



Pennsylvania Board of Pardons
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Members:

Hon. John Fetterman, Lieutenant Governor, Chairman
Hon. Josh Shapiro, Attorney General
Hon. Harris Gubernick, Corrections Expert
Hon. John P. Williams, MD, Psychiatrist
Hon. Marsha H. Grayson, Esquire, Victim Representative

Cc: Hon. Tom Wolf, Governor

Sent via E-Mail to Brandon Flood, Secretary (bflood@pa.gov)

August 4, 2020

Honorable members of the Board,

FAMM, in solidarity with incarcerated individuals and their families with whom we advocate, calls on each member of the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons to commit to a truly robust commutation system, and reconsider applications of individuals formerly denied by the Board. Our nation is in a moment of deep self-reflection, and multitudes are in the streets day and night demanding that people in power finally take action to address racial disparity and injustice in our legal system. The Board has before it an opportunity to immediately address some of the ways the commonwealth's legal system has failed our communities.

As a direct result of the near absence of second-chance opportunities for people serving long, mandatory life without parole and death sentences, Pennsylvania has a ballooning and costly aging and ill prison population. Many of these people were sentenced when they were young and have literally grown up inside. Many have spent their time in prison improving themselves and serving their communities. These individuals would undoubtedly be mentors in their home communities if recommended by the Board and granted clemency by the Governor. Pennsylvania has incredible examples of formerly incarcerated people contributing to society in positive ways because they were given a second chance. Our leaders must act to expand those opportunities to more people who have demonstrated readiness to return home.

Pennsylvania became a leader in the country by quickly enacting multiple policing reforms into law after the killing of George Floyd. As a number of our elected officials have stated, however, we must go much, much further. Unfortunately, Pennsylvania is also a leader in sentencing people to mandatory life sentences, and categorically denying them the opportunity for parole. The disproportionate harm caused to Black people and people of color by our legal system extends well beyond policing; it pervades our charging and sentencing policies and procedures, as well. In this commonwealth, Black people are



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sentenced to serve life without parole at a rate that is 18 times higher than their white counterparts. The rate of life without parole sentences for Latinx people in Pennsylvania is five times greater than for white people.

This historic moment is marked by an unprecedented level of introspection and action across society. The Board has the opportunity to rise to this moment and do what it can to help alleviate racial disparities in our prison system by choosing to extend mercy and grace to deserving people who are serving life without parole and death sentences. Doing so will also acknowledge and begin to address deep-seated distrust of our legal system. We call on each Board member to choose mercy and justice, and use their power to recommend clemency for those before it trapped in a cycle of perpetual punishment, and to reconsider the cases of everyone serving such sentences it previously denied.

We appreciate your diligent attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

K. Celeste Trusty
Pennsylvania State Policy Director, FAMM