

TESTIMONY OF HARRIET AND STANLEY HENDEL

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

In support of H.B. 6581 and S.B. 1062

Dear Judiciary Committee:

My husband and I have known Robin Ledbetter for four years and each year has brought us all closer together. We live half the year in New York State (the other half in Florida), but we have been able to visit her 21 times since 2009. Robin communicates with us by letter and telephone.

Four years ago, I came across *I'll Fly Away* by Wally Lamb and was moved by a story composed by Robin called "A Gift". {Wally is a volunteer teacher of creative writing at York Prison and also a writer of national acclaim}. The book he edited contains stories and poems by the women of York. After reading the book, I decided to contact Robin to see if we could arrange a visit. Immediately, we found ourselves drawn to Robin because of her openness, her intelligence, her overwhelming desire to learn and to grow, her sensitive and caring nature and her deep remorse.

Over time, we have watched Robin welcome challenges. She earned her CNA (Certified Nurse Assistant) in 2010, her certification as a drug and alcohol counselor in 2013. At present, she is enrolled in two college level classes through Wesleyan University. Her essay, "Laying Roots", won third prize in the Prison Writing Program offered by PEN American Center, an organization begun in the early 1920s to recognize writers of various genres.

It is clear to us that Robin has matured from the child of 14 who entered York Prison eighteen years ago. Robin is as close to us as if she were our own offspring. We would not hesitate to offer her a permanent place in our home and in our lives. As two people who have a total of 63 years of teaching experience, we view Robin as an outstanding student and a unique person. We will always be there to support her.

Sincerely,

Harriet and Stanley Hendel