

**TESTIMONY BY Christian Emanuel-Womack
BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE COMMITTEE ON CRIME VICTIMS,
CRIME AND CORRECTION HEARING ON HOW THE ELDER PAROLE AND FAIR
AND TIMELY PAROLE BILLS WILL IMPROVE PAROLE RELEASE LAWS AND
PUBLIC SAFETY IN NEW YORK STATE**

The Fair and Timely Parole and Elder Parole bills are essential because the Parole Board's current presumption of risk based on the nature of the crime, and excessively long sentences, do not allow consideration for how an individual has transformed while in prison.

Many incarcerated individuals who committed their crime did so because they were dealing with unresolved trauma and didn't seek nor receive appropriate help. I'm one of those cases in point. When I was 21 years old, my unresolved trauma (DV, serial displacement, familial drug use) caused me to remain in toxic environments, make poor decisions and attempt to cope with a reality I couldn't quite grasp by using drugs and alcohol. This led me to commit a "senseless" act of violence against an innocent man. I was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Since being in prison, I've sought help from mental health. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and depression. Finally, getting the appropriate help, I was able to move out of that space and cope with my illness more effectively. I made myself better too: Where I had no skills before my incarceration, I learned how to operate a forklift, how to operate a computer automated in-line machine for bottling chemicals, safety protocols for hazardous chemicals, such as asbestos abatement, and even how to sew.

I've become more engaged in the classroom as well. I've attended Alternative to Violence programming, the Yale University founded Project Allied for a Calculated Transition program, Osborne's parenting classes (despite not having children), attained my associate's degree this past summer, and am currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences with a specialization in Public Health.

I've participated in these programs of my own volition. It's not because I'm going before a Parole Board. I'm not. I move the way I do because I'm going back to my community and I understand I can't go back to society the same man I was when I came in. The type of mindset I used to have before my incarceration isn't beneficial to anyone and this is a reality many people like myself understand -- facing the Parole Board or not.

I'm due to be released in about two and a half years. What's my goal upon release? To intercept the younger me from making the same bad decisions I made by using the approaches I've learned that I know would have been most effective for my younger self. I believe other approaches are failing; they failed me.

The nature of my instant offense is one of senselessness. However, I'm no longer senseless. Ask anyone who knows me today and they'll call me an over-thinker and a perfectionist, and they'll tell you I go to dramatic lengths to avoid violence, drug use, and toxic environments. This

is a transformation that happened in prison because I knew it was the right thing to do. Being denied parole, because of the senseless nature of my crime would not only quickly transform my passion into despair, it would also do a disservice to the younger me I'm so desperately trying to reach. Thankfully, the nature of my crime does not define me. I shouldn't consider myself one of the lucky ones. That doesn't seem far at all. The Fair and Timely Parole and Elder Parole bills must be passed so everyone can have hope that they will be judged on who they are today and not the one thing they can never change, their crime.

Humbly submitted,

Womack