



April 30, 2023

RE: Juvenile Sentencing Provisions SF 2909/HF2890 Omnibus Judiciary and Public Safety appropriations

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Today, we write this letter of support to urge you to include the Juvenile Life Without Parole *and* 15-year release eligibility provisions from HF1300 in the Omnibus Public Safety bill, SF 2909. I'm a 19 1/2-year former State Corrections Officer who served at Stillwater Prison. I'm now the founder of Art from the Inside, a non-profit organization that works with incarcerated individuals utilizing visual art as a way to support healing and rehabilitation. I know several of the individuals currently impacted by this bill.

During my nearly two decades as an officer in Stillwater prison, I watched with my own eyes young people become men and transform year after year. Some of them are now participants in Art from the Inside and I have witnessed their growth. I know these individuals, if given the opportunity for a second chance at freedom, would be productive assets in our community. We have a chance this year to correct the over sentencing of our young Minnesotans that has occurred for decades. This change would at least provide an opportunity after serving 15 years of their sentences to be reviewed, acknowledging that the developmental changes that occur during in our teens and 20's are substantive, and that transformation is possible for all people, and *especially* for our young people. Recidivism rates of this specific population nationwide are extremely low, 1% or less.

One of our gifted artists, Roberto Lopez-Rios has served over 20 years of the life sentence he received at 16 years old. Mr. Lopez-Rios has demonstrated the transformation of a 16 year-old boy to a 38 year old man with positivity, maturity, wisdom, and a strong desire to give back. He, like many others, deserves the opportunity for a review after 15 years.

On July 18, 2018, my friend and co-worker of 16-years, Officer Joseph Gomm, was murdered at Stillwater Prison by the hands of an incarcerated person. As someone personally impacted by the violent crime of another person, I am committed to finding new, creative ways to provide healing and find safety for all of us. Juvenile sentencing reform is a critical way we demonstrate that we believe in our young Minnesotans and even if they caused harm as a child that we know transformation is possible.

I would like to say thank you to the committee members for supporting this critical step forward for juvenile sentencing reform.

Sincerely,

Antonio Espinosa  
Founder, Art from the Inside