

Bill No: HB409
Title: Juvenile Restoration Act
Committee: Judiciary
Hearing Date: 1/21/21
Position: SUPPORT
Name: Jermy Merriweather

My name is Jermy Merriweather, and I am currently living in Charlotte, North Carolina. I was released from prison in 2014. Since my release I have attended college where I obtained several academic acknowledgements starting with the Dean's List as well as the President's List, on my way to receiving and accepting the esteemed honor to join my school's Honor Society of Phi Theta Kappa. After receiving this humbling recognition; I was selected to travel abroad to continue my studies but due to my parole limitations I was not able to do so but the honor and privilege speaks volumes in so many ways. I served 22 years of a 60 years sentence, a sentence that I wasn't sure would afford me the opportunity to show and prove my growth as a man and show society that I wasn't who I once was labeled to be; "incorrigible".

I recently joined ICAN, a network of formerly incarcerated children that provides support for its members and empowers them to create positive changes in our communities. The ICAN network also supports professional skill-building opportunities, and connects members to the reintegration resources necessary to rebuild our lives and advocate for change.

Dear recipients of this plea, please do try to understand that mistakes and poor decisions are an intricate part of life, it is that learning curve that some maneuver better than others whether it's due to financial or environmental circumstances. The road of life is not without its share of potholes but learning how to bypass the roads with the most potholes is an essential step in one's rehabilitation, but this only comes from mental growth and one's ability to assess what is right and what he/she knows to be right. This is the reason why so many of our youth have succumb to peer pressure because the receptors and the decision-making ranges of the brain for dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is responsible for the sensation of pleasure and reward, are more active at that stage but the maturity of self-control is more gradual, and is not yet complete until the early stages of adulthood. I SUPPORT this Bill because I strongly believe that there should be numerous avenues for one to obtain their freedom. I went up for my initial parole hearing after serving 15 years of my sentence, at which time I was recommended to return back before the Board after 3 years, but the Commissioner saw fit to increase that time frame from 3 years to 5 citing due to the nature of my offense. The key factor that rests with the court system is their ability to assess the actual role of the person unlike the parole board which does not consider such factors; only the crime itself. The Bill will grant these youth offenders the opportunity to show and prove their value and worth in a society that so many have made changes to be a part of and successful. I thank you for your time and consideration!