

Testimony *in Support* of Senate Bill 1038
Juveniles Convicted as Adults – Sentencing – Limitations and Reduction
(Juvenile Restoration Act)

To: Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings
Committee

From: Mica McNair

Date: March 12, 2020

Re: Previously Submitted Testimony in Support of the Juvenile Restoration Act, cross-
filed as House Bill 1437

Chester McNair is my husband. I submit this letter in hopes of a favorable vote on House Bill (HB) 1437. Chester is serving an indeterminate life sentence for a crime that was committed when he was a 17-year-old child. Chester was convicted of felony murder in Prince George's County in 1992. He is now 45 years old and has been incarcerated for over 28 years.

I have known Chester for 29 years. We met when we were teenagers. When Chester was convicted, I was pregnant with our son. Our son was born in 1992, shortly after Chester was incarcerated. We named our son Chester Jr., but we call him Chucky. We faced the trials and tribulations of raising Chucky while one parent was incarcerated. Our family has worked tirelessly to maintain communications with Chester throughout his incarceration. While it was not without challenges, Chester and I are proud of our family and our relationship.

Because Chester was incarcerated, I faced the challenge of raising a Black child as a single mother. I am proud to say that despite all the societal pressure placed on Chucky to fail, he has thrived. This is partially because of the large role that Chester played in his life growing up. Chester could have easily given up on parenting as a result of his incarceration. Instead, he stepped up to the plate in the most admirable way. He played a significant role in raising Chucky, especially during the times I could not reach my son strictly because I am a woman.

Chester Sr. has had an enormous impact on our son. When Chester went to prison, he did not have his GED. His focus was on maintaining a platform of structure and education for our son. Chester did this by enrolling in classes and obtaining his GED and continued on to receive his Associate's degree. He demonstrated the value of self-guided learning and it showed Chucky the value of education not just in his life, but in his father's life as well. His father would read books and have him check out the same books from the library and discuss them through letters, phone calls, or visits. Chester also took an interest and invested in our son's spiritual life, letting him know he could talk to him in difficult times. And that is what Chucky did. Chucky would not really talk to me about his issues, but he would wait and talk to his father about them. Even from behind the wall he trusted in his father's judgement and guidance.

Chester is very generous, and he is one of the humblest people I have ever met. Chester has grown into a man who will sacrifice his own wellbeing to make sure others around him feel comfortable. He has not always been this way. Throughout his incarceration, I have watched Chester grow from an impulsive child into a mature adult who is working to better himself while helping those around him. I believe he can do the same in our community, if given the opportunity.

Chester is now 45 years old. Despite his decades of incarceration, Chester works to make the best of the life he is living. Over the course of his incarceration, Chester has earned his GED and graduated *cum laude* with an Associate's Degree in Business Management. He has participated in a wide selection of self-help groups, educational opportunities and co-directed a program for his fellow inmates. He also been trusted with a variety of different work experiences.

Watching Chester struggle through the challenges of incarceration has pushed me to become more involved in systemic change to help make a difference for families across Maryland. I am a member of a family support group for juvenile lifers and also a part of the M.O.M.S. group

which is a subgroup of the Diversion Program in Prince George's County, Maryland which is headed up by the States Attorney's Office. As someone whose life has been impacted by the strenuous and unpredictable circumstances that the state prison system can cause, I feel it is my duty to not only help Chester, but any other family that is in a similar position.

Chester understands that he has a huge debt to pay. He also realizes that he will never be able to pay this debt in full. However, if he is released, he is more than ready to serve by sharing his experiences to hopefully prevent children and young men from making his same mistakes. Chester is best-situated to make a difference in the lives of children and young adults. He has learned valuable lessons over his decades of incarceration and, in his middle age, can help to provide a positive influence in the lives of others.

I am a strong believer that everyone deserves a second chance. We all make mistakes in our lives, and unfortunately, some are more devastating than others. Chester has learned from his mistakes and has been in prison for 28 years, for a crime that was committed when he a seventeen-year old child. Please allow Chester to come home so he can have a second chance.

I appreciate your consideration of my letter and for these reasons I urge a favorable vote on HB 1437.

Sincerely,

Mica McNair