

**Testimony By Ellis Douglas Before, DIN: #97A3334**

**New York State Senate Committee on Crime Victims, Crime & Correction**

**Hearing On How The Elder Parole And Fair & Timely Parole Bills Will Improve Parole Release Laws And Public Safety In New York State.**

My name is Ellis Douglas and I've been incarcerated for 27 years. I am currently being held at Sullivan Correctional Facility in Fallsburg, NY. I was convicted of attempted murder of two police officers and robbing a cab driver to which I was sentenced to 37 years to life despite no one being hurt, injured or hospitalized as a result of these crimes. My youth was a troubled one. I have never known my father. My mother, who was a drug addict, gave me away as a baby and left my upbringing to other family members. The environment to which she left me was abusive and dysfunctional, creating a spirit of resistance and rebellion within me. To escape the abuse and constant reminders of abandonment, I would often run away for long periods at a time, sleeping on trains, park benches, or childhood friends' homes on occasion and accepting scraps of whatever food or money I could find or was given by kind strangers. My entire youth was either spent finding ways to survive while living in the streets and fending for myself or being placed in juvenile detention institutions. These traumatic experiences along with what I witnessed while in these institutions influenced my already undeveloped mind and shaped my attitude toward those who abused their authority or took advantage of those without family representation, unable to defend themselves. I approached life always on guard and with this spirit of rebellion because this was all I knew.

Throughout my incarceration I continued to resist and became a gang member as it provided a sense of belonging and camaraderie that I had never experienced before. I affiliated with men who shared similar upbringing and background that I did and for the first time in my life I didn't feel alone. When I came to prison the climate was very different from what it is now in so many ways. The punishment for trying to defend or protect yourself was met with unjust hearings. There were harsh excessive solitary confinement time sentences in bleak and depraved holding cells enduring extreme cold or heat conditions and being placed amongst incarcerated individuals who had mental health issues. It was not unusual to have to endure inhaling or being exposed to feces or other bodily fluids these individuals would throw in and outside their cells and at other prisoners and officers.

The aftermath of the lengthy time already served and being exposed to these environmental and inhumane conditions as well as lack of proper medical attention throughout NYS facilities, I cope with PTSD and significant health issues I never had before entering prison. While serving my sentence these past 27 years, I have been diagnosed with: Sarcoidosis, hyperthyroidism, arthritis in neck, wrists, shoulders and back, as well as asthma. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was placed in the prison infirmary three times for extensive periods of time for contacting COVID-19. When I wasn't sick myself, at the height of the pandemic, I worked in the infirmary to help care for other prisoners.

There are limited rehabilitation programs and job opportunities available in these facilities. Despite the lack of opportunity, having matured over the years, having a renewed sense of purpose by being provided a loving and supportive family, learning from my mistakes, and a strong desire towards self-improvement, I have long left gang life behind me. I seek as much

education and productive opportunities that avail themselves to me whether it is offered by the Department of Corrections or obtained through library books and correspondence study. I have gained my G.E.D as well as certificate in vocational plumbing. I have received numerous certificates through my participation in many prison programs formerly offered throughout my years in prison. I'm presently in college working on my Associates Degree in Humanities and it is my goal to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Social Science thereafter. I have written and had published two poetry books to date promoting self-worth and motivation needed to achieve one's goals in life as well as addressing societal dilemmas and in the prison system to show the need to think beyond a one-dimensional scope of view which only blinds us from seeing others point of view. I also do my best to encourage the youth in a more productive direction by using myself and my life experiences as an example and as a result have influenced many in achieving their educational and entrepreneurial goals and to become productive members of society.

The Elder Parole And Fair & Timely Parole Bills will assist those elderly incarcerated the opportunity to be significant builders of society bridging the gap by serving as real life examples by word and deed with real life experiences in helping our youth. Those with troubles with the law learn to take responsibility for their own actions as well as serve as a resource to direct these individuals on a new path and a healthy trajectory in life, one prisoners such as myself were never provided. Once you know better, you do better. Most Elders in prison have fully rehabilitated and are lingering in poor health with no hope or access to greater opportunity thus making any additional time needed to be served from their sentences counterproductive and in effect serving no real purpose except wasting taxpayers' money and contributing to the continued breakdown of family and community.

With little hope and in addition to the health issues we continue to face while serving excessive sentences, I've watched many elders who have served even longer sentences become severely depressed by numerous Parole Board denials, succumb to drug use, drown themselves in mental health medications, while many others have committed suicide. Where there is no hope, there lies deflated souls subjected to deterioration in the mind, body, and spirit with no regard for self or faith in humanity. It is my hope that these bills and the many others concerning criminal justice reform will pass so that it may offer hope, opportunity, a second chance and renewed faith in our criminal justice system and humanity. It will certainly give me a glimpse of the possibility of one day being free, united with family, achieving my goals, and contributing in a positive way to society. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Ellis Douglas #97A3334**

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