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In Support of House Bills 4806-4809, 08-27-13

My name is Wayburn Dean from Grand Rapids Michigan and I'm here in support of House bills 4806 through 4809. I am also in support of the Supreme Court's decision that states mandatory life without parole sentences for juveniles under 18 violates the 8th Amendment. The heart of the decision is the recognition that it is fundamentally unjust to mandate a life sentence for children convicted of homicide without considering mitigating factors. House Bill #4806 Section 5 A-H reflects the same. I am the Executive Director of an organization named The Other Way Ministries. A Family Development Organization on Grand Rapids west side. In our neighborhood the median income is 22,000 dollars...poverty. Where there is poverty, there is crime. We have gangs, drugs, and all sorts of illegal activity in our neighborhood. Many of the teens who come to our facilities, are searching... searching to find themselves living in a desperation and survival with no father, no money and for them often no hope. I will also say without reservation that many of these teens have undeveloped cognitive skills and are yet children in their thought processes. Some fall through the cracks and make horrible life altering decisions like murder, that land them in prison. Now the balance of their lives is in the hands of the courts, the daunting task of deciding the ultimate fate of these children.

Now, having mentioned these difficult facts. I understand that if a person commits a crime, no matter the age, there are consequences that must follow. Harsh sentences where necessary, which may include life. But it is simply unjust, cruel and unusual punishment to sentence a person whose cognitive and mental development is not matured. Scientific research shows that youth do not have the same capacity as adults to use reasoned, mature judgment, or to control impulsive behavior. Again I emphasize and recognize there are cases that require applicable harsh punishment, which is why I support House Bill #4809. Additionally, there are some 350 juveniles who are incarcerated for crimes committed. Many of whom have served a number of years behind bars, are rehabilitated and are model prisoners. There is no doubt remorse from many and for those prisoners at the very least deserve a second look to examine the factors of the crime when committed, the state of mind, age and mitigating facts. It is an unqualified position to relegate all crimes to one determination and assume there is no change or there can be no change in behavior.

I also am a Contemporary Christian Recording artist, former lead singer of a group called Acappella. I now have a solo career as well My wife and I have had the opportunity to go into many prisons to do concerts and share the message of Christ, including several here in Michigan, Earnest C Brooks, West Shoreline, Ionia Prison and Carson City on 15 or more occasions in the last 3 years. I've had the opportunity to talk with many prisoners. I've seen many of them enrolled in programs that have made a tremendous difference in their lives. Rehabilitation is a very real occurrence that we must consider in respect to House Bill 4806 - 4809.

I would hope that those who are making decisions regarding these bills, will reflect on their own lives, their children's lives. Look back at when you were a teenager, how steady were your thoughts. Could you have been persuaded to do something very stupid where you could end up in a prison cell. The late Chuck Colson said it very appropriately when speaking to a group of

prisoners at the Earnest C. Brooks prison and those who had come to support him and hear him speak. He said, the only difference between myself, these prisoners and those of you who are not and have not been incarcerated is: "We got Caught" I urge those who are making decisions regarding House Bills 4806 through 4809 to please consider the state of mind of these juveniles, and circumstances that surround the crime and determine the right punishment for each individual circumstance.

Thank You!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. J. ...". The signature is stylized and somewhat illegible due to the cursive nature of the writing.