



The **CAMPAIGN** for the
FAIR SENTENCING
of **YOUTH**

To: Members of the Minnesota Conference Committee on SF 2909

Re: Statement of Survivors and Family Members of Victims of Youth Violence in Support of Including in SF 2909 the provisions of HF 1300, Eligibility for supervised release for individuals sentenced for crimes committed while under age of 18

Chair Moller and Distinguished Members of the Conference Committee on SF 2909,

We are writing as people who have either directly suffered harm at the hands of a youth offender or have lost loved ones to youth violence, to add our voices to the diverse chorus that supports including in SF 2909 the provisions of HF 1300/SF 1325 to create release eligibility for children serving extreme adult sentences. We are at a unique moment in which twenty-seven states and jurisdictions, including Arkansas, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Nevada, North Dakota, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming, have all passed laws affirming that no child should ever be told that they have no hope but to die in prison.

As people who have personally experienced the tragic pain of losing a loved one to youth violence or suffering it ourselves, we do not lightly encourage you to support this crucial legislation. Our individual journeys have been marked by grief, anger, and many unanswered questions. And although our lives have forever been altered by the violent actions of people who were under 18 at the time, we are firm in our conviction that children never cease to be deserving of our compassion and concern, as they simultaneously represent the most vulnerable members of our community and our most valuable resource as we work for a more just future. When children cause harm, as they did in our lives, it is important to hold them accountable in trauma-informed, age-appropriate ways that leave room for the profound potential that they have to move beyond their worst moments and experience dramatic positive transformation. Because of our painful experiences, we are deeply committed to the hope of redemption and second chances, and a belief that all of us are more than the worst thing we have ever done. We encourage you to support youth sentencing policies that are in harmony with these fundamental values. We believe that when a person who has served a lengthy

sentence for a crime she or he committed as a child is able to demonstrate rehabilitation, we must give them an opportunity to lean into the future awaiting them outside prison walls.

The road we have traveled is a hard one, and many people whose lives have been impacted by youth violence have not arrived at the point where they can advocate for second chances for people who committed crimes as teenagers. We understand their feelings. But through our own process of healing, we have come to know many people who were incarcerated as children, some of whom served decades for crimes they committed before they were old enough to vote, sign a contract, serve on a jury or in the military, or, in some cases, even drive a car. We have seen with our own eyes that redemption is possible, that when a young person is given a second chance, they can accomplish so much good, and in this way, they can try to make up for the harm they caused. These individuals are making countless meaningful contributions to their communities by raising loving families, serving as mentors to at-risk youth, and working as school teachers, substance abuse counselors, restorative justice practitioners, social workers, and advocates for sentencing reform. It is a blessing to stand in solidarity with people whose lives testify that we should never give up on a child.

The provisions of HF 1300/SF 1325 abolishing life without parole for kids and establishing 15-year release eligibility for juveniles are about making sure all children have hope because every child matters. Every child is worthy of our care and concern. We have faith that Minnesota will benefit from following the example of twenty-seven other states that have already passed this kind of legislation. We have been proud to advocate for bills like this in states as diverse as Arkansas, California, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, and New Mexico, and we are pleased to encourage Minnesota to join them by including these provisions in SF 2909, the Omnibus Public Safety Bill. By doing so, Minnesota can give the hope of a second chance to people who received lengthy sentences for crimes they committed when they were still children.

Very sincerely,

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