

**Testimony from Michael Francis, MCF-Rush City**

**Re: HF 2349 (HF 1078, Article 4)**

Submitted by Jay Claire, TC IWOC

April 3, 2021

Mr. Chairman and committee members,

My name is Michael Francis. I am an incarcerated individual classified as a violent offender. I am testifying on behalf of individuals who are similarly situated as I am and on behalf of Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee.

The MRRRA bill is helpful but grossly inadequate. Its exclusions defeat what it seeks to establish, therefore it must be universal. Too many criminal justice reform efforts focus on non violent incarcerated individuals. The so called violent incarcerated individuals are always left out of the equation and are almost never given an incentive to be better. I say so called violent because many of the individuals deemed violent have matured and have not committed violence during their incarceration, and have aged out of criminal thinking. Our redeemed humanity always goes unnoticed and unrewarded by law makers. However, many of us who are convicted of violent crimes are heavily relied on by facility administrators who have recognized our rehabilitation to be mentors and to bring stability to the facilities. Because of our redeemed humanity we do it without any incentives. The so called violent incarcerated individuals are also the ones who mostly reach for self change and participate in the scanty offered rehabilitative programming. Our rehabilitation always goes without recognition by legislators.

As a society we must deal with the problem of yesterday. In the 1980's in response to the crack epidemic State and Federal legislators across the country began to enhance sentencing to the point that life by numbers became a common occurrence. With the cherry on top, the Crime Bill proposed and passed by President Clinton, the sentencing became even harsher and because of that we are dealing with a broke down prison system which warehouses instead of rehabilitation.

The quick fix has always been to send home the nonviolent or short timers through programs, incentives or mass release. But this does not and by years of evidence has not helped the problem, because with no rehabilitation or incentives and parole officers quick to violate these individuals, they become part of the revolving door which we know as recidivism. So the band aid did nothing for the wound. Now we know for a fact that long term incarcerated individuals age out of their criminal thinking and very seldom come back. [See Farmington, D. P. (1986). "Age and crime." In M. Tonry & N. Morris (Eds.) *Crime and justice: An annual review of research*. Volume 7. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and Sweeten, G., Piquero, A. R., & Steinberg, L. (2013). "Age and the explanation of crime, revisited." *Journal of Adolescence* 42, 932-938.] So at some point we must begin to fix the whole system and not to repair part. So the MRRA should be amended to give everyone who is willing to change and put in the work a chance to do so.

I'm around many rowdy individuals convicted of violent crimes and when I talk to them about possible incentives of early release, they become very receptive to the ideal of making changes in their behavior. Which evidences the importance, need and benefit of making that bill universal.