

THE SECOND CHANCE INITIATIVE

An *H.O.N.O.R.* Program Activity Group



Spring 2025

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Dear Reader,

Enclosed in this package are letters written by individuals housed in the H.O.N.O.R. Program at Cheshire Correctional Institution. These individuals participated in a group called the *Second Chance Initiative*. The purpose of this group is to give incarcerated individuals a voice in the conversation on criminal justice reform. The discussion topics are also enclosed for your consideration when reading these essays.

We hope that you read this material with an open mind and a compassionate ear. Finally, we would like to extend an invitation to you, the reader, to come into the Cheshire Correctional Institution facility, at staff discretion, and speak with the participants in person. If you are interested please contact the Commissioner of Correction's Office in Wethersfield to make the appropriate arrangements.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this material.¹

Sincerely,

Anthony N. Brunetti

Creator/Facilitator of *The Second Chance Initiative*

¹ Please note that all essays are listed alphabetically by the author's name



THE H.O.N.O.R. PROGRAM

Cheshire Correctional Institution

900 Highland Avenue

Cheshire, CT 06410

Why have an H.O.N.O.R. Program?

Those serving lengthy sentences in the Department of Correction have little access to programs that can help them rehabilitate or improve themselves. Many prisoners, over the age of 25, who desire change, rehabilitation, and personal development must struggle to attain these tools, resources, and education needed to do so. The H.O.N.O.R. Program seeks to supplement these needs.

Who is the H.O.N.O.R. Program for?

The H.O.N.O.R. program is for everyone, specifically, prisoners who have never had the opportunity to learn why they committed the crime(s) that they are incarcerated for. This includes the internal and external factors that contributed to the commission of their crimes and what they need to learn and know to prevent themselves from reoffending and returning to prison once they are given an opportunity for release. This program is intended for prisoners who are serving lengthy sentences, who may have come to prison repeatedly, those who lack interpersonal and/or problem solving skills, and those who have unaddressed trauma. The H.O.N.O.R. program seeks those individuals who want to be rehabilitated and improved. Thus, this program is for the prisoner who can admit to themselves that they need to change something about themselves and hope to learn how to make constructive choices and wise decisions to prevent themselves from returning to prison.

What is the H.O.N.O.R. program about?

Honor is the central ethos of the program. It is the fundamental value upon which the program's culture is based. It is the primary disposition that the program seeks to instill in its participants. The ultimate goal of this program is to improve each individual participant's opportunity for rehabilitation by offering them a combination of tools, resources, and education that can shape their character, attitudes, and behaviors into one that reflects what is honorable. To accomplish this goal, the H.O.N.O.R. program has been created to reflect a community that has rules that each member should observe and adhere to in order to build and maintain order and structure. This community shares a common goal; rehabilitation and personal development. With this common goal in mind every member of this community is expected to be an example and a leader at all times. This community is comprised of participants from at least nine different work assignments throughout the facility. The community seeks to offer duties and responsibilities to each of its members on a rotating basis in order to instill a sense of ownership, self-respect, and obligation to one another.

The remainder of the program proposes to offer:

- H.O.N.O.R. Discussion Groups
- Open Discussion Groups
- Programs and workshops
- Facilitator training
- Mentorship training
- Trauma healing
- Practical human decency and respect
- Conflict resolution circles
- Advanced personal development
- Periodic evaluations

Discussion Topics:

Acknowledgement

- 1.) Acknowledge how your crime has impacted the victim and their loved ones.
- 2.) How have you dealt with feelings of remorse?
- 3.) If you are innocent, you can still acknowledge the impact of the crime on the victims.

Change

- 4.) Write about how you have changed, matured, or grown during your incarceration.
- 5.) Write about how you have been rehabilitated during your incarceration.

Effects

- 6.) Explain how long term incarceration has affected you:
 - a. Mentally,
 - b. Emotionally,
 - c. Physically
- 7.) What has been the impact of your incarceration on your loved ones?

Reform

- 8.) Explain why you think over sentencing is an issue.
- 9.) Consider any ideas for how this could be addressed.

Anthony Nicholas Brunetti

276789

To whom it may concern.

My name is Anthony Nicholas Brunetti, a member of the *H.O.N.O.R Program* and the creator of the *Second Chance Initiative* group. I am 44 years old and have been incarcerated for 25 years. At the age of nineteen I was arrested for the charge of murder and sentenced to 60 years' incarceration.

Reflecting on my situation, I had to come to grips with the fact that the way I chose to live cost someone their life. It was a difficult thing to process and the gravity of what I've done is not lost on me. Someone is no longer here to enjoy a meal with their family, to watch a movie or pet their furry friend. Someone's family had to grieve and mourn for a loved one who was taken before their time. I have tried to imagine what their pain would feel like if it was my loved one who was taken in such a way, it hurt to the point that tears streamed down my face and I knew that what I was able to imagine paled in comparison to what they actually felt. Feelings of shame, guilt, regret, and remorse were overwhelming. My faith in God caused me to pray for forgiveness and many nights I prayed that God would allow my prayers to be heard by the soul of the victim in my case, asking that she would be able to hear my sincere apologies, and expressing that I would give up my own life to restore hers. It has been a long time since I was capable of committing the acts I committed as a teenager.

Shortly after coming to prison I had to take a hard look at the contributing factors that derailed my life and cost someone else theirs'. The conclusion I came to was that my crime was the result of heavy intoxication, a warped sense of morality, and the bad decision making ability of a teenager deeply enmeshed in the criminal lifestyle. When I started this period of

incarceration I was angry, selfish, and had a moral code created by the influence of violent rap music and peers who were committed to criminal activity. I didn't know how warped my sense of morality was until I took up the study of religion and spirituality. In attempting to find answers to the greater questions in life, I ended up discovering a moral code completely foreign to the one that previously guided my actions. The emphasis on qualities such as love, compassion, kindness, and altruism in these studies compelled me to make a critical assessment of the values I held and the way I lived. The more studying I did, the more soul-searching and self-reflecting took place. During this process I was able to identify and correct the causative factors and character defects that allowed my criminal behavior.

In 2011, I had my final fight and my final ticket in prison. I was in seg and just decided I had had enough. I prayed to God with tears in my eyes and told him I was done, from that day forward, I was going to live as a law-abiding citizen, whether I was in prison or out. After coming out of seg I studied harder and took every program I was allowed to take. Anger Management helped me to understand and apply emotional regulation techniques. VOICES helped me to understand the impact of crime on victims and their loved ones. The applied theater and creative writing programs that I was involved with for almost seven years helped me to overcome antisocial tendencies and build pro-social skills such as working together as a team and learning to trust and rely on others instead of thinking I can only depend on myself. It provided a fun, safe, humane environment that was a stark contrast to the normal block atmosphere.

Throughout all of my programming and studying I always took time to reflect on the positive impact this was having on my efforts to improve my character and aid in my rehabilitation. This process of critical thinking has also caused me to become aware of the

impact long term incarceration has on those serving long sentences and their loved ones. When one becomes aware of the fact that they are no longer the same person, that they have matured and corrected their criminal tendencies, the question they are faced with is—what now? If after a ten or fifteen-year period a person is completely transformed and rehabilitated what do they do with the remaining fifty or so years left on their sentence/life? After rehabilitation is accomplished the sentence becomes purely punitive.

Being punished for an act committed 20 or 30 years ago with no end in sight turns into a cycle of psychological torment that repeats itself day after day, year after year. Prison conditions are a form of mental, emotional, and physical punishment that a human being should not be subjected to indefinitely if we as a society believe that human life has value and human beings are capable of redemption and rehabilitation. The repetitiveness of the same options and the same routine played out day after day, month after month, creates a sense of hopelessness in the thought processes of the incarcerated individual. Being served a diet that is designed for punishment and being locked in a bathroom with a person that you may not get along with are forms of punishment that become progressively crueler the longer they continue. Not being allowed moments of affection and physical intimacy with a romantic partner for decades is an emotionally crippling experience. The humanity in you begins to cry out for relief. You start to feel that these unnatural experiences should come to an end at some point. You mentally struggle with the fact that individuals committed to criminal activity are released on a daily basis and come back to do another short bid and repeat the process, while you know with every fiber of your being that you are transformed and if given a chance you would never break the law again. You begin to ask, “where is the justice in the illogical madness that continues to operate in this system?”

From having to deal with thoughts of your own punishment never coming to an end, you also have to cope with the pain and suffering your extremely long sentence inflicts on your loved ones. The first thing they have to deal with is the prospect of never seeing you again outside of a prison. When you tell someone that their loved one is sentenced to an outrageously long period of time it's not a reasonable or understandable situation that one can accept. This draws them into a fight for their loved ones' life and many times they will go to extreme measures to hire lawyers they cannot afford to try to reduce the severity of the punishment imposed on them. Families and spouses will take loans, dip into their 401(k)'s and possibly cripple themselves financially because the sentence imposed was so extreme.

If the maximum sentence was between 20-25 years for a murder charge, then our loved ones would probably not spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on attorneys for the slim chance that a habeas or appeal might succeed. The situation while severe, would be reasonably acceptable. A prisoner's loved ones in most cases are also sending them money for food, clothing, and cosmetics, usually on a weekly or monthly basis because the prisoner is more often than not unable to support themselves financially. Loved ones also have to deal with the heartbreak of denials from avenues of relief that rarely succeed, such as sentence modification and commutation hearings which oftentimes leave both the offender and their loved ones in a state of confusion and grief due to a lack of consistency in how these decisions are made. At some point, the punishment should end, both for the offender and the offender's loved ones, unless the offender continues to display behavior while incarcerated that shows that they still pose a threat to society.

If we as a society believe that human beings are more than their worst act, that people are redeemable, and capable of change, then why are so many still sentenced to death by

incarceration? Most European nations rarely keep an individual incarcerated for more than 20 years. Consider Norway's policy of a maximum sentence of 21 years of incarceration regardless of the crime and the circumstances of the case. While twenty-one years of incarceration is a severe penalty, it satisfies the punitive aspect of a sentence and is more than sufficient time for rehabilitation to occur.

Objective data shows that most people tend to "age out" of crime by the age of 40 and the recidivism rate for people who have spent 20 years or more in prison is extremely low. It doesn't make sense to continue spending tax dollars to keep individuals incarcerated who no longer pose a threat to public safety. Please consider adopting and supporting policies like Norway's. Consider proposals like that from the *Connecticut Second Look Sentencing Project*. You can also incentivize inmates to invest in their own rehabilitation by offering good time for completed programming, schooling, and work. This would give them the opportunity to simultaneously rehabilitate themselves while reducing the time they spend incarcerated.

My prayer is that compassion will increase and people who have corrected themselves will be given the opportunity to redeem and salvage what is left of their lives.

Respectfully

Anthony Brunetti

Ian T. Cooke

#340812

Born: October 1987

Arrested: May 2006

Convicted: April 2010

Sentenced: Life without the possibility of parole plus five years consecutive

Age at time of arrest: eighteen years old

Time spent incarcerated: nineteen years

Every day that I spend incarcerated I have a series of comingled thoughts, these include thoughts for myself, my loves ones, and those affected by the events that brought me here. I have thought about the choices that I made that led me down the path to where I am today. I think about attributing blame because I did not pull the trigger, I did not pass judgment on those lives that were lost. Yet my actions have consequences. For each of us who has been sentenced for a crime in the state of Connecticut our actions have consequences. Whatever our role in these crimes, even for those of us who did not commit the ultimate crime, our actions led us to where we are. My poor choices led up to my implication in the loss of two lives. Crimes that I was convicted and sentenced for. Often there is a victim: someone who has been hurt or killed, or someone who has lost property or even their sense of safety.

If you haven't been the victim of a crime it is impossible to know what that feels like. Yet, years and decades of incarceration teaches all of us that sense of pain and loss and remorse. I have learned about myself and about loss.

Time is the single resource that every single person shares. Whether or not we realize it, time is the one resource we all covet, we are all spending that resource, and we are not getting it back.

Time spend incarcerated is lost time. It can be put towards productive pursuits—but no individual who is incarcerated has opportunities inside that they could've have outside. So the time each of us spends incarcerated is for punishment and retribution: an eye for an eye in our *civilized* society. Each of us must prove that our time is more valuable to society outside of this place. Each of us must show that the time we have already spent in here is punishment enough, because no two people value their time the same. My idea of wasted time may be someone else's idea of a good time (e.g., playing video games, watching TV). When we talk about the time that goes into a prison sentence we talk about the value of a victim's lost time: their pain and suffering or their death. The victim's lost time becomes the punishment. The prisoner must now prove their potential. We balance these two competing ideals to find equilibrium—what is best for the whole of society?

Every single one of us is fallible, we all make mistakes. I have made mistakes, errors of judgment, and a litany of poor choices that ultimately contributed to me coming to prison. I came to prison when I was eighteen and, like most teenagers, these sorts of poor decision making processes are prevalent.

My poor decisions do not make me less human. If anything, they prove that I am flawed—yet still human. I received a life sentence and have been continuously incarcerated for longer than I was free. Over half of my life in prison.

When I started my incarceration it seemed like a bad dream, it was truly surreal. I knew this was a place I did not belong. In a certain sense I felt that the rules did not apply to me. In my immaturity I believed that regulations within the prison were intended for everyone else and that I could fly under the radar or that some rules that I didn't agree with need not apply to me. In time, I came to realize that no one is above or outside of the rules—or the laws. I have come

to realize that the world does not revolve around individuals but rather, that I am a small piece in this great machinery.

Once I realized that I could make the machine better, I did not have to be a “taker” in order to reap a benefit for myself. I realized that, by giving back to people around me and the community in general, that this grand machine would work better for myself as well as everyone else around me.

I find gratitude and satisfaction in helping others. I feel good about myself when the people around me are doing good and feeling good. This is amplified if I am able to contribute to it.

At some point in my incarceration I also outgrew the poor decisions. I am still human and I am still imperfect, but I take a lot more time and use a lot more knowledge and judgment in making my life choices.

In short, I am not the same person now – nearly two decades later – as I was at eighteen. The difficulty with a rigid criminal justice system is that it does not account for a very real aspect of the individual who is being punished- that they are human. Just like the victim, just like the attorneys and the judges and the police, those prisoners are people. People capable of changing. A life sentence to an eighteen-year-old means that at eighteen all of those people, attorneys, judges, police, and so on, know all they need to know in order to pronounce that eighteen-year-old a “wasted life.” Useless to society. Irredeemable. That life sentence says to me that society has given up, not just with the possibility that I can be rehabilitated but, even worse, that society can deem any teenager incapable of change.

I challenge anyone who reads this to reflect on their eighteen-year-old self and say that they are the same now as they were then.

A fair and just criminal justice system should yearn to consider both sides of the punishment equation: first, the need for retribution and penance for a wrong act, and second, the simultaneous need to rehabilitate someone—anyone—who is hurt and in need of help. We should strive for this balance: punishment and redemption, because it means we care for one another, even when we are at our lowest.

Thank you for your time.

Steven DeBow

#333305

Hello, I am a proud participant of the H.O.N.O.R. program at Cheshire Correctional Institution. H.O.N.O.R. Stands for Honesty, Ownership, Nobility, Obligation, and Respect. I'm writing on behalf of a discussion group called the *Second Chance Initiative*. We are a group of men who believe that accountability is vital on the path to rehabilitation. My name is Steven DeBow and I am on my nineteenth year of a forty-year sentence. This letter is written with the intent of showing how rehabilitation starts with acknowledging the impact my crime had on my victims and their loved ones. The gnawing distress arising from a sense of guilt for past wrongs started once I learned what empathy meant. Empathy means to vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another person. On a human level, I suggest we all practice this in our everyday lives. When I first took the time and put myself in the shoes of my victims and their loved ones I cried. To think, someone could bring physical harm not just to myself but to someone I love and care for is unfathomable to say the least. There is not a day that goes by when I don't reflect on how my decisions and actions robbed someone of life and all it has to offer. I'm truly remorseful for my actions and have been dedicating my life to giving back while staying conscious of the impact of my decisions.

Nonetheless this journey has not been easy. In 2006 you had a 20-year-old young man walking into a scary new world that our justice system said I would remain in until the age of sixty. It's hard for anyone to imagine the stacked emotions that I felt, hopelessness, helplessness, which led to anger. Still not holding myself accountable, I spent the first six years of my incarceration with a chip on my shoulder and an air of indifference. This attitude led to being unproductive and staying in trouble. This might sound strange to some but I appreciate those beginning years. Sometimes a person needs to get to his lowest before he realizes a change

needs to be made. I came to realize that I owed a great debt to society. My participation in the destruction of my community which led to the loss of life had to be atoned for. Reparations for my actions was very necessary and it had to begin with me. So I started with something that sounds simple, but in practice was hard. I changed my associations. My core values changed, if what was happening wasn't productive, count me out. When I did this, good things started to happen. My conversations soon changed and I became more focused on what was important. Programming and maintaining a job became a priority. The same programs I couldn't get before became available all of a sudden. The energy I exuded started to come back and it felt good. The hopelessness I once experienced turned into hopefulness and it was invigorating, to say the least.

Let me say this though, with the dedication I put forth it still feels like what I'm striving for is unattainable. How can people be serving a death-by-incarceration type of sentence show society that the system works? Rehabilitation and restoration should be our main objective, but when there isn't an end in sight it's emotionally taxing. The quality and state of being humane is what humanity means. I often ask myself, are we dealing with compassion, sympathy, or consideration for humans by warehousing men and women and throwing away the key? My incarceration affects my family just as much as it does myself. They are serving a life sentence right along with me. The compassion and sympathy for them is thrown out the window right along with the key used to lock me in with.

One out of every seven people incarcerated is currently serving a life sentence, to me that's a problem. Obviously, throwing life sentences at people convicted of certain crimes isn't working. If this was supposed to be a deterrent for future crime, we need to find a better alternative. Sentencing should have as an overriding goal, the reduction of criminal activity, the

imposition of just punishment, and the provision of meaningful and effective rehabilitation and reintegration of the offender. When I hear “effective rehabilitation” that sounds like providing help instead of a steady dose of isolation and punishment. Give men and women the tools through programming and therapy to get to the genesis of their issues.

We need to find a way to reintegrate assets back to our communities and I don’t feel a lifetime is required for this to happen. How can we prevent the steady flow of handing down lengthy incarceration in the first place? We can interrupt crime at its roots by investing in and supporting our youth and lower class neighborhoods. We can start with the allocation of some of those funds used to incarcerate someone for an excessive amount of time. Those funds could be used for other community safety measures besides prison. Opening up more safe spaces where our youth can escape the inner city violence that’s essentially waiting on their doorstep. Offer real mental health care instead of misdiagnosing our kids and turning them into zombies with heavy medications. Provide training and more employment opportunities so people won’t feel a life of crime is their only option for provision. If prevention wasn’t an afterthought, mass incarceration and over-sentencing would be less of an issue.

Now that it is, let’s work on fixing the problem by becoming the change we all need.

Norman Haughey

#306073

My name is Norman Haughey and I've been incarcerated for 20yrs. In 2007 I was sentenced to life without release on a cold case from a double murder in 2003 that I cannot remember committing when I was 25.

In the beginning and after my first and last segregation trip in 2007, an officer named Pablo Correa saw something in me and starting taking me out of my cell to do odd jobs when I wasn't even a worker. I couldn't understand??? I figured why not, I'm out of the cell. Each day he would speak with me, tell me that I was still young, people change, don't prove the system right about you, You're better than that!!! The more he talked, each day I listened. A Month or so later his rotation changed but still found his way over to the unit I was located in and would ask, "how are you doing?" This allowed me to see someone cared. Till this day, years after his retirement, I still speak with him.

A few years into my incarceration and for over a decade, I chose to live a life of servitude to others suffering. Program after program, being a hospice volunteer, using my past to help others in programs and years later on multiple occasions, speaking with high school students, I found myself and my purpose

For the first time in my life, I love the man I am today and it shames me that, if I did not come to prison, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish this. Seeing other families' traumas and mentoring all these programs like Domestic violence, and voices which speak to the families and their suffering.

All These programs allowed me to feel and understand the family's loss. For years and years, I did the same programs, I had to watch a family's grief over and over again and then to have to speak about my crime, and my actions, remorse started to weigh heavily on me. The pain

about how their families were feeling. This became one of my hardest struggles while in here, feeling the pain of someone else's loss and knowing I've caused it. Seeing my faults and what pain I've caused to others has been my greatest feat.

Today, each day I waken. I head outside early morning 7am and cry for forgiveness to the two women and their lives I've taken. I also thank them for helping me to become the man I am today. It pains me greatly that, without them, this would not have been possible and I wouldn't have been able to change so many lives. I owe my life to Donna and Mary and will try to help many others struggling so their lives were not taken in vain.

I've been incarcerated for 20yrs and cannot speak on anything that was counterproductive or anything that prohibited my rehabilitation during my time inside. While at Walker-MacDougall corrections for 18 of those 20 years Officers treated me with respect and I've received many chances with programs that are not normally given to people with time like myself. I feel that the staff there had good judgement about the sincerity of an individual. This enabled me to grow and to be able to make the changes I have.

Being 25 and sentenced to life w/out release has been very awakening to say the least. My friends and family that got to know the man I've become cannot understand why at such a young age, do I have to die in prison after becoming part of the change? What I mean by that is, by helping myself. I was able to help others. I understand that I needed to be here and one thing that weighs heavily on me is it took a situation such as this to make a" this possible It saddens me that I cannot share our story with the younger generation that may be headed down a path I've chosen. I truly believe I can contribute to so many lives and help so many.

When asked to write about my struggles inside, I froze. I tried to avoid this at every turn. I know deep inside that I've hurt so many. Why should I talk about my struggles when I'm the

one incarcerated for this act? A lot of times I think, why would anyone care about what I'm going through or my family when they are the ones that brought me into this world. I feel my struggles while incarcerated I had coming because of a life I've chosen to live.

However, I do understand the family of the people I've hurt, my family, friends, and all the people that have supported me didn't need to go through this. They weren't supposed to bury their loved ones and my family wasn't supposed to watch theirs locked up forever. There is no true explanation about how someone feels in a situation such as this or any words that can convey how they or I feel.

The one thing I can speak on is, what I've seen as a hospice volunteer. I was with good men who have brought change to themselves and others while inside. Unfortunately, I've watched some pass away in the hospital ward. It's sad because these men could have helped so many outside these walls to prevent others from making the same mistakes. With such an unjust system, their knowledge was left to us as the future generation. The generation that with legislative change can be the help society needs to bring about change in others.

I truly believe the universe must have saw something in me. There are new things that have been happening in the last few years like the latest research on 18-25yr olds which will eventually affect me. New bills and laws proposed to help so many incarcerated. I don't think any of this would have been possible without personal change or the support of so many outside these walls.

I've never been so ready for anything and as more time passes, more doors have been opening. Years later I did the impossible, I filed a sentence modification and was granted a hearing. I cried!! This has never been done in Connecticut. The judge denied it but I could feel he wanted to do something for me but felt he lacked the jurisdiction.

A month or so later I was contacted by another attorney from the chief public defender's office. She stated she heard a lot about me and wanted to speak with me. She claimed my case could help others. I was so happy and she was going to reach out to the top defense attorneys which one took my case.

This is everything I could have asked for. A CHANCE never thought possible and a light at the end of a once permanently dark tunnel. Now another chance I may be able to help so many others like myself. Men that have demonstrated personal growth through constructive use of their personal time and have deep remorse for their actions. An understanding of all the pain they've caused to countless others.

Today as a 47yr old man and after 20 years of incarcerated rehabilitation, I see for the first time. I see countless others making some of the mistakes I had which all I can do now is teach them. Now, with this new insight into myself and life, I wish society could see what some of us are doing in here today. At 27, I was told I will have to die behind these walls and swore if I had to, I would be a different person. One I could be proud of.

I do not think for a second, I don't deserve to be here in prison. I know I brought this upon myself, but what happens when an individual makes choices due to life's circumstances? Should they not be afforded to show growth if possible from said individual.

The average life span is 60yrs or so. How is sentencing someone to 60, 70, 80+ yrs and to sentences such as life, how is that a just punishment? Now with the poor food, the inactivity of incarceration and lack of proper nourishment that is sold and served, the average life span is shortened greatly. It would seem that we are all to just die in prison. That in of itself seems to be very cruel to our families and ourselves. I honestly see why so many groups are fighting for us today.

In conclusion, without the help of the correctional staff at MacDougall C.I., the programming I was afforded to be part of and mentor, I wouldn't be where I am today.

THANK YOU.

Antonio Inglis

#357103

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Antonio Inglis. I was sentenced to life without parole plus thirty years consecutive. I've been incarcerated since I was nineteen years old—for the past seventeen years. Throughout my incarceration I've taken many steps to better myself along with my decision making. Furthermore, I've surrounded myself with productive individuals here in the H.O.N O.R. program unit who want to live a better life.

While I maintain my innocence, I do acknowledge and understand the impact that this horrible crime that I was convicted of, has had on the victims' family and friends. I'm a father to a seventeen-year-old and during my imprisonment I took the liberty to place myself in the victims' family's shoes, as a parent. The pain and anguish that it would cause me to hear those traumatic words that, "your child was murdered," and then I would have to deal with the pain everyday due to the absence, is a pain that will never go away. Constantly having to tell the victims' kids that were left behind that they want to see their father again and won't have any more memories of their father is heart wrenching. I thought of all those painful concepts while I thought from the perspective of the victims' family and friends. I know how my family would feel, so regardless of my innocence, I'm human and I empathize with loss and pain. No one should have to go through that.

I can say that I am no longer a nineteen-year-old that entered prison in 2008. I found myself stuck in a compromising dilemma: trying to discover who I was while attempting to adopt to a new culture. My change started with me not being able to look at the pain in my daughter's face as well as coming to grips with feeling like my child is embarrassed of me. So I

knew that I had to change in order to give her something to be proud of. As I got older, I got wise and started shifting ideals in my life as well as people.

Part of my rehabilitation was restoring my values that my parents and grandmother had given me. In the beginning it was very difficult due to the length of my sentence at such a young age. I was constantly being told that I was not a priority. To circumvent being brushed aside I have taken it upon myself to not allow any barriers to prevent my transformation. Therefore, I read business books and had talks with individuals who facilitated the programs where I was told I wasn't a priority. I did this to absorb as much information as possible. I was able to get help from Counselor Moore who allowed me to take VOICES and helped me to start my path of transformation and comprehension of empathy.

My long term incarceration has had an emotional, traumatic impact on me due to the fact that I'm left here alone without aid, so I must deal with my issues while being isolated. I've become detached to what one might call or think is "normal." For example, when I hear keys, my heart races, thinking automatically that something is wrong. I'm emotionally numb to disappointments or loss because I know I wouldn't get the chance to spend time with my loved ones in their times of need. When I hear bad news, it's like I'm already mentally prepared for it and this condition prevents me from properly coping. The physical ramifications are that my asthma has gotten worse during my incarceration. I now have high blood pressure and this is accompanied by chronic back pain and constant numbness in my shoulder.

The impact that my confinement has had on my loved ones is something that I cannot really speak to. Therefore, I attached their letters with this one so you can hear directly from them their feelings. What I can say is that I know it's been rough because of the constant burden from me being here. I'm an extra expense. My grandmother expresses anguish to me, she's

constantly praying that I am able to sit with her before she dies. Also, I do know that my family has placed their lives on hold for me and not doing certain things they want to because I'm not around.

Over-sentencing serves a main purpose, which is death by incarceration. With such sentences, the individuals are left to take it upon themselves to rehabilitate and reform themselves along with many other measures to show their growth and change. Those extreme sentences place you on the bottom of any list because you are not a priority. No one thinks that you will make it back to society. To fix this major problem, I think adopting the proposal by the *Second Look* initiative will change the ideology within these institutions. The idea that there will be an evaluation every three years or so, after serving at least eighteen-plus years, prevents the problem that individuals will not be treated fairly, because an opportunity to advocate for yourself is plausible. It may also help that the DOC will have to turn over documents to a separate board who will review or meet with individuals and there will be transparency about how these individuals try to do things in order to properly prepare and rehabilitate themselves—that they weren't just sitting around without doing anything for themselves.

In conclusion, I'm asking the readers to look and see how extreme sentences are outdated. Consider how other countries view these practices as cruel and unusual punishment. Extreme sentences aren't needed for people to rehabilitate. As a society, do we think people can be redeemed? Long term incarceration doesn't address the humanity in a person. Allow someone to demonstrate that they have been rehabilitated and look at their growth during their incarceration. Most humans learn from their most severe mistake in life and don't ever repeat it. Continued punishment through adulthood for something that happened when an individual was a child or teenager suggests that those individuals are irredeemable.

This is wrong.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Truly Yours,

Antonio Inglis

Date: January 19, 2025

James and Vernessa Inglis

Parents of Antonio Inglis

February 10th 2008 that was the day our life has changed? That the day I felt like a bus had hit me hard in the chest. I couldn't breathe, I just fell to the floor with tears running down my face saying why ... My heart split into two, one sided filled with pain, other side beautiful memories of you. At court, when I looked at my son face, I've just wanted to take all of his weight, burden, and pains away from him. When I come to visit you? I put on my best dress face when I see you When I leave you, that's when the pain come back stronger. My heart starts aching. Remember, missing you is a heartache that never goes away. A big part of my heart is missing you, Antonio. Your dad was very confused and filled with pain. "He and my mom had to be strong for all of us, but he's holding his own pain and tears in while he's comforting all of us. He couldn't hold it any longer, so he just broke down and cried. It really has a big impact on our family life. With tragedy pains. Holiday's and vacations are not the same. Without you. We all can't wait til you come home. I know I can't wait, so I can breathe again. So my pain can be free. Now, I know the pain how it feels missing and losing someone you love so deeply.

Date: January 13, 2025

Hey bro,

There he been so many years I have wanted to express this feeling. The day you went away was the heaviest day of my life and still is to this day. The weight of not having my brother around follows me. Growing up you have always been there for me. You were my biggest role model even though we are only one year apart you still felt like my biggest brother. I felt like I lost my security, with you I always felt like I had a sheet of protection over me that none of our other brothers made me feel. Nothing feels the same because I lost the biggest part of me.

Tommie Martin

271452

To whom it may concern,

My name is Tommie Martin. I have been sentenced to 75 years for the crime of felony murder, 25 years of that sentence I have served.

I would like to convey to you that I am an innocent person convicted. Yet it is pertinent that I express the impact that this senseless crime has had on the victim's family, community, and all who love him dearly. I am deeply sorry for your loss. I know that words alone fails to fully capture my sorrow. My heart and soul empathize with you. I feel the heartache and scarring this senseless crime has caused to all whom still suffer 25-years later. I am sorry for your loss.

I believe that to express my sincere condolences, to express the emotional weight I carry, to verbalize the impact that this terrible crime has had on me and to acknowledge the pain of everyone else affected, has the inner potential to open up a pathway towards healing.

Further, I would like to express that I have dedicated myself to the hard work of being an agent of positive change. In particular, it is my deepest desire to be an interrupter in the cycles of violence. Extending a helping hand, being a courageous voice, to prevent senseless crimes, like the irreparable harm caused to the victim's family and loved ones.

I began my journey of transformation in the first year of my incarceration. By making a clear decision and embracing the uncomfortable and complex feelings that arose as a result of acknowledging my past alcohol addiction. Enrolling in A.A. was my first practical step toward taking ownership of my behavior. Going to meetings and actively participating within a small group equipped me with a sense of awareness and courage. Expressing complex emotions

stemming from my childhood helped me to develop confidence in the process of self-healing and acceptance. The healing process demanded a personal commitment to changing my behavior and a sincere effort to seek out more awareness of my unaddressed anger issues and trauma.

A.A. introduced me to the world of sobriety. During a time in my life where nothing was clear and navigating a life sentence was painful. After seeking substance abuse treatment, the spirit of personal development was awakened inside me. I enrolled in a GED preparatory class with the intention of achieving my GED and sending it home to my mother. I wanted to make her proud of me by demonstrating that I was making the best of my time by working on myself. In 2001, I received my GED and shortly after I made good on my plan. I sent my GED home to my mom. Her pride in receiving my achievement further inspired me to continue working hard on myself.

I signed up for and actively participated in every DOC program available to me as a “lifer.” Most programs at that time were geared toward offenders who were closer to returning back to society. But I was committed to wanting to be better and I was persistent. I was determined to grow and continue my healing process. Eventually, I was enrolled in the vocational and business education programs, as well as religious studies. My time spent learning and working imparted me with pro-social skills. My deepest commitment towards changing my attitude and behavior arose out of my belief system. My belief and submission to the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth forever changed my identity and mission in life. Maintaining employment throughout my incarceration has also aided my development and transformation and nurtured my maturity. These small yet consistent steps were foundational agreements that I have committed to, to ensure myself that I would hold myself to a higher standard of conduct.

This mindset shift not only changed my behavior and attitude, it also afforded me the insight of the power of “choice,” and its impact on positive change. A change that continues to improve my inner quality of life and as an extension, I’m committed to being a positive role model and credible messenger in the lives of others that I meet daily.

Paradoxically, I prepare to die while preparing to live. The possibility of dying in prison is my ever present reality. I have been sentenced to 75-years. I will soon be 50 years old. To live another fifty years in a carceral setting is unlikely. So I force myself to see only my goals and not the obstacles of a life sentence.

So when I’m asked, “what do I think about long term incarceration?” I say that it effectively blocks the pathway towards redeemability. The path that every dedicated offender desires to walk towards. Long term incarceration is the lawful term for a sentence which is extremely long or one that has no end date. It languishes. Both types of sentences have the effect of assuring that the offender’s lifespan shall expire before his release date appears. In other words, before the body is released from its carceral casket it must flat line. No heartbeat, no pulse.

It is my deepest desire to demonstrate to society, my community, my mother, my wife, my children, and my grandchildren, that I too am redeemable. I am truly worthy of a second chance at life outside of incarceration. I am capable of being a productive citizen. I am responsible for my behavior. And most importantly I am not a threat to society. I am worthy of receiving back the privileges that are afforded from a second look, at us.

Unlike offenders who may have received two, three, four, or five chances, those of us with longer sentences live in a state of perpetual anxiety. Desiring a day that we have no assurance of ever reaching us. So we become so acclimated to this chronic state of mild anxiety

and discontent, that we learn to accept as if it is the norm, while knowing that it is far from normal.

For every milestone we achieve, whether it's the completion of another program or co-facilitating a group, or receiving a degree, or remaining disciplinary free for a decade, we celebrate and acknowledge the accomplishments of positive change, maturity, and accountability. But the process does not end there. Because living out our purpose is our life long challenge. So we ask, when will these longer sentences serve their purpose and deem us redeemable? I ask myself night after night as I lay on my top bunk, half asleep, staring at holes in the ceiling. How long of a sentence is too long? I've resided in this carceral setting for over two decades, without a visible end date in sight. I can tell you that the agonizing pain of my 75-year sentence is similar to the enduring pain of a torn muscle, when the limb is functional, yet its usefulness is seriously blunted. Oftentimes, I respond reflexively by suppressing this tension that overwhelms my body, my jaws clench tight, my heartrate increases, and perspiration coats my body. As I exhale this constriction, I inhale the need to keep on breathing. My enduring sentence does much more than confine my body, it blunts my emotional range and beckons on the psychological terror that I too may die here.

Vividly, I recall March 31, 2020, five years ago, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons announced the next phase for curbing COVID-19 exposure in federal prisons. Back then I was unfamiliar with the terms: symptomatic, asymptomatic, quarantine-unit, and personal protective equipment. But in an instant, I learned that being symptomatic could result in an un-curable diagnosis. I remain haunted by the memories and images of my friends and other men being escorted out of my unit by medical staff, day-in and night-out. I recall being afraid to eat, afraid to sleep. To this day, the sudden arrival of a group of medical staff makes me gasp for air. Before COVID-

19, it was Hepatitis C, before Hep it was MRSA. All reminders of the uncertainty that accompanies life in prisons and jails.

The weight of my sentence has also had its toll upon my family. Their collective hopes are high and then their expectations are met with sadness when another policy concerning second chances excludes me and similarly situated offenders. They ask me, why? And all I can tell them is to continue to pray, maybe next time.

According to the National Registry of Exonerations, there are currently 2,488 exonerations nationally, with a total of 21,890 years lost. The registry found that contributing factors include: perjury or false accusations, official misconduct, mistaken witness identification, inadequate legal defense, false confession, and false or misleading forensic evidence. These factors and more resulted in the wrong person losing their liberty and confined to a prison cell. The registry provides detailed information about every known exoneration in the United States since 1989.

Why must I suffer the consequences of a functional life sentence, because I am financially unable to produce new evidence of my innocence? The men and women who were exonerated were blessed in every sense of the word. So I will continue to pray.

The registry's research illustrates that despite a well-intentioned jury's verdict of guilty, it is hard to know who is actually guilty without a fair and equitable process that protects the rights of indigent defendants. The United States' criminal justice system prioritizes obtaining a conviction over arriving at the truth of a case. The truth is, the risk of condemning innocent people to death through extreme sentences poses a threat to public safety. Further, people of color, particularly black Americans, are represented at a higher rate among those serving lengthy and extreme sentences compared to the total prison population.

Harsh sentencing policies, racial disparities in sentencing, mandatory minimum sentences, and wrongful convictions facilitate the prison boom.

Nearly 2 million people in America are confined in a prison or jail. Among them, over 200,000 are serving life sentences. Our criminal justice system is in need of reform. In particular, in the manner in which sentences are imposed. Our system costs taxpayers too much, fails at rehabilitation, exacts a life-long toll on offenders and their families, and does not yield corresponding benefits to society.

The purpose of these essays is an appeal for common ground in advocating for fair and equitable sentencing, as well as providing a second chance to offenders who have demonstrated rehabilitation. It is our plea, our cry, our hope, our deepest desire, to coalition with all professionals, legislators, judges, concerned citizens, and all other segments of society. We believe that there are sensible solutions to sentencing that hold offenders accountable for the crimes they commit and sentences that afford those offenders a second chance to demonstrate that they are worthy of reformation, reintegration, and redeemability.

In conclusion, I was reminded of the dialogue in Protagoras, in which Plato writes: "He who inflicts punishment rationally does so not on account of the past offense—for he cannot make undone what has been done—but for the sake of the future."

This rationale focuses upon the future and this refusal to devalue people because of their past. The future of sentencing should likewise be with an eye on discharge.

In Solidarity,
Tommie Martin

Marquis Pettway

#275238

To whom it may concern,

My name is Marquis Pettway. I have been convicted and sentenced to 35 years accumulatively for a murder that I will spend the rest of my life remorseful and in repentance of. This crime brings me shame and disgrace every single day of my life. I take full responsibility for my actions on that day and I will forever be haunted by the pain I have caused a plethora of people. The victim of my crime was in no way deserving of the fate I bestowed upon him. My selfish actions robbed him of his life and the ability to be able to fulfill his hopes and dreams. Because of me his mother is missing a son, his family will never get to enjoy his magnetic smile, or feel his comforting hug. Because of me they will never get to see the amazing man he was on his way to becoming. The impact of my actions are not lost, they serve as a constant reminder of the damage a moment of selfishness and a lifetime of trauma, can cause several families as well as the community as a whole.

During my incarceration I have taken this time to better myself. I have become a man that society can use as an example of change and redemption. This redemption is not just for me, but for my victim as well. His death should not and will not be in vain. I've taken the pain, hurt, remorse, and sorrow I have inflicted on myself and others and turned them into motivating factors. I believe that he watches me, not with anger, because that wasn't the type of person he was, but with forgiveness, and a desire to see me do right by him. I made a vow on the day I got sentenced that I would one day leave prison a man with the moral fiber and sound character that my victim had. I pray that his family can find comfort in the change in me that is befitting of the character of their loved one.

During my incarceration I have grown into a man that my son can look up to and be proud of, as well as a man that society can consider to be worthy of a second chance. I realize just how selfish I was of a person, and how I didn't take the time to think before I acted in many situations, including the act that landed me in prison. I've taken the time to better myself using programming, education, and self-analysis. My focus was on what caused me to be self-detrimental in my actions, while holding myself accountable for these actions instead of blaming society and social circumstances

Through accountability, acceptance, perseverance, and discipline I have been able to become a leader, someone my peers can look to for sound advice, guidance, and wisdom. I still struggle with the realization that I have taken something that I do not have the ability to replace. This struggle solicits a multitude of emotions. The ones that continue to resonate are the guilt and shame I have for my actions. I have brought shame to my family, a family that consists of hardworking men and women, many of whom are first responders. I am remorseful for what did, the pain I caused and for the impact my selfish actions had on so many lives.

As the years have gone by I have begun to grown old in prison. Approaching the age of 50, I can begin to feel the effects prison is having on me physically. The continuous diet of excess carbohydrates has caused me to gain excess weight, without any healthy alternatives I have become pre-diabetic. The effects of this lengthy sentence are not just physical. During this sentence I have lost both of my parents, a sister, and my best friend. It has taken a toll on me mentally, as I am faced with loss on so many levels. I have lost contact with so many family members throughout the years, it is almost to the point where I have very few people I can call family left.

At what point does my stay in prison transition from punishment into rehabilitation? By what standard am I to be judged as being rehabilitated? My self-improvement during my incarceration has shown a constant effort for rehabilitation, as my institutional record can attest to.

Over the course of my stay in prison, I have encountered many individuals who have shown that they have been rehabilitated and would likely never participate in any criminal activity in the future, yet they remain warehoused in prison due to the over sentencing for their offenses. Through vigorous programming, education, and self-adjustment these men have displayed a readiness to be fruitful contributors to society if given the chance, and could serve as positive role models to younger at-risk individuals in the community. Their story is a living deterrent for any engagement in criminal activity, yet they face decades of remaining prison time because of the sentences being imposed in Connecticut, which is forfeiting their usefulness. Our state's taxpayers continuously pay for inmates who are rehabilitated or statistically have aged-out of criminal activity. The chances of any of these men committing an offense again are less than 1%. If rehabilitation is the goal for the incarcerated population then there needs to be a process that determines when that individual has reached this pinnacle and a release plan should be designed. However, this can only be an option if the issue of over sentencing is also addressed. A person who is sentenced to 30 or more years in prison is effectively given a death sentence. With the inadequate dietary sustenance given and the lack of quality medical care, most inmates serving long sentences are hard pressed to live out the life expectancies of American citizens. There has to be a nuance between justice, punishment, and rehabilitation. Connecticut has yet to find that gray area.

I feel that more merit should be taken in regard to institutional behavior, programming, and individual commitment to change. The current status of the DOC makes it hard, yet not impossible, for those seeking a change to do so. The individuals who have taken the necessary steps for self-improvement and are ready to be released should be given an opportunity to earn their freedom regardless of the number they are relegated to by the court. A good way to place merit on good behavior, programming, and commitment to change is to reenact good time for everyone, not just certain groups of criminals. Every human has innate worth and value, and there should be no exception as to who can be considered rehabilitated and who can't, as well as those whose behavior should be rewarded and whose shouldn't. Any individual who shows a desire to change and has an institutional record that indicates that, should be able to receive good time that can aid in shortening their sentence, thereby reducing the strain on taxpayers, while allowing that individual to have a chance to once again have a purposeful and meaningful life as a free and productive member of society.

Another tool that can aid with the problem of over sentencing is if every person sentenced to 20-years or more in prison were allowed a hearing at their mandatory minimum that their charge carries. In the case of murder, the mandatory minimum is 25-years. At that time, if a hearing was held and it was determined that through the person's institutional record, programming, and overall improvement that the person meets the criteria for either re-sentencing or parole, they should be given a chance to return to society.

In closing, I thank you for your time, effort, and diligence in this matter. There are a lot of great men with so much potential being warehoused well beyond what is necessary. Society has become aware of this crisis, the time for prison reform has come.

Thank You.

Recommendations to Address Over Sentencing

Please consider implementing the following proposals to address extreme sentencing. Consider that extreme over sentencing keeps otherwise rehabilitated individuals incarcerated far longer than necessary to attain all concerned parties' interests.

- 1.) Incentivize offenders to invest in their own rehabilitation by crediting them with good time credit for completion of pro-social activities such as programming, school, work, vocational training and remaining disciplinary report free for extended periods of time.
- 2.) Reduce the maximum amount of time that an individual may be sentenced to for a single offense to somewhere between twenty and thirty years.
- 3.) Adopt a sliding scale of justice that holds the offender more accountable for their actions the older they were when they committed their crime by making their maximum sentence equivalent to the age they were on commission of their crime (*e.g.* an eighteen-year-old could not receive a sentence longer than eighteen years).
- 4.) Consider whether the "nature of the crime" or "severity of criminal offense" is a basis, in and of itself, to deny any individual an opportunity for parole or sentence modification. The individual's ability to present themselves in the present, *i.e.* their conduct during their incarceration and any accomplishments they have achieved in that time, should have weighted consideration when compared with the original offense.
- 5.) Create the presumption of parole eligibility or sentence review after 25-years of continuous incarceration. Any individual who has served 25-years should automatically be reviewed by the Board of Pardons and Parole for suitability for reintegration into society.

Authorities

Early Release

Two separate 15-year cohort studies tracked the deterrent and incapacitation effect of increased incarcerated rates. An increase of 200% added a mere 8.3% reduction in violent crime. (Lofstrom, 200)

A subsequent three-year study following a dramatic release of inmates from California's penal institutions in response to prison overcrowding saw a 16.9% reduction in overall violent crime coinciding with a 22% overall reduction in the statewide incarceration rate. (Lofstrom, 208).

Likelihood of Recidivism

There is evidence that the likelihood of recidivism is not based on early release. A study cohort of 5,525 federal prisoners who received retroactive sentence reductions under the *Fair Sentencing Act* (FSA) find "no difference between recidivism rates for offenders who were released early...and offenders who had served their full sentences," (1). Indeed, recidivism rates from the study cohort were virtually identical with early release under the FSA rates at ~37.9%, identical to the non-early release rates, (7). Among those who gained the benefit of early release and did recidivate, "court or supervision violation was most often the most serious recidivist event reported," (3) (internal quotations omitted). In other words, the majority of early release recipients who did recidivate did not commit a new crime, but were remanded to custody for technicalities in their supervised release. (Hunt, 2018)

Criminal Behavior

Connecticut is the second highest New England state to impose "virtual life" sentences (sentences over 50 years) behind only Massachusetts. (Mauer, 11-13) P 11-13.

Violent crime has been consistently declining in the last three decades, with half of the average rate since 1993 levels. Overall prison populations have declined by ~30% nationwide. Yet life sentences have doubled in that same time. (Mauer, 15-16)

Behavior:

Under 10 years incarcerated only 19% of offenders were DR free for past 3-years.

Over 10 years incarcerated 33% of offenders were DR free for the past 3-years.

Over 30 years incarcerated 66% of offenders were DR free for the past 3-years.

Virtually all industrialized nations other than the United States impose life imprisonment only sparingly. They therefore have a lower anchor point for punishment at the top of the scale, which serves as a moderating influence across all offenses. (Mauer, 112).

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