

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 300
INMATES – LIFE IMPRISONMENT – PAROLE REFORM

To: Hon. Luke Clippinger, Chair, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Tommy Bonilla

Date: March 3, 2020

My name is Tommy Bonilla, #213-291. I am currently incarcerated at the Patuxent Institution. I would like to share with you the reasons why I support Bill HB 300. I had to quit school at the age of 16 so I could get a job to help my mother because she has had three heart surgeries. I was in the eighth grade when I left school and started working full time at a catering company. I was 16 years old. I had to wake up everyday at 6am to go to work. Even though the work was hard, it felt good that I was able to help my mother. I was incarcerated at the age of 17 for this current offence. I am almost 49 years old and have been incarcerated for the past 31 years. I was a juvenile with no guidance, no education, and always hanging out with guys much older than me. I was truly influenced by my older peers. I come from a broken home. I have never lived with my father. I was raised by a single mother. I strongly believe that I should be resentenced because I was a juvenile, very immature, and I am certain that the record supports the fact that when this crime occurred, I was a shy 17 year old who was trying to gain the acceptance and credibility of my much older peers that I hung out with. Although it is rapidly surfacing for the publics eye what juveniles do when unattended and absent responsibility, I am here to tell you that the things juveniles do are not new. To the contrary, with the dawning of the digital age, these things are just coming to light. Like so many other youths that are wallflowers seeking acceptance with their more popular peers, I was so wrongly influenced. I had not even developed planning or decision making abilities beyond those typical to an adolescent. Guided by these peers, on this fateful night, I committed a crime which for the remainder of my life, I will be seeking forgiveness. That factor alone has changed how I live my life. For so many years, I have sought ways to allow those that were directly or indirectly victims to my crimes, know just how sorry and remorseful I really am. Unfortunately, because of political correctness and societal limitations, I am trapped into having words as my evidence. Words cannot describe nor do I think I am equipped to fully and completely express

just how sorry I am. I began to grasp the true dynamics of forgiveness and the need for it when I thought I was close to being granted me - forgiveness. Along with this understanding came deep levels of sadness and true remorse for all others directly or indirectly associated with the things attributed to my stupid behavior. At that point, I learned to think outside of myself and instead for others as well as recalling those terrible misconceptions of my past, which stagnated my growth and development, also triggers yet another level of remorse. Meanwhile, I have dedicated my life toward becoming more charitable in providing assistance and support to those who are less fortunate. The things that I hated the most, school and studying, have become one of my greatest preoccupations. I read almost constantly and have expanded my levels of employable skills. Once I addressed in the past my personal shortcomings and grew closer to becoming a resourceful man, I then sought out to see what it is that I can do to help others.

During my many years of incarceration, I have learned to understand the true gravity of the hardships my actions have imposed in the past upon my family and friends. They have never forsaken me, and continue to this day, to love and support me. It is not a common thing in prison and I am fortunate to have their love and support.

I have participated and completed each and every program that is reasonably available to me. A few programs I have even operated in the capacity of a tutor or interpreter to other Spanish speaking inmates. I have gone on to try locating affordable correspondence courses so that I can expand my horizons.

I will conclude this letter by saying, thank you for giving me this opportunity to enter your consciousness, even momentarily. I do hope that my reality offers you a thread of compassion to support Bill HB 300.

Sincerely,  213-291