

Written Testimony: SB 796

Elizabeth Beinfield

11 Pennoyer Street. Rowayton, CT 06853

March 4, 2015

Written Testimony from Liz Beinfield for Edward Turnage Inmate # 255942:

I have known Eddie Turnage for 26 years—since he was seven-years-old. He was in the same first grade class as my daughter, Jenny. Unlike Jenny, he lost his mother at the age of five and had little parental guidance from that day forward. Eddie was and is a good person who as a child did a terribly bad thing.

I was present at his arraignment. My heart broke for the family of the victim. I cannot imagine the despair that was caused by Eddie's act but what I do know is that he feels intense and utter remorse. I believe the crime was a split second incredibly tragic, rash singular event. Nothing excuses this capital offense, but there is a context for it. Eddie had never been in trouble with the law. The day of this event was Mother's Day—the hardest day of the year for him. He had been without his mother for ten years—twice as many years as he had lived within her embrace. On that day he was particularly sad, mad, and bad—he was at an apartment with a lot of people. A two-year-old reached into a backpack and pulled out a gun. Eddie took it from him and put it in his pocket. Eddie should not have had a gun and he absolutely should not have used it. He never should have caused such unbearable loss. He received 32 years, of which he must serve 28 years—he has already done 17. I was told to tell him to take this plea bargain—in retrospect, I do not know that I should have done so.

I conjecture that Eddie might have grown to be a better person in jail than he otherwise would have done. He has matured with grace and integrity within the confines of a high security upbringing. He has willingly served his time for the crime committed without harboring ill will. He is one of the most thoughtful and caring individuals that I have ever met. He has become a Muslim and that spirituality has contributed to his capacity to self-reflect.

He has spent so much time thinking about his future. He will make his life as positive as possible and will contribute what he can towards making a brighter future to all of those that will have the gift of befriending him in their lives. I can see Eddie becoming a mentor and counselor for troubled teens. He has a sense of clarity rare in a person of his age. He recognizes that he has accrued knowledge and wisdom as a result of his years in prison. He talks about wanting to spend time with his nephews and teach them what was never taught to him as a child. When he speaks to his siblings he is always trying to steer them toward a better life path. Looking back at himself as the young man who committed his crime, he sees himself as having been thwarted by anger, confusion, and peer pressure. He no longer feels this as the more mature person he has become. Now he experiences his life as a blessing.

My family origins and life circumstances dramatically differ from Eddie's—I have had privilege and opportunity. Despite our differences, or because of them, my relationship to Eddie and his siblings has been important to me and to them—I have tried to fulfill the role of being a constant source of support. Eddie and I have spoken between one and three times a week for the last sixteen years. I am also in close touch with his sister Special and her children. Were Eddie to be released from prison, I would offer him maternal and emotional support, help him to find a job, and attempt to ease his transition back into the community. I do not believe that this would be difficult—Eddie is so sure about making another set of choices than those he made as a fifteen-year-old committing this thoughtless, terrible act eighteen years ago. As a thirty-four-year-old, he is a responsible, thoughtful man who seeks to be in the cradle of his family and contribute to their welfare and that of his larger community. I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter and hope that you see that Eddie has changed and, based on that, you can see your way clear to offer him a second chance at being a free citizen.

Respectfully,
Liz Beinfield