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Title:

Organization or Agency: Incarcerated in CT DOC

Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed

NA

Testimony:

42 years. A "day-for-day" definitive sentence, where you can do nothing to change that ironclad number of years. It is strict retributivism at its finest, a sentence that forever shackles you to the person you were the day you committed your crime. You are nothing more than a monster and a villain, beyond rehabilitation, beyond redemption, beyond humanity. That is the narrative a definitive sentence creates.

I had just turned 29—it was 4 days after my birthday—when I committed my crime. At the end of my "day-for-day" sentence, I will be 71 years old; my release date is scheduled to be four days after my 71st birthday. I will have no family, no children, no future career or educational prospects. The state will have robbed me of everything that makes up a life, except for my literal life itself. This void I was left with was quiet, but it was a shadow that hovered—filling my sleepless nights, leaving no room, or light, for dreams and hopes. This is another narrative of the definitive sentence.

That narrative, however, is only one part of my story. While my sentence means to tie me permanently to the day of my crime, I have chosen otherwise. Even in the midst of policies and practices that have deemed certain people "ineligible" for rehabilitation and redemption, I believed that rehabilitation and redemption were possible. I found that the shadows that darkened my existence could be countered by light, that the void I lived with could be filled by my thoughts and actions, and that my despair would only be driven away by new hopes and new dreams. I discovered that in the midst of my hardship, I didn't have to be a monster or a villain, that I could still be a human—fallible but human, nonetheless.

I know that a definitive sentence is designed, simply, to inflict pain. Yet, when I finally looked beyond the darkness, I realized that my suffering was useful—it enabled me to understand the depth and importance of compassion. Only when we suffer do we begin to understand others' suffering. We develop a depth of empathy that could have never otherwise been attained. I would never wish my pain on another, but I have made it meaningful for me. It has allowed me to connect more wholly with the humanity of others and, in that way, made me more human myself.

I've learned with time, too, that kindness and patience are virtues that, when practiced daily, sustain compassion beyond a feeling to an action, a mode of living. In every kind word of support, shared laughter, and much needed hug, I build connection and affirm that I am more than my worst day. That while I must endure the punishment of a definitive sentence that froze me in time as a monster, I do not need to obey it. Everyday, in every act of compassion, kindness, and love, I rebut the narrative my "day-for-day" sentence tried, and nearly succeeded, to trap me in.