

Testimony of Tollie Miller in Support of SB 796
Judiciary Committee
March 4, 2015

I come to speak in favor of the Juvenile Sentencing Bill (SB796). There are many experts here to speak to the scientific brain research and the ethical, judicial and economic reasons to pass this legislation. I bow to their expertise, and wish to make a personal statement about the experience I have that leads me to push hard for this bill. For three years, I have co-lead a weekly meditation class at MacDougall Correctional Institution in Suffield. It has been a powerful experience to come to know many inmates. One of the members of the class, who has come faithfully for all three years, is Nicholas Aponte. Nick committed his crime at the age of 17 and was sentenced to an adult term of 38 years in prison. He, along with several other teenagers, held up a store, and a clerk was shot and killed during the robbery. It was established in court that Nick neither carried nor fired a gun during the crime. Even so, he was sentenced to a term of 38 years.

In the 18 years he has spent in prison, Nick has matured into a responsible, caring and skilled adult. He has completed CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) training and works daily in MacDougall's medical unit, often caring for hospice patients. His work there is valued highly by the medical staff and his fellow inmates. Having completed an Associate's degree, he is now pursuing a Bachelor's, and hopes to one day attain a nursing degree. Despite the years of incarceration, he has maintained a close relationship with his mother and, through weekly visits, developed a strong relationship with his son.

Nick speaks often in group of his deep remorse for his crime. He has spent his time in prison coming to grips with the consequences of his actions and is deeply aware of the suffering he caused by his involvement in a robbery and needless death. Nick already had a committed meditation practice of many years before attending our class. Becoming mindful, pausing before reacting, and choosing actions wisely are some of the skills we teach and practice in meditation class. Nick has become an exemplar of these to the men in the group. Nick is someone I would be proud to have as a neighbor and friend. He is a fine example of someone who has truly matured in prison, and become an adult who would be a credit to any community.

Nick is among 200 inmates who would be impacted by a change in the law. Such a law would not be a 'get out of jail free card'. It would simply give inmates in his position a chance for consideration by the parole board for early release. He received an adult sentence for a crime committed when he was a juvenile, and he has certainly earned his right to such consideration.

More than 15 states have passed such 'second look' laws. It is the right thing to do. Please support the passage of this bill in THIS legislative session.

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