

TO: SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE ON BILL 1382

FROM: AP-3468, ROBERT WIDEMAN

INMATE PROFILE: ROBERT WIDEMAN

I WAS CONVICTED OF SECOND DEGREE MURDER IN 1976 AND SUBSEQUENTLY SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON IN 1979. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MY CASE ARE AS FOLLOWS:

MY TWO ACCOMPLICES AND I DEvised A SCHEME TO SET UP A CAR DEALER THAT WE KNEW BOUGHT STOLEN GOODS, THIS CAR DEALER WAS THE VICTIM NICKOLAS MORENO. WE PLANNED TO TELL HIM THAT WE HAD A TRUCKLOAD OF STOLEN TV SETS SO HE WOULD HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF CASH ON HIM. WE THEN WOULD ROB HIM OF THE MONEY. THE DATE AND TIME FOR THE BOGUS DEAL WAS SET UP AND WE PROCEEDED TO COMMIT THE CRIME. ON THE EVENING OF THE CRIME WHEN I ARRIVED TO CHECK OUT THE PLACE I WAS SURPRISED TO FIND THE VICTIM HAD TWO MALE FRIENDS WITH HIM AT THE CAR LOT. HE REASSURED ME THAT THEY WERE NOT THE POLICE AND WERE THERE TO HELP HIM UNLOAD THE TVs. I THEN PHONED MY TWO ACCOMPLICES TO BRING THE TRUCK THEY HAD PARKED UP THE STREET FROM THE CAR LOT. WHEN THEY ARRIVED THE DRIVER PARKED THE TRUCK AND GOT OUT OF THE TRUCK. HE WAS ALSO ALARMED AT THE OTHER TWO PEOPLE BEING PRESENT AND ASKED ME DID I THINK THEY MIGHT BE TRYING TO ROB US. I RESPONDED THAT I DID NOT THINK SO. NEXT WE ALL PROCEEDED TO THE BACK OF THE TRUCK TO LOOK AT THE TVs. WHEN WE OPENED THE TRUCK MY SECOND ACCOMPLICE JUMPED OUT WITH A SHOTGUN AND TOLD THEM TO FREEZE AND TO GIVE ME THE MONEY. THE VICTIM MR. MORENO AT THIS POINT THREW THE MONEY ON THE GROUND. THE WIND WAS BLOWING SO I BENT OVER AND WAS SCRAMBLING TO PICK IT UP. AT THIS POINT I HEARD FEET SHUFFLING AND I HEARD MY ACCOMPLICE SAY ROBBIE HE'S RUNNING. I RESPONDED "GET HIM". AS I GOT UP I HEARD WHAT SOUNDED LIKE SOMEONE FALL I RAN AROUND THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE TRUCK FROM WHERE I HEARD THE FALL. AT THIS TIME I HEARD A SHOT. WHEN I GOT TO THE FRONT OF THE TRUCK I SAW THE VICTIM MR. MORENO RUNNING DOWN THE STREET I HAD A CLEAR SHOT AT HIM BUT I DID NOT SHOOT. WE THEN PUT THE OTHER TWO MEN IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK. IN OUR PANIC WE FORGOT TO LOCK THE BACK DOOR OF THE TRUCK AND AT THE

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FIRST STOPLIGHT THE TWO MEN JUMPED OUT OF THE TRUCK AND RAN. WE DID NOT PURSUE THEM. THESE FACTS WERE CORROBORATED AT MY TRIAL AND ARE PART OF THE PUBLIC RECORD.

WHILE IN PRISON I STARTED OFF BITTER AND DISILLUSIONED AND GOT SEVERAL SERIOUS MISCONDUCTS FOR THE FIRST FIVE YEARS I WAS INCARCERATED. THEN AFTER I SPENT SEVEN MONTHS IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT I REALIZED I HAD TO CHANGE MY LIFE FROM THE INSIDE OUT. STOP BLAMING SOCIETY, ACCEPT MY OWN BLAME, MY FAULTS, AND MAKE MY PEACE WITH GOD BY BEING A BETTER PERSON. AFTER I WAS RELEASED FROM THE HOLE I ENROLLED IN SCHOOL, REJOINED A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY, STARTED A REGULAR PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAM AND BEGAN THE SOMETIMES PAINFUL PROCESS OF REMAKING MY LIFE SO I COULD PROVE TO MYSELF IF NO ONE ELSE THAT I WAS DESERVING OF ANOTHER CHANCE AT LIFE. AND, IF GIVEN THAT CHANCE WOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE IT AND USE IT TO BE A PRODUCTIVE CITIZEN. I GRADUATED FROM ALLEGHENY COMMUNITY COLLEGE WITH AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE IN ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY WITH THREE RELATED DRAFTING CERTIFICATES. I TOOK SOME COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH AND BEGAN TO TEACH FOR THE UNIVERSITY WHICH I HAVE DONE NOW FOR TEN YEARS TEACHING ALGEBRA AND TRIGONOMETRY. I AM SET TO GRADUATE FROM GARFIELD BUSINESS INSTITUTE THIS MARCH WITH A DIPLOMA IN HOW TO MANAGE YOUR OWN SMALL BUSINESS. AFTERWARD I INTEND TO GO BACK TO PITT AND FINISH A DEGREE IN COMPUTER SCIENCE. I ALSO WORK IN THE INSTITUTION'S VISITING ROOM AS A CHILD MONITOR WHICH NECESSITATES A SECURITY CLEARANCE. IN ADDITION TO THESE ACCOMPLISHMENTS I WAS GIVEN A SUPERVISED LEAVE TO ATTEND THE LIFERS CONFERENCE AT LASALLE UNIVERSITY AND HELPED MY BROTHER WRITE A BEST SELLING BOOK THAT DEALT WITH OUR UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP. I HAVE PARTICIPATED IN OTHER PRISON ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION

STAND ON BILL NO. 1382

OF COURSE, I HAVE A VERY SUBJECTIVE VIEW OF THIS BILL BECAUSE IT AFFECTS ME

SO CLOSELY. INSTEAD OF GIVING MY VIEW ON BILL 1382 IN ITS PARTICULARS, PLEASE LET ME GIVE MY VIEWS AND FEELINGS ON LIFERS IN GENERAL.

I HAVE SPENT ALL OF MY TIME WHICH IS SIXTEEN YEARS IN SCIP EXCEPT FOR APPROXIMATELY ONE MONTH I SPENT AT SCIG AT WHICH TIME I ATTENDED THE LIFERS CONFERENCE WHICH WAS HELD AT LASALLE UNIVERSITY. IN BOTH OF THESE INSTITUTIONS I SAW THAT LIFERS ARE IN POSITIVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN ALL ASPECTS OF THE RUNNING OF THE INSTITUTION. LIFERS HERE AT SCIP, AND I AM SURE AT ALL PA. STATE PRISON, RUN THE SCHOOL PROGRAM. BY RUN I MEAN WORKING FOR OR THROUGH THE UNIVERSITIES THAT INSTITUTE THE SCHOOL PROGRAMS BY ENLISTING STUDENTS, DOING THE PAPER WORK, HANDLING COMPUTER WORK, TEACHING OR PARA-TEACHING. INVARIABLY IN EVERY SHOP OR WORK AREA THERE IS A LIFER THAT THE CIVILIAN SUPERVISOR DEPENDS ON TO KEEP THINGS RUNNING SMOOTHLY. LIFERS ARE THE MOST STABLE OF THE POPULATION. I HAVE TAUGHT FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH FOR TEN YEARS IN THE INSTITUTION AND MY BEST STUDENTS HAVE BEEN LIFERS. IN CONTRAST A MINORITY OF LIFERS GO THE OTHER ROUTE. THEY BECOME CAUGHT IN A CYCLE OF BITTERNESS AND HOPLESSNESS THAT LEADS THEM TO BE VERY UNRULY AND SELF-DESTRUCTIVE. SO I BELIEVE THAT NOT ALL LIFERS SHOULD BE GIVEN PAROLE BUT THERE SHOULD BE SOME WAY TO EVALUATE THOSE THAT DESERVE ANOTHER CHANCE. THERE IS ALSO A LARGE GROUP OF LIFERS THAT ARE SENTENCED TO LIFE AND THE PRINCIPLES IN THEIR CASES WERE GIVEN A LIGHTER SENTENCE. THIS SMACKS IN THE FACE OF ALL OF OUR SENSE OF FAIRNESS. I WAS SENTENCED TO LIFE WHILE THE OTHER ACCOMPLICE IN MY CASE IS NOW OUT ON PAROLE. THESE TYPES OF INEQUITIES SHOULD BE ADDRESSED BY OUR SOCIETY AND REMEDIED.

A LIFE SENTENCE IN PENNSYLVANIA MEANS JUST THAT, LIFE, THERE IS NO PAROLE FOR LIFE IN PENNSYLVANIA. THERE IS NO OTHER STATE IN THE UNION EXCEPT FOR LOUISIANA THAT HAS THIS TYPE OF PENAL CODE. SOME STATES HAVE LIFE WITH PAROLE AS WELL AS LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE BUT NONE EXCEPT PENNSYLVANIA AND LOUISIANA HAVE ONLY LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE. THIS FROM A STATE AS PROGRESSIVE AS OURS I BELIEVE

WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE BY MOST OF OUR CITIZENS IF THEY KNEW AND UNDERSTOOD ALL OF ITS RAMIFICATIONS. ONE OF THESE BEING THE AMOUNT OF MONEY IT TAKES TO KEEP A MAN OR WOMAN IN PRISON FOR 20, 30, or 40 YEARS, THE OVERCROWDING THAT IS CAUSED BY A POPULATION THAT CONTINUES TO GROW WITH NO CHANCE OF DIMINISHING. HOW FAR DO WE GO AS A SOCIETY? HOW MUCH CAN WE SPEND ON PUNISHMENT? THE AMOUNTS OF MONEY SPENT ON AN INMATE IN A PA. STATE PRISON IS OVER \$20,000 A YEAR. HOW MUCH CAN WE PAY? WELL, AS MUCH AS NEED BE IN SOME CASES. BUT, ISN'T THERE A WAY TO RECOGNIZE THOSE THAT HAVE CHANGED? A WAY TO RECOGNIZE THOSE WHO CAN GO OUT AND BECOME LAW-ABIDING AND PRODUCTIVE. I'M SURE THERE IS. WE CAN FIND A WAY TO STOP BURDENING SOCIETY WITH THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY BURDENED IT ENOUGH. I BELIEVE THIS BILL 1382 AND THIS HEARING IS A LARGE STEP IN FINDING THAT WAY TO REMEDY AND CHANGE THE WAY LIFERS ARE DEALT WITH IN PENNSYLVANIA.

THANK YOU,

ROBERT WIDEMAN, AP-3468