



To: Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Tyra Patterson, Community Outreach Strategy Specialist

Date: December 2, 2020

Re: Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 256

Chairman Lang, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 256.

My story is one that is at the heart of what I believe this legislation is about: redemption and a belief in giving young people a chance. As a teenager, I was wrongly convicted of murder and robbery. I was sentenced to 43-years to life in prison. Although I did not commit the crimes for which I was convicted, I believe I have something relevant to say about the power of young people to transform their lives. I know this because I am that young person who transformed her life. I am Tyra Patterson.

Growing up in Dayton, my family was very poor. I dropped out of school at the age of 11. I left school because my family and I experienced chronic homelessness and moving around meant that it was hard to develop roots in a neighborhood. When I was 17, I quit my job at Wendy's after two weeks because I could not count money. I was so ashamed and I figured the manager would find out, so I quit my first and only job. Like many teenagers, I made some bad choices and experimented with marijuana and alcohol.

I was in literacy classes for five years, and that began my transformation. After earning my GED—I became a certified tutor to give back what was given to me—I took building maintenance classes and became the career technical aide. I wanted to do more with my time so eventually earned my third class steam engineer's license. I participated in over 500 self-improvement groups and participated in community services while incarcerated.

Today, I maintain a very demanding but fulfilling schedule working as the Community Outreach Strategy Specialist at the Ohio Justice & Policy Center. I also facilitate workshops nationally for attorneys and prosecutors on how to humanize their clients. I use the intersection of art and social justice to educate our communities. I travel, speaking with young people about the power of good decision-making but also not allowing their mistakes to define them. This is also my passion because I wish someone would have done it for me.

I also work to leverage my experiences to assist people coming home from prison through a mentoring program I created as well as helping connect them to meaningful jobs and career opportunities.

I am here today because I refuse to be a victim of my circumstances. I never gave up on myself. The bill you are considering today is telling our young people in prison that they are more than the worst mistake they ever made. You're telling them that we won't give up on them. They need a path to redemption and you are creating it. Thank you to Senator Lehner and Senator Manning for introducing this bill.

Mr. Chairman, I am happy to answer any questions.