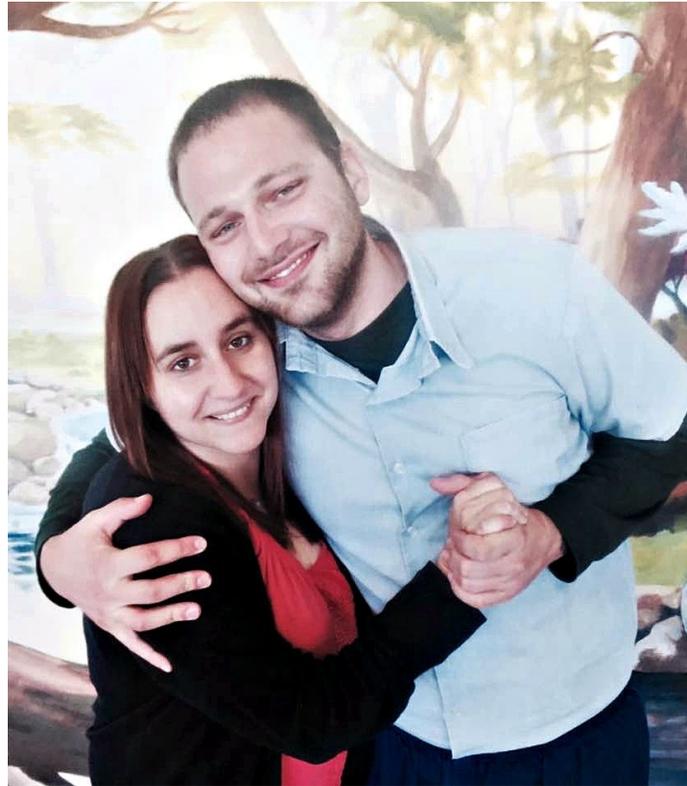


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**Testimony in Support of SB 256**  
**Regards Sentencing Offenders Under 18 When Committed Offense**  
Senate Judiciary Committee

Good morning, Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Stefanie Tengler, and I am engaged to a juvenile lifer. Joshua and I met a little over eight years ago, and we have been inseparable ever since. I was born and raised in Germany, and moved to the U.S. at the age of 21. I am now 33 years old. Four years ago, I became a U.S. citizen. I have settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I work as an elementary school teacher. In 2018, I completed my Master's Degree in Educational Studies from the University of Johns Hopkins, and I am currently in the process of purchasing a house that Joshua could come home to, if he were to receive a second chance.

As a teacher, I believe that *all* of our children have an ability to achieve greatness. Unfortunately, not all of them are given the tools to do so. My fiancé, Josh, is a prime example of that. As a child, Josh witnessed prostitution, gun violence, and substance abuse on a daily basis. His father was addicted to crack cocaine, and so -at the age of six- Josh would come home from school, and his dad would show him how to package drugs. Between the ages of about eight and

ten, Josh also suffered extreme child sexual abuse. One of his uncles sexually abused Josh for well over a thousand times. He would lure Josh into his home with presents, then take him to the woods or the lake to have sex with him. Sadly, Josh wasn't the only child in his family impacted by this abuse. Two of his cousins took their own lives, because they couldn't endure living with those memories. In addition to losing his cousins, Josh also lost his little brother, Luther, who he was very close to. Luther, who had been through a lot of horrific childhood experiences together with Josh, was brutally beaten to death. The amount of pain that Josh has gone through in his life is impossible for most of us to imagine.

Josh (right) and his brother, Luther (left)



As a child, Josh couldn't escape his circumstances. Those who were supposed to protect him caused him a lot of pain. So when Josh became a teenager, he turned to the streets in search of support and protection. While Josh's childhood experiences explain some of the choices he made when growing up, I certainly don't want to make excuses for him. He made terrible mistakes when he was a teen, and he knows that he deserves to be punished. The crime he committed is something that will never go away, and Josh knows that better than anyone else. Because of Josh, a young man is dead and a family and community devastated. Josh will have to live with that for the rest of his life. The question is: Do we need to keep a regretful, now 31-year-old man, who poses no risk to society, in prison until he's over 70 years old?

Josh has been incarcerated for close to 15 years now. He is serving 56 years to life since the age of sixteen. As current law stands, he will be parole eligible in 2061. SB 256 gives us hope that Josh would have the opportunity to be heard by the parole board in 10 years from now, after serving a total of 25 years.

Until then, Josh will continue to prepare himself for life outside of prison. He trains service dogs for our veterans and for children with special needs. He has earned a paralegal degree, and he has completed a psychology and social work program with highest distinction. He participates in a variety of programs, such as the prison's community garden and the Global Leadership Summit. In the past, he also completed the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program through Xavier University, and he aspires to work on an associate's degree in culinary arts and/or business management in the near future. Josh isn't an exception. A lot of our teenage lifers have changed their lives for the better. They have the potential to lead productive lives amongst us. All we have to do is give them a second chance.

Josh and his service dogs in training

