

TESTIMONY BY LEROY TAYLOR, DIN: 05A5238
BEFORE THE NEW YORK 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

Why Am I Worthy of a Second Chance?

My name is Leroy Taylor and I have served 18 years of a 22-years-to-life sentence for shooting and killing someone. I accept full responsibility for my actions and often contemplate what the life of the person I killed could have been. And I ask myself, the person I killed doesn't get a second chance to live their life, so why am I worthy of one? In the end, I have realized that this is not my question to answer. This question belongs to those who have witnessed my transformation. This question belongs to the community that will benefit from my presence.

I refuse to let the death of the person I killed go in vain by living my life as if this tragedy never happened. However, early in my prison sentence, I did not know where to begin, or if I even had the right to live my life in honor of them. I just wanted to spread the word that this should not happen to anyone. Eventually, I found inspiration and direction from old timers who I met in the Alternatives to Violence program and in religious services. These men smiled a lot and had a clear purpose and message that I needed to hear in order to forgive myself. These wise and caring men maintained a keen awareness of the pain and trauma they had caused to their victims, their victims' families, and the community at large. I admired those qualities and adopted them as my own. Today, I am proud to say that I am one of those older men who smiles a lot and engages in community healing and development.

One thing that I make sure to do in prison groups like AA, NA, and other personal development groups is to share my personal narrative about how drug abuse, combined with unhealthy relationships, and anti-social lifestyles can spiral terribly out of control. After I share, men will often approach me later to thank me because they needed to hear that. It doesn't occur often enough that men are willing to share their vulnerabilities in group settings, which is something that needs to change.

In 2019, my sixteen-year-old son told me that he considers me an "elite role model." When I asked him why he felt this way he said it's "because even though you're in prison, you're always helping people and doing good things." He and his sisters have been on this journey with their father because I make sure to include them in the work that I'm involved in. My youngest daughter, TeAna, has declared me her best friend. She

says that her father is the closest person to her. She deserves to have her father by her side. She is a good judge of character who will not put her integrity to the side for anyone. TeAna is an active member in community development and social justice initiatives. She has worked in the restorative justice field in the role of a conflict resolution specialist in an underserved public middle school, and I'm confident that she can give a few of her own reasons why her father is worthy of a second chance.

A few years back my daughter received a letter from a man fifteen years my junior, Larry Greene, who was housed with me in the prison's honor housing unit. We were neighbors and college classmates for several years but had since been moved to separate facilities. Larry had heard TeAna speaking about being the daughter of an incarcerated parent on the Vassar College radio talk show, Voices Beyond the Wall. Her on-air interview inspired Larry to write the letter. Here is a snippet of what he said, "Your father is, and always has been, since I have known him, a good person. He carries himself like the proud father he is. I appreciate having had the honor to grow around him. I designated him as a mentor because he is an exceptionally intelligent person, and he has the skills and characteristics, that as a young man in search of guidance, I sought to take the best qualities and make them my own." I am proud to say that Larry is home now and finished his degree at Nyack College. He has plans to pursue work in community restoration projects.

The word "worthy" means to have value. We rehabilitated men and women know what we need to do, and the people who witness us in action will always point us out as agents of change and inspiration because we live it. It is not for our personal gain that many of us want to reenter society. We are the opposite of cynics because we believe that human beings have the capacity to embrace our good nature and let that guide us. Our people know we can add much-needed value to our hurting communities. I'm here to say that we are fully cognizant of the harms we have done and that is what drives many of us to be a major part of the healing that needs to take place in our society. Just think about when you fall out of grace and the sense of urgency you feel to make up for your wrongs. We feel the same way. So, we only ask that we be given a chance to stand before a fair and timely parole board that will listen to the people that know who we are today. This will help the parole board make more informed decisions that place public safety as a priority. Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole will help to identify us as transformed individuals who are ready to help improve public safety. We are subject matter experts ready to contribute in positive ways. Please pass these bills.

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