



**Written Testimony of Dr. Shaneva McReynolds
FAMM's Illinois State Consultant
House Judiciary – Criminal Committee, Illinois General Assembly
In Support of HB 3373
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Hello, I'm Dr. Shaneva McReynolds & I want to thank you for allowing me to testify as a proponent for the earned reentry bill.

November 26, 2008, my husband was murdered. Not only did his murder devastate our families it left me to be a single mother of three girls; one of which was only two months old as she was born on September 9th, 2008, which was our first wedding anniversary.

I keep the time as our baby girl grows through life. This year on what would've been our 16th wedding anniversary, our daughter Reagan will be 15 years old. 15 years later we still don't know who murdered my husband. If you would've asked me 15 years ago, 13 years ago, or even 10 years ago, I would've told you that whoever is responsible for his death should spend the rest of their life in prison. They should not be allowed the opportunity at freedom, holidays, birthdays, or any time with loved ones.

As time moved on, I had this epiphany. What would this accomplish? Will it make my family whole? Does it restore all that we've lost over the years? I know it will certainly devastate their family to lose a loved one to a life sentence of incarceration. I do believe the person that committed this heinous crime should be sentenced to time in prison; I just don't agree that it should be a lengthy, life or de facto life sentence.

I believe that people are redeemable. I believe in second chances. Just as I was convicted in my thinking, I believe people can change.

In 2013 I was reconnected to my childhood sweetheart. His sister reached out to tell me he had been looking for me. When he called me for the first time after 22 years, I was elated to talk to him and devastated to hear that this call was from a federal prison. To make a long love story short, we got married July 31st, 2014, in Rochester Federal Medical Center with over a decade remaining on his sentence.

In 2005 at the age of 28 my husband was sentenced to 235 months in the Federal Bureau of prisons which meant he wouldn't be home until the year 2025 and would then be 48 years old.

It has been said that our country throws away far too many people. We sentence people to decades in prison; send them to remote, dangerous institutions; forget they exist; then release



them from prison with little to no coping skills. Article one section 11 of the Illinois Constitution records “All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship.”

Two forms of legislation with retroactivity provisions allowed my husband the opportunity at useful citizenship. After 11 years & 7 months, he was released!

Second look sentencing provisions afforded my husband & our family priceless experiences and opportunities. My husband was able to spend a year with his mother before she passed away. He was home to see two of our children graduate; one from high school and the other from college.

One year after his reentry, my husband started a logistics company. He hires individuals reentering society just as he once had to endure – and it was most certainly a struggle. He believes in second chances because he was given one, so he pays it forward! He’s a taxpayer contributing to the same society he once committed crimes against.

As of 2020, there were over 10,000 people serving sentences of 15 years or more in Illinois prisons (including 1,579 people serving life without parole sentences). Illinois can, and should, pass legislation to provide people with life and long sentences an opportunity for resentencing or parole.

We must commit to fair, rational, and humane sentencing practices which allow incarcerated people to prepare to re-join their families and communities. It’s evident that resentencing works at the federal level and makes our community stronger, now, Illinois needs to create more pathways for people to receive a second look at their sentence and the earned reentry bill does this with a conservative approach. The bill is merit-based and requires 20 years before review -- which is almost 2 times longer than people with the most serious crime-convictions had to wait for review in Illinois’ previous (pre-1978) parole system.

Resentencing creates Second chance mechanisms. Second chances offer hope and hope directly translates to public safety!

I want to thank you again for the opportunity to share my testimony and I’m open to any questions you may have.