognizing that they're grounded in racism and anti-blackness. It means understanding that they're perpetuated by social, racial, economic injustice, not by a process of correction."



So Many Years by Nathan Mould, for Life Cycles Towards Freedom



From Let's Get Free's 'Let Our Grandmas Go' campaign earlier this year

Daughters Speak

Out of the heart flows the issues of life. | Interview with Trisha Dippery

**Interview with Trisha Dippery, 847JA
(paroled from SCI Muncy)**

Daughters: Hello Trisha. God bless you, and thank you for sharing your story with us! How old are you and do you have any children?

Trisha: I'm 24 years of age, no children.

Daughters: Is this your first time incarcerated?

Trisha: I started coming to prison (jail) when I was 14 years old.

Daughters: Do you suffer with addiction?

Trisha: Yes, heroin.

Daughters: Can you share with us some of your life story with addiction?

Trisha: I was raised in an alcoholic, drug addicted family, mom murdered in front of me when I was six. After that my grandparents took me in, and they were also alcoholics. My childhood played a factor into me becoming addicted. First time I used drugs I was eight and it was marijuana. The feeling it gave me made me want to try everything else. By age 13 I was addicted to heroin. I got sent to placement and I was in and out of foster care and juvenile rehabilitation. First time I overdosed I was 18. I moved back home at age 18, got arrested for robbery, did a little county bid, and they let me back out. By the time I was 20, I tried every drug and I was heavily addicted to K2 and heroin. I'd been in and out of state prison three times by this point.

Daughters: Are you getting ready to leave soon?

Trisha: Yes, I'm going to a center which I've been to before.

Daughters: What was it like for you in the center in the past?

Trisha: Been in three centers. It's like, when you get out of jail you feel good, but they don't help you at all. You're on your own. You get punished for doing the right things.

Daughters: Can you explain further?

Trisha: Whenever I was in Capital (a center), I had a really good job working 60 plus hours a week. On top of that, they wanted me to do 10 hrs of community service monthly, and it wasn't a part of parole.

Daughters: Did you feel that was excessive?

Trisha: Absolutely.

Daughters: Are you okay with going back to Capital?

Trisha: No way, shape, or form.

Daughters: Can you explain more on why you feel this way?

Trisha: First day I walked in the center, there were people getting high; shooting up. I was working and working, getting fired, stressed out because the center was taking money from me that they claimed was for good use. 10% for my savings, 10% fines and cost, and 20% for rent. When I finally left, my savings were \$400 short! And the county never received the fines and cost check from the center. I seen other people using. I was just stressed and exhausted, and I got high in the center. First I was doing cocaine. Then I sought out heroin. No support, no help, and I overdosed. It was one of my friends that helped me. The staff did not. I had a prior overdose in this same center.

Daughters Speak, Continued

Daughters: Wow, your story is both sad and powerful! What will you do differently this time when you leave, in order to stay safe?

Trisha: I'm on vivitrol. I never tried it before, but I have a good feeling about it. I have a good support system also.

Daughters: What changes would you like to see in DOC's centers?

Trisha: Facilities would be a lot better off with more caring staff, instead of people just being there for a paycheck; staff you could talk to versus getting high. Because I would never want to see others experience what happened to me when I overdosed at Capital Center. The girls ran to get staff, and staff said they wouldn't do anything for me; they gave another resident Narcan to spray up my nose. It would be nice to have more programs on living on life's terms, and more drug programs and treatment.

Daughters: Trisha, I just can't say thank you enough for sharing your experience. I pray and hope the best for you.

Trisha: Thanks.

Addiction, Treatment, & Women

***Excerpts adapted from an interview with
Stephanie S. Covington, PhD.***

"For women, addiction is a multidimensional issue that involves complex environmental and psychosocial challenges. In developing effective treatment for women, we must include the experience and impact of living as a woman in a male-based society—in other words, gender—as part of the clinical perspective.

"Values-based treatment" proposes four core values for treatment: gender-responsive, trauma-informed, culturally relevant and recovery-oriented. The integration of these values needs to be throughout the organization. It has to start with administration but include trauma-informed training for staff. The environment or culture of the program is an essential aspect of the treatment experience and its effectiveness. Even if you're not providing trauma-specific services you certainly can train your staff about trauma and its impact.

One of the biggest impediments to providing quality services for women can be the female staff. Often the staff have had some of the same experiences that their clients have had, and they haven't done their own therapeutic work. Therefore they are very hesitant to move in that direction because of how they are maintaining their lives and shutting off that common experience. Once you deny trauma in your own life, it's very hard to become trauma-informed and to use a trauma lens when working with women.

Everyone needs to understand what trauma is, what the typical responses are to trauma, as well as helping women develop coping skills. Many women with multiple treatments are usually really surprised when the trauma issue is mentioned. No one ever mentioned this connection to addiction. No one had ever asked them what had happened in their lives, and they are surprised that this would be part of the treatment process and yet it becomes, for many women, the critical piece to maintaining any kind of sobriety or having any quality of recovery. So this isn't just a little add-on to a program; I think this is a core ingredient to providing good services for women. "

Menopause, the Nemesis of Eve

by Sarita Miller

Menopause. Most women dread to think of it. Thoughts of our physical appearance diminishing associated with our primordial fears of becoming advanced in years. Ancient, with saggy breasts and crepey skin, Distressing for most women, but even worse if you are a woman incarcerated going through the change of life. Invading stereotypes about "getting old" or "being old" can make it extremely hard for women to accept something so natural. Unfortunately, in this present culture, the pressure is on for us to live up to an unrealistic standard; to stay immortally beautiful and young, with the constant badgering of media, and advertisements warning us about the dangers of showing the slightest signs of aging.

Ladies, I bring this topic to the surface because after 17 years of incarceration, 10 of those spent going through perimenopause, I am so convinced that medical along with the Department of Corrections does not take seriously the delicacy of our special health needs while incarcerated. Heartbreakingly, I've witnessed more women than I choose to admit suffer in prison from lack of inadequate healthcare. Cancer seems to be at the top of the list, followed by reproductive issues. Ovarian and cervical cancer are famed among PA's incarcerated female population, leaving women battling for their lives, and many succumbing to the syndromes, misdiagnoses and lack of empathy. So many women suffer unnecessarily with extreme pain for long periods of time.

When I first noticed a change in my body, my period had become extremely heavy. There were times I had to wear five or six maxipads at a time, changing them frequently throughout the day, along with this frightful bleeding every month. It was accompanied by huge pieces of tissue that had the look of raw sliced liver. I later found out was a condition called Menorrhagia, which entails an abnormally profuse menstrual flow usually chaperoned by large amounts of tissue debris. Needless to say, years of bleeding like this caused me to become anemic, resulting in me having to take iron supplements to this day. Other symptoms I suffered were hot flashes and night sweats. Hot flashes and night sweats are kind of similar, except one occurs at night while a woman sleeps. The profuse sweating and heat sensations have a tendency to awaken you, making it hard for one to fall back asleep. Recurring nights like this can cause insomnia. More symptoms I suffered through were chronic migraines, problems concentrating and even remembering things, weight gain and loss. Top that with heinous mood swings. I did not know if I was coming or going.

The effects of menopause on our bodies, ladies, is heft, but it is no comparison with the psychological struggles it brings. Whether we want to admit it or not, women can be summed up as one giant hormone. Hormones control almost every aspect of a woman's being, thank you Lord?? Because of the reduction in levels of estrogen during menopause, it may increase mood problems and depression in women who have an existing history of psychological issues. Unfortunately ladies, there is no cure, just strong endurance and a lot of prayer. Some women may choose different methods to gain comfort during menopause. My advice is to educate yourself as much as possible before accepting any medications offered to you. Suggestions would be to get to the library and check out books pertaining to menopause. My favorite one is *Our Bodies, Ourselves* by the Boston women collective. You could even have your families and loved ones research on the Internet and download and send you some information directly to the prison. Researching for yourselves is a smart, significant choice, so that if you have to rely on medical while incarcerated you will have some sort of understanding pertaining to your condition. Most of all, get to know your body. It's beautiful and it's yours!!

MENOPAUSE

[TIPS FOR A HEALTHY TRANSITION]



Staying healthy and attending to bothersome symptoms can help ease the menopause transition.

It's also important to manage the increased risk for heart disease and osteoporosis that come with menopause.



Take care to:

-  Quit smoking or using tobacco products, if you currently do.
-  Eat a healthy diet, low in fat, high in fiber, with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods.
-  Make sure you get enough calcium and vitamin D.
-  Learn what your healthy weight is, and try to stay there.
-  Do weight-bearing exercise, such as climbing stairs or dancing, at least 3 days each week for healthy bones. Try to be physically active in other ways for your general health, too.

Remember:
Menopause is not a disease that has to be treated. But it's a good idea to talk to your doctor about staying healthy and things you can do if symptoms like hot flashes bother you.

Visit www.nia.nih.gov/menopause for more information about menopause.



Understanding & Managing Menopause

Perimenopause

In this phase, your body starts providing physical clues that the menopause process is starting. It can still be years before your last menstrual period.

Some common, normal signs: irregular periods, hot flashes, vaginal dryness, sleep disturbances, and mood swings—all results of unevenly changing levels of ovarian hormones (estrogen) in your body. The most common symptoms women in their 40s notice are changes in periods and the onset of hot flashes.

Tips for Getting Yourself to Want to Exercise

- Make a conscious decision: “I want the wellbeing and self care benefits that physical activity brings.” (i.e., improved mood & sleep, weight loss, management of menopause symptoms)
- Decide what experience you want to gain from physical activity: Reduced stress? Social time with friends?
- Choose a physical activity that will give you that experience.
- Schedule that activity into your day and give yourself permission to leave other activities to go do it.
- Be flexible. If you only have 10 minutes but you planned for 30, do it anyway.
- Evaluate whether your activity is giving you the experiences you wanted. If it isn't, try a new activity, a different setting, a lower intensity, or a different time of day.
- Experiment. Figuring out the best activity for you can be a process that takes some time, but it's worth it!
- Decide if enhancing your sense of well-being is time well spent.

Menopause

Menopause is a normal, natural event, not a disease that needs to be treated. When you haven't had a period for 12 consecutive months, you've entered menopause.

Women in North America typically experience natural menopause between ages 40 - 58, averaging around age 51. Some women, however, reach this phase in their 30s, others in their 60s. Typically, women reach menopause around the same age as their mothers & sisters. Smokers may reach menopause ~2 yrs earlier than nonsmokers.

Dealing with Menopause & Depression

For mild to moderate depression, herbal remedies such as St. John's wort and the following lifestyle changes, recommended by the National Institute of Mental Health, may be helpful:

- Break large tasks into small ones, set priorities, & do what you can as you can.
- Participate in activities that may make you feel better: mild exercise or religious, social, or other activities you enjoy.
- Give it time. Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately. Feeling better takes time.
- Postpone important decisions until the depression has lifted; talk to friends and family who can help you have a more objective view of your situation.

For perimenopausal mood swings, some experts recommend a low-dose oral contraceptive (OCs). These estrogen-progestin pills provide continuously stable hormone levels and may control mood swings. Plus, they provide other benefits such as regulation of uterine bleeding and decreased risk for uterine and ovarian cancer. Smokers over 35 should not use OCs.

Rhythm From The Heart: Shh...

by Angela Hellman

Shh...

Do you hear that?

It's the emptiness of Love.

The vacant shallow whisper of a heart that's seldom hugged,

A perfect painted picture of a memory that was now just quiet visions,

Dreams felt in the mud,

Shh...

Loneliness awakens,

Footsteps on the trail behind,

Walking into,

Patience... moments relegate us leaving us in sorrow

As they slowly rebate us,

Used and returned, misused and abused,

Every bruise has its turn.

Shh...

Do you hear that,

It's the emptiness of love,

A shallow vacant whisper of the woman I once was...



Unintended Consequences

by Heather Lavelle

Living in prison during the Covid-19 health crisis is a scary thing. There is no good way to maintain social distancing in a prison. The facility I'm in was built in the early 1900's. It was not designed to keep us separated. There is one dining hall and until recently, one infirmary to service the 1,400+ women housed here. While the prison is taking measures to keep us safe, we still live with the daily anxiety of what will happen if we have an outbreak. Dying in prison of Covid-19 has become another unintended consequence of committing a crime.

My life is full of unintended consequences. It all started with my participation in a robbery in 2005. That spur of the moment decision, with no thought of the potential consequences, changed the trajectory of my life. If I had only known then what lay ahead, I never would have engaged in such a reckless act. The unintended consequence of that crime was my friend losing his life. I was convicted of his murder in 2006 and have been serving a life sentence ever since.

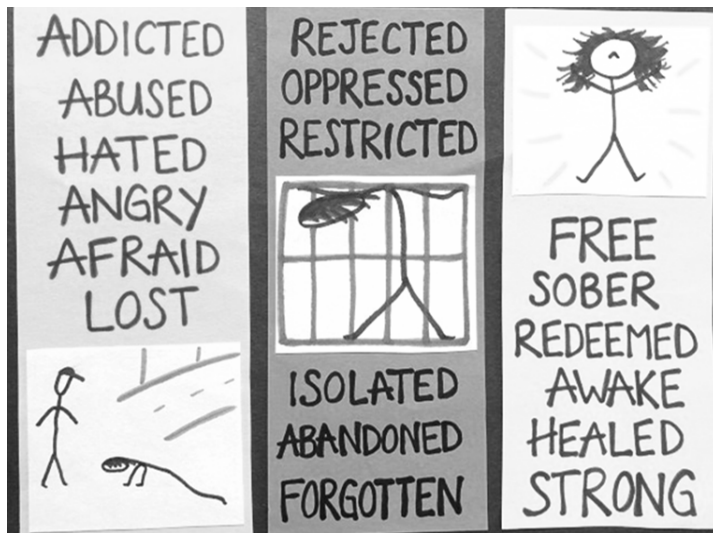
A homicide committed during the perpetration of a robbery in Pennsylvania is considered a felony murder. The only penalty for felony murder is life without the possibility of parole.

Pennsylvania is one of only two states in the country with such a severe penalty. A pending lawsuit is challenging whether or not this penalty violates the prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment in the Constitution. This begs the question, what is cruel and unusual punishment? I believe any prison sentence that eliminates the hope of one day being released should be considered cruel. Unfortunately, in Pennsylvania, it is not all that unusual.

While I hope that sentencing reform will be a reality in my lifetime, living with a life sentence has created countless unintended consequences. Any woman can tell you that losing the right to bear children is devastating. Too devastating to even talk about most of the time. Choosing not to have children is one thing. You can always change your mind. Having that choice taken away feels like being deprived of what it is to be a woman. For those of us who do have children, the unintended consequence of not being there as they grow is equally as devastating.

Earlier this year, I lost my mom. Not being there with her while she was sick was never supposed to happen. My mom and I had a very close bond. I always assumed that I would be the one to take care of her when that time came. My mom was my biggest supporter during my fifteen years of incarceration. I tried everything I could to get home to her - appeals, commutation, advocating for parole for life's legislation, you name it. But sadly, it was not meant to be. My biggest unintended consequence became not being there for the person who meant the most to me when she really needed me. I don't know what other consequences lay ahead for me, but I do know that they never stop.

Our country is in a state of unrest. Not only due to the health crisis, but also from people standing up and saying they won't take it anymore. Police brutality is one important aspect of the change we need to make as a society. We need meaningful criminal justice reform in Pennsylvania. Be it through legislature, the courts, or the Board of Pardons. Never ending punishment and multiplying unintended consequences need to stop. We must find a way to move forward.



Hope by Heather Lavelle, for Life Cycles Towards Freedom

Commutation Hearing Statistics

Two weeks after the September hearings, Let's Get Free and Amistad Law Project hosted a debrief over Zoom to share information and emotionally support each other. There was an overview of the results (see Elaine Selan's infographics below) and we had time to break up into groups to share how we were doing. About 80 people zoomed in and it felt SO GOOD to be with each other. We also wrote a chat poem.

MAY 2019	
Applicants	23 Men 21 Women 2
Type of Conviction	1 st Degree 9 2 nd Degree 12 Criminal Homicide
Age	Oldest 82 Youngest 50 Average 64.4
Race	W 6 B 15 H 2
Time Served [in years]	Most 47 Least 24 Average 34
Board Results	
Recommended	9 1 st Degree-4; 2 nd Degree-5
Not Recommended	12 1 st Degree-5; 2 nd Degree-5; CH-2
Under Advisement	3 1 st Degree-2; 2 nd Degree-1
Previous UA Decisions	3 Denied 2 Continued 1
Board Voting [Yes/No]	
	0-5 = 12* 1-4 = 1** 2-3 = 0 3-2 = 1 4-1 = 0 5-0 = 10***
	*Including the 3 Previous UA Cases
	**Fetterman was "yes" vote [Joelle Harper]
	***Including 1 Previous UA Decision
Voting Tally [Recommended/Not Recommended Only]	
Grayson	Yes 13 No 11 Williams Yes 12 No 12 Gubernick Yes 10 No 14 Shapiro Yes 10 No 14 Fetterman Yes 12 No 12

DECEMBER 2019	
Applicants	19 Men 17 Women 2
Type of Conviction	1 st Degree 9 2 nd Degree 9 Robbery 1*
Age	Oldest 72 Youngest 44 Average 61.8
Race	W 3 B 12 H 3 NA 1
Time Served [in years]	Most 49 Least 23 Average 32.5
Board Results	
Recommended	3 1 st Degree-2; 2 nd Degree-0; Robbery-1*
Not Recommended	12 1 st Degree-5; 2 nd Degree-7
Under Advisement	3 1 st Degree-2; 2 nd Degree-1
Continued UA	1 Case Not Heard & Continued 1
Board Voting [Yes/No]	
	0-5 = 3 1-4 = 0 2-3 = 2 3-2 = 7 4-1 = 1 5-0 = 4*
	*Including 1 Continued UA
Voting Tally [Recommended/Not Recommended Only]	Grayson Yes 12 No 3 Williams Yes 12 No 3
Gubernick	Yes 3 No 12 Shapiro Yes 3 No 12
Fetterman	Yes 12 No 3
	*Robbery Applicant is a long-term offender; only required a 3-2 [majority] vote for recommendation. He received a 4-1 vote [Shapiro was NO vote].

COMMUTATIONS – NUMBER CRUNCHING MAY 2019 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2020

SEPTEMBER 2020	
Applicants	22 Men 19 Women 3
Type of Conviction	1 st Degree 8 2 nd Degree 11 Murder 2 Robbery 1*
Age	Oldest 83 Youngest 43 Average 55
Time Served [in years]	Most 41 Least 24 Average 37.1
Race	W 9 B 10 H 3
Board Results	
Recommended	9 1 st Degree-2; 2 nd Degree-5; Murder-1; Robbery-1*
Not Recommended	9 1 st Degree-6; 2 nd Degree-3
Under Advisement	3 1 st Degree-0; 2 nd Degree-3
Case Not Heard & Continued	1
Commutation Revoked	1 [Not counted in other stats]
Board Voting [Yes/No]	NOTE: UNDER ADVISEMENT VOTING NOT INCLUDED
	0-5 = 5 1-4 = 2 2-3 = 1 3-2 = 1 4-1 = 1 5-0 = 9
Voting Tally [RECOMMENDED/NOT RECOMMENDED ONLY]	
Grayson	Yes 10 No 8 Williams Yes 10 No 8
Gubernick	Yes 10 No 8 Shapiro Yes 11 No 7
Fetterman	Yes 12 No 6
	*Robbery Applicant is a Long Term Offender – Required 3-2 vote but received 5-0 result

SUMMARY – THREE HEARING TOTALS	
Applicants	64 Men 57 Women 7
Type of Conviction	1 st Degree 26 2 nd Degree 32 Murder 2 CH 2 Robbery 2
Age	Oldest 83 Youngest 43 Average 60.4
Time Served [in years]	Most 49 Least 24 Average 34.5
Race	W 18 B 37 H 8 NA 1
Board Results	
Recommended	21 1 st Degree-8 2 nd Degree-10 Murder-1 Robbery-2
Not Recommended	33 1 st Degree 16 2 nd Degree-15 CH-2
Under Advisement	9 1 st Degree 4; 2 nd Degree-5] Case Not Heard & Continued 2
Commutation Revoked	1
Board Voting [Yes/No]	NOTE: UNDER ADVISEMENT VOTING NOT INCLUDED
	0-5 = 20 1-4 = 3 2-3 = 3 3-2 = 9 4-1 = 2 5-0 = 23
Voting Tally [RECOMMENDED/NOT RECOMMENDED ONLY]	
Grayson	Yes 35 No 22 Williams Yes 34 No 23
Gubernick	Yes 23 No 34 Shapiro Yes 24 No 33
Fetterman	Yes 36 No 21

Possible Implications:

- A '4 - 1' vote only occurred twice. A change in the law to modify voting to a '4-1' yes no margin may have a little impact on commutation approvals.
- The degree of the offence does not appear to have any predictive value.
- The board sits on the under advisement cases for several months. There are at least nine and probably more holding on the status.
- Gubernick and Shapiro often vote in tandem, as does Grayson and Williams.
- 2 to 3 attempts has a "charm"; seven individuals were approved on a repeat application or reconsideration.
- Correlating race with outcomes may have some value.
- Victim input has notable correlation with board voting outcomes DOC input less so.

The Chat Bar hosts a Chat Poem

A chat poem takes place in the chat bar on a virtual event. The chat bar is a common feature during “live” online events (i.e., Facebook Live, Zoom events, etc).It’s a place for participants to chime in and hear from each other while the event is going on. The more people participating the faster the chat scrolls - it can be hard to keep up. At the end of our board of pardons debrief we had a chat poem. There was a prompt read and typed in the chat and then some participants responded. Hannah du’plessis provided the prompts.

It is fall in the northern hemisphere. Around us forests are shedding their leaves, trusting that new life will return. Keeping that image in mind....

Part One:

“Like a forest sheds its leaves, I...”

19:27:56 From etta cetera : let go
19:28:03 From Azh Dailyn : take my bra off
after a long day! RELIEF
19:28:09 From Debby Rabold : look forward to
new growth in the spring
19:28:12 From Anthony Marqusee : shed false
ideas
19:28:13 From Sarah Yanuck : respond to the
world around me
19:28:16 From Donna Hill : Shed my grief
19:28:18 From Gabriel Donahue : shed my
struggle
19:28:23 From katy kop (she/her) : cycle
between grief and growth
19:28:24 From Anne Swoyer : continue to
shimmer with brilliant color
19:28:24 From Sue Wooley : embrace change
19:28:26 From Eric Trumbower : shed my
ignorance
19:28:27 From Sarah Morris : make space for
new growth
19:28:35 From Alan Lewandowski : hold
reverberating circles
19:28:43 From ellen melchiondo : go inward
to recenter.
19:33:26 From Susan McGovern : shed my
tears in hope my husband is always
safe and will come home soon.

Part Two:

“Like a forest rests in winter, I too trust...”

19:29:07 From Emily Abendroth : in the
regrouping and growth of spring
19:29:12 From etta cetera : our community
19:29:13 From ellen melchiondo : A new day is
coming.
19:29:15 From Sean Damon: that my people will
be there in spring
19:29:15 From Sarah Yanuck (she/her) : that we
don’t have to do this alone
19:29:17 From Sue Wooley: that peace will come
19:29:20 From yvonne newkirk : my supporters
and family
19:29:25 From Azh Dailyn : that one day the
sun will shine and melt away all this
hate in the world
19:29:31 From Alan Lewandowski : we are
together and cannot be divided
19:29:33 From Debby Rabold : the days will get
warmer, the sun will shine brightly
19:29:36 From katy kop (she/her) : that we are
held
19:29:53 From colleen d : all things are possible
19:30:03 From Azh Dailyn : that one day the
sun will shine and melt away all this
hate in the world
19:30:11 From Naima : that our time is coming,
and when it hits the surface of the
earth, people shall yield in admiration!
19:30:15 From Angela : the God of my
understanding will carry me when I
get tired

PA Prisoners File Challenge to Parole Restrictions

by Claudia Lauer (The Associated Press) | July 8, 2020

Six Pennsylvania inmates serving defacto life without parole sentences for crimes where they did not kill or intend to kill someone are challenging the state's felony murder statutes as unconstitutional under the state's ban on cruel punishment. The six inmates represented by lawyers from the Abolitionist Law Center (ALC), the Amistad Law Project and the Center for Constitutional Rights are suing the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole after they were each denied a parole hearing in a form letter last month.

The lawsuit filed Wednesday asks the state's Commonwealth Court to find the felony murder statute mandating a life sentence for these inmates while not allowing the parole board to hear requests for release unconstitutional. It also asks the court to order meaningful parole hearings for the six inmates and order the parole board to create a framework to review the parole requests for similarly sentenced inmates.

Nearly 1,100 of the close to 5,200 people serving defacto life without parole sentences in Pennsylvania did not kill or intend to kill someone, the lawyers said. Attorney Bret Grote, co-founder of the ALC, a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit working to end mass incarceration, said the sentence of life without parole means death by incarceration. "It is a prosecutors net that allows them to link the consequence of a criminal act to anyone who participates in that felony," he said during a teleconference about the lawsuit. "It allows prosecutors to engage in overcharging and linking people to unintended consequences of their actions." Grote noted that the sentence is disproportionately levied against Black and Hispanic defendants. Almost 70% of Pennsylvania life without parole inmates are Black, when the state's overall population is about 13% Black and the total inmate population is about 46% Black.

A spokesperson for the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole said the board does not comment on open litigation. A spokesperson for the Pennsylvania District Attorneys' Association said the members needed time to read the lawsuit before commenting. The six inmates, Marie Scott, 67; Marsha Scaggs, 56; Normita Jackson, 43; Tyreem Rivers, 42; and brothers Reid Evans, 58, and Wyatt Evans, 57, have all served more than 20 years and in Scott's case more than 47 years in prison. All were convicted of felony murder, which after 1974 included in the second-degree murder statutes, for crimes where they did not kill or intend to kill someone.

Scott was the lookout during a gas station robbery, where her underage co-defendant shot and killed the station attendant. That co-defendant was 16 at the time and has since had his sentence overturned and has been paroled. Rivers and the Evans brothers were both involved in robberies where the person later died. In the Evans' case, the man they robbed died of a heart attack several hours later, and in Rivers' case, the woman whose purse he stole died of pneumonia she had contracted in the hospital while being treated for injuries she sustained during the robbery. Jackson was convicted for her role in luring a man to her house, where her co-defendant shot and killed the man during a robbery. Scaggs testified she refused to kill a man during a drug deal after her co-defendant, who later shot and killed the man, believed he was an informant.

The lawyers argue that these inmates along with the 1,100 others convicted under the statute for their accomplice roles or for indirect deaths are less culpable, making the life without parole sentence cruel under the state's constitution. They say all of the inmates in the lawsuit have made efforts to better themselves by seeking addiction treatment, learning trades, starting support groups, earning college credits and serving as mentors and counselors to others during their combined 199 years in prison.

The only way for those inmates to receive a meaningful chance at rejoining society is if their sentences are commuted, something that the lawyers said has become increasingly rare with just eight inmates receiving commutations between 1995 and 2018 in Pennsylvania. "The complete absence of any individualized assessment when it comes to imposing DBI sentences in Pennsylvania is in stark contrast to the death penalty, to which the Supreme Court has compared the severity of life without parole sentences," the lawyers wrote in the lawsuit. "Indeed, the Pennsylvania legislature has required individualized sentencing in nearly every sentencing scenario except DBI sentences." **13**

Film Release: Wide Open

New short film featuring three former lifers released on November 14

Tamika Bell, Paulette Carrington and Starr Granger were sentenced to die in Pennsylvania when they were teenagers. After decades in prison -over 90 years collectively- Tamika, Paulette and Starr were released after the US Supreme court ruled that sentencing youth to life without parole was unconstitutional. This short film poetically depicts some of what the transition home from prison has looked and felt like.



As for the title, Wren Rene the filmmaker, took it from an interview with Starr where she says, "You have to step outside of the box

that they try to put you in. If a door shuts, build a door. Build your own door and kick it wide open." Wrene loved the sentiment and also felt that it functioned on numerous levels - speaking to the women's release, the possibilities available to them in their new world of reentry, as well as their openness and vulnerability throughout the interviews and filmmaking process.

This film is part of a multi-media campaign uplifting the stories of women and trans people serving death by incarceration in Pennsylvania. All 4 films can be seen online at lifecyclestowardfreedom.org. We have asked the women's prisons to screen the video on the institutional TV. Last time we did that many of the men's prisons also showed the films, so hopefully the DOC will approve the viewing of it. This film was a collaboration with the People's Paper Coop, Let's Get Free and the Women Lifer's Resume Project.

Amadou Diallo, Trayvon Martin, Tony McDade, Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd, Botham Jean, Anthony Hill, Michael Brown, Ahmaud Arbery, Walter Scott, Breonna Taylor, Philando Castile, Sean Reed, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice.

List of names, Lives Lost, dreams smoked into cinder. Questions of why, hatred breeds hate, shouldn't it be justified? Endangered species, suspected genocide. I'm a rage, fist pumping towards the heaven, in an uproar, Knees scraped and bruised, imprints choked into concrete, Gun smoke by brown hands, shots fired against one another. AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER? My African sisters so deeply misunderstood, loyalty courses through our veins, betrayed by our hearts and the love we so ferociously give to our Nubian Kings. Abused and degraded by frustrated fists.

I SEE YOU COLORED LIKE ME.

HANDS UP! DON'T SHOOT! COLORED LIKE ME!

BLACK LIVES WILL NEVER MATTER UNTIL IT MATTERS TO US!!

14

Poem by Sarita Miller

2020 Merit Review Sessions

Successes, Disappointments, Resilience, and A Call for Action

2020 offered Merit Review opportunities to fewer Lifers and Long-Timers than expected. The first were to take place on February 6, 2020. On February 5, an email reported: *"I just talked to Brandon Flood. He said no lifers will be heard on merit review tmrw. That all lifers were getting pushed to May!!:(I'm so dissapointed."* Three months later, the first Merit Reviews of the year were finally held on May 7 using a virtual format. 13 people with Death by Incarceration sentences were considered, eight of whom were successful in getting enough votes to move to a Public Hearing, including Avis Lee and Mildred Strickland, both at Cambridge Springs. Unfortunately, Public Hearings that were to take place in June were cancelled and those scheduled had to wait until the September 4 Public Hearings.

In the meantime, another Merit Review session was held on August 6. The seven lifers scheduled for this session were all up for reconsideration from previous hearings, and all seven were granted a Public Hearing. We were disappointed that no others serving DBI were considered at this session, but happy for the seven who were moving forward.

On November 5, 2020, the last Merit Review session of the year was held. Many members of the movement called the conference call line and listened in to the hearings, which involve BOP Secretary Brandon Flood reading the names and calling each board member to vote. It was heartbreaking and honestly a bit surprising that five out of the six people with life sentences seeking commutation were denied almost unanimously for a chance at a public hearing.

Lt. Governor John Fetterman cast the lone yes for Kenny Stevenson. David Slaughenhaupt who was up for reconsideration was granted a hearing with a 3-2 vote. Rose "Roddie" Dinkins, Kawania McIntosh, Heather Lavelle, Robert King Jr, Andre Gale and Robert Madison Jr. were all denied hearings.

The applicants need three out of five votes to be granted a public hearing. Rose "Roddie" Dinkins has been in prison for 48 years and is 72 years old. Kawania McIntosh has served 27 years and is now 60 years old. Heather Lavelle has served 15 years and is now 50 years old. Members of Let's Get Free have personally met all three women, and support their freedom without a doubt! We are sharing their ages and time served because we hold onto those details, grasping for any reason why the board may have denied them. Did they not have enough time in? Was it because police were victims? Did the election have anything to do with it?

It's so hard to tell, which is why now more than ever we are pressuring the Board of Pardons and the Lt. Governor to produce a written reason for denial for every case going for commutation. There must be some sort of accountability for the decisions.

Want to help us apply pressure? Write your own letter to the BOP and Lt. Governor John Fetterman explaining why there should be a written reason for denial mailed to each applicant who is denied.

**Pennsylvania Board of Pardons
333 Market Street
15th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126**

2020 Commutations

Overview of September Public Hearing Outcomes

The first week of September brought us the first Virtual Public Hearings in PA. The board was tuning in for work from desks and places in their homes while Fetterman was in the state house with Brandon Flood and other assistants at his side. The hearings took place on zoom. Hearing participants were sent a special link. The public was able to watch a live stream of the zoom on the BOP website. A schedule was sent out weeks before listing over 200 cases to be heard, most of them pardons. The pardons cases are all people who are not in prison.

There were technical problems throughout the process resulting in the postponement of many of the pardon cases. It was a relief that the board chose to continue with the commutation cases.

Henrietta Harris, Avis Lee, Mildred Strickland, Gregory Stover, Francisco Mojica, Reid Evans, Wyatt Evans, Daniel Cummings and Kevin Butler were all recommended to the Governor.

Dennis Horton, Lee Horton and Eric Eisen were held under advisement. (They do this when the board has unanswered questions that would impact their decision.)

Edwin Dejesus, Harry Jeffries, Richard Marra, Michael Rinaldi, Felix Rosado, David Sloughenhaupt, Joseph Spinks and James Strapple were denied.

We at Let's Get Free were overwhelmed with joy to hear unanimous yes votes being read out for Avis Lee, Mildred Strickland, Henrietta Harris and the six others recommended for commutation that day. In recent decades, the idea of nine Lifers being recommended for commutation in one year was unthinkable, let alone in one day. The same can be said of three women receiving a recommendation for pardon in one day.

Nonetheless, disappointments and questions persist and a cloud hangs over our joy to see friends of our movement and others deserving of commutation being denied a second chance with no clear indication as to why. At the time of writing this, it has been almost 90 days since the applications were approved and the board of pardons still has not signed on.

Watching and hearing the BOP deliberate can be thoroughly disheartening, as information introduced into their lackluster discussions can seem very random and in no way connected to judging an applicant's readiness for release. More than once in the course of the hearings, Lt Governor Fetterman saw fit to remind his fellow board members that the job of the Board of Pardons is to consider pardons, and not to re-litigate decades old cases.

It must be noted to their credit that in several cases the Department of Corrections team went to bat for the applicants they were representing. James Strapple's case stands out with the DOC rep from Albion unflinchingly responding to every question from the board with glowing affirmations of James character, accomplishments and transformation. In Mr. Strapple's case the family of the victims turned out in high numbers using all of their 30 minutes to share agonizing testimony of grief and impact. In Felix Rosados case, much to many of our surprise, Jennifer Storm was a lead character witness on his behalf. Even with this high profile testimony and no victim presence he was still denied. Avis Lee's hearing barely lasted 4 minutes, the board clearly had already made up their mind.

Hey Board of Pardons, Be the Board of Pardons!

Reflections by etta cetera

After the hearings, many gathered virtually for a state-wide debrief. We talked a lot about victims' participation. As we try to hold the complexity of their voice being included, it can still feel unfair. Especially when a scenario from decades ago is recounted, including information that has not been proved. Some people think there should be no victim participation at all. I disagree with that personally, but i do think there should be some sort of guidelines on what can be talked about. But how do you put guidelines on someone's grief? At a JV Lifer hearing i attended years ago, the victim was recounting things that did not and could not have happened and no one said. "Let the record state, the testimony may feel real to the person but includes inaccurate recountings because (name withheld) was incarcerated and not able to attend the situation you are describing." Because when the victims speak in the room it feels real, and that happened on the zoom hearings too with different witnesses. At least in two cases, the grieving witness stated things that were proven untrue or were disputed by family members we support.

I can't stop imagining how these hearings could be more healing instead of the robotic and rote nature of the overwhelmed state process. What I am envisioning feels so unattainable because it is outside of the punishment and retributive paradigm that we find ourselves in. So far off. A totally different process. A circle. Holding space. Having time for all the feelings. There are a lot of feelings and experiences. In my dream we would need so many members of the community to participate because there is no way a 5 person board could handle the time. So yes. I see community participation. I see trauma-informed healing spaces that holds space for all the participants.

And since I'm dreaming I see the Board of Pardons stewarding people home. So the hearings would be more about how to transition home, holding the heaviness of the past, supporting a letting go, and planning for the future.



Yes! on Commutation demonstration in Harrisburg on August 27

Help Us Lift Our Message to the Sky!

2021 Billboard Campaign

Let's Get Free is raising a whopping \$40,000 to amplify the message that 'Life Sentences are Death Sentences' in Pennsylvania. PA has one of the largest populations of people sentenced to die in prison in the US: 5,430. We need to build public awareness to strengthen our movement to bring our people home. We need to push our cause outside of our committed justice bubbles. We want lawmakers and residents across PA to see a few of the faces who have been sentenced to die.

Help us reach the unthinkable!! One billboard on the turnpike for 2 months can make 1 million impressions. Millions of people who have never thought about this issue will be exposed.

The billboards will be launched in conjunction with each of the four sessions of merit review and public hearings in 2021.

- If 2,000 people donate \$20 bucks... we got this!
- If 1,000 people donate \$40 bucks... we got this!
- If 500 people donate \$80 bucks... we got this!
- If 250 people donate \$160 bucks... we got this!

Currently, we can afford a four-month stretch for one billboard. So yay! We will be on the turnpike but not in as many places or for as long as we want so we have long way to go. Can you afford a small donation? Can you ask a family member or loved one to chip in?

Checks can be sent to: **Let's Get Free • 460 Melwood Ave #300 • Pittsburgh, PA 15213**
or: family members and loved ones can donate online at our website: **letsgetfree.info**

5,430

PEOPLE IN PA ARE
SENTENCED TO
DIE IN PRISON

PAID FOR BY LET'S GET FREE



One of the billboard designs featuring Tameka Flowers, Charmaine Pfender and Sarita Miller

Daughters
c/o Let's Get Free
460 Melwood Ave #300
Pittsburgh, PA 15213



These photos shows advocates on August 27, 2020 holding signs at rallies held in Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, a week before the hearings. They were meant to demonstrate physical support for people coming before the Board of Pardons. The Harrisburg rally displayed over 200 portraits of supports holding signs of support for their loved ones coming before the board.