

Written Testimony of James Swansey

May 1, 2023

To the Respected Minnesota Conference Committee:

My name is James Swansey and I am a member of the National LWOP Leadership Council with Human Rights Watch. I am writing in support of HF 1300, which would provide some hope to persons serving life without the possibility of parole in Minnesota.

I was incarcerated for 28 years, serving a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. Fortunately for me, I was given an opportunity to return to the community, and I have been home since December 2020.

Since being released, I am now a Policy Manager with Restore Justice Foundation, where I am doing everything possible to take advantage of my second chance. I teach people about the challenges faced with issues such as the one I am here in support of today. I also mentor today's youth by speaking about my past mistakes; showing that I was not my worst mistake. And I also have become a registered lobbyist in the state of Illinois.

Life without parole takes away any hope, which is cruel & inhumane. It is built on the false premise that the crime itself means a person can never change, and this is untrue. People should not be defined for the rest of their lives by one mistake. Science shows the brain continues to develop into the late 20s, and everyone grows and changes. Returning people to valuable citizenship should always be the goal.

For these reasons, If you believe that children and young people can change and mature, I ask that you give someone that chance. I am asking that you include HF 1300 in the Public Safety Omnibus bill which would abolish JLWOP and create release eligibility for juveniles after 15 years in Minnesota.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
James Swansey
Policy Manager, Restore Justice