



September 2, 2021

The Honorable Ralph Northam  
Governor of Virginia  
P.O. Box 1475  
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

As the end of your term approaches, we write to urge you to use your pardon power generously and grant conditional pardons to deserving people in Virginia's state prison system. We appreciate your use of pardons in recent weeks to remedy injustices that are decades old, even for people who are no longer with us. Conditional pardons can do the same for people who have a lot of life left ahead of them, and the people who need them home now.

As you know, Virginia has a large and costly prison population but does not have parole. Clemency is the only way home early for the many people in state prisons who have aged, matured, improved themselves, and no longer need to be incarcerated. People change and grow, but Virginia's lengthy sentences and lack of parole do not allow for second chances. A sentence that might have made sense once may no longer be necessary to keep the public safe.

Some sentences – like many of the mandatory minimum sentences you have rightly questioned – were unjust and excessive when imposed. For those who are seriously ill or have matured from their youthful crimes, continued incarceration is cruel and counterproductive, wasting resources on incarcerating people who are not a danger. Conditional pardons can remedy injustices, recognize rehabilitation, protect public safety, and give people a second chance.

Conditional pardons will also reunite families at a time when many are still struggling from the pandemic. Many families in Virginia need their incarcerated loved ones home now. These loved ones could be at home as partners, parents, employees, and taxpayers. Their presence could mean that marriages survive, children stay in school, mortgages are paid, and careers grow.

Legislative efforts are underway to repeal mandatory minimum sentences, so that people receive fair, individualized punishments, and we support those efforts. But you have the power today to advance justice by releasing people who are serving excessive sentences. We urge you to do so.

Sincerely,

Kevin Ring  
President