

STATEVILLE SPEAKS

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE • SPRING SPECIAL EDITION 2021

A LOVE LETTER

My name is Richard Wallace. I am the founder and executive director of Equity and Transformation (EAT), a member of the movement for black lives policy table, and one of the millions of people in America branded as formerly incarcerated by the system of mass incarceration.

I am the Son of a father who taught me everything I know during my weekly visit to Stateville and through overpriced calls that were always cut short. I am the Son of a mother that invested every moment of her life to his freedom until the day he died.

I am one of the many that fought for, drafted, and passed this historic piece of legislation. Unlike many other legislative efforts, House Bill 3653 (what is now called the “SAFE-T Act”) wasn’t solely informed by one person or one organization. It was informed by the people.

HB 3653 is informed by you, the suffering of our ancestors, and the lives that have been stolen. It is informed by Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X. It was informed by Laquan McDonald, Rekia Boyd, Marcellis Stinnette, Anjanette Young, and others that were victims of the same system



intended to provide their security.

It is informed by my Mother, Rev. Doris Green, also known as Queen Makeda, and her work at Men and Women in Prison Ministries, an organization that started in Stateville correctional facility in the 80s. Work that, to this day, she attributes to her mentor, Rev. Mother Consuella York. My Mother informed me and her husband—my father, Minister Michael D. Smith. He spent nearly two decades in Stateville and passed away in Dixon State Prison in 2011. He never got to see this day, but he knew this day would come.

If my father were here, he would have sent you a kite to tell you the news, educating everyone on the deck of the changes made and the changes to come. He is no longer with us in the physical form, but his work lives on through you and me.

Educate the deck, share this new knowledge with your people and continue to lead the work of your ancestors. ■

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SAFE-T ACT ILLINOIS’ TRANSFORMATIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE LEGISLATION

By Luke Fernbach, Terah Tollner & Richard Wallace

What is the SAFE-T Act?

As the result of years of organizing, Illinois has passed a historic omnibus criminal justice bill that affects many issues of detention, prisons, and policing. Sponsored by members of the Illinois Black Caucus in the 101st General Assembly, the Illinois legislature passed the Safety, Accountability, Fairness and Equity - Today (“SAFE-T”) Act on January 13, 2021, and Governor Pritzker signed the bill into law on February 22, 2021.

The SAFE-T Act emerged out of the Breathe Act—a visionary bill developed by the Movement for Black Lives which advocates are pushing at the state and national level. Though the SAFE-T Act and the Breathe Act are not the same, there are many overlaps in the text of the legislation and in the underlying principles: (1) creating systems of accountability and transparency around policing; (2) demilitarization and reducing police power and interaction; (3) ending the carceral state, and repairing criminal-legal system harms; and (4) redistributing resources to

build healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities for all people.

The SAFE-T Act was not without opposition. A major police union, the Illinois Fraternal Order of the Police, released a scathing statement opposing the legislation. “Do nothing and your career in law enforcement, as you know it, will come to an end,” the statement warned. Yet despite some intense political pushback, the Illinois Senate voted 32-23 and the Illinois House of Representatives voted 60-50 in support of the bill. In a teach-in about the Act, Illinois Senator Robert Peters, who sponsored the bill, urged us to defend and thank those legislators for stepping up to do what is right. He also noted that this legislation was only possible because there was organizing happening around this package from across the state and from people with different points of view, but united around a clear sense of what needs to be done to create more safety for all people in Illinois. Years in the making, this bill is a testament to the strength of these coalitions.

The SAFE-T Act is most heralded for abolishing the practice of

See SAFE-T ACT, page 3

Hope...Redemption...Change

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to another edition, a Special Edition of Stateville Speaks. We call it a special for a couple of reasons. First, we find it incredibly special that a criminal justice reform bill (HB3653) of such magnitude, 764 pages, was drafted, passed, and signed into law, here in Illinois. While it does not make everyone happy, too lenient for some, too limiting for others, what most will agree on is that it is a major step forward.

Also special are the folks, Richard Wallace, Luke Fernbach and Terah Tollner, that read and synopsised what they felt may be the most impactful portions of this legislation, to you, the readers of Stateville Speaks. What might help get you out sooner, or keep you from a future, return stay? Also, while still in custody, what may offer some respect or even

compassion? We thank them for their time and efforts to break this down to give us a better understanding of this potentially life-changing legislation. We hope to hear more from them in the future.

Also, a thank you to Shane Lamb for openly discussing dark feelings and thoughts of suicide, maybe not so uncommon, especially in such trying and uncertain times. And for reminding us there is help and that circumstances can change, even in what feels like the bleakest of situations.

Welcome home Gerald Reed, who was incarcerated for 30+ years and is finally free.

And again, we thank you for your submissions, letters, and honest commentary, which is what really makes this very special. Be healthy and stay hopeful! ■

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Luke Fernbach (top) and **Terah Tollner** (middle) are third-year law students at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, where they have each spent much of their time working in the Community Justice and Civil Rights Clinic. Both Terah and Luke took the same class at the Stateville Correctional Center through the Northwestern Prison Education Program, where they made great friends and had the chance to further study the harms of prisons and policing. Luke spent last summer working at the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta, a nonprofit that fights for a world free from mass incarceration, the death penalty, the criminalization of poverty, and racial injustice. Terah worked at Loevy & Loevy, a civil rights law firm in Chicago, dedicated to seeking justice for people who are harmed by police misconduct and mistreatment in prisons. They both plan to pursue this type of work after graduation and they are honored to have the chance to share the page with Richard Wallace and to be in conversation with Stateville Speaks readers about this triumph for justice, though the fight for justice in our laws is far from over.

Richard Wallace (bottom) is an artist, organizer and the founder of Equity and Transformation (EAT). His work focuses on organizing black informal workers to confront anti-black racism in the US and abroad. He is also the founder of the Roosevelt University's student chapter of the Stop Mass Incarceration Network, the Founder of The Future of Benin Program in west Africa, one of the inaugural AFRE Fellows, a Voqal alum and was recently selected as Soros Justice Fellow. ■



REACH OUT

By Shane Lamb

I think about death a lot
I try to hide it
But when I step out of my head
That's what's inside of it
I don't try to
But if I said I didn't
I'd be lying to you
At one time I thought I wanted to die
I swallowed some pills, but realized I was full
of life
I wanted to be alive
Thank God I survived
Now I'm here talking to you
I'm telling you to think twice
Before you think about taking your own life
Things will get better, I promise
I've had some of the same problems as you
And I solved them
Don't think you're weak
Because I'm one of the strongest
When I felt down
Those days seemed the longest
Getting mad at everyone who wronged us
But God reached out and found us
Keep your head up, things will change
These dark days will end
Everything will be okay
I know as a man, it's hard to open up
But don't hide this
You'd be surprised how many men have
survived this

Footnote:

Dear Stateville Speaks,
I wrote this with the hopes it might just help one person who is going through a dark time in their life. I've been there and it's something that a lot of men in prison don't talk about because it's not macho to open up to people or reach out and talk about suicide. I am in a much better place now and a lot of people have helped me through my dark days in here, so I thought I'd return the favor.

Thank you,
Shane Lamb ■

EAT: EQUITY AND TRANSFORMATION

EAT is an organization whose mission is dedicated to assisting Black Chicagoans, especially those within an informal economy, with the ability to engage in "activities, enterprises and jobs...to change the social and economic conditions affecting their lives."

Their multifaceted approach combines research, development and endorsement of policies, community organizing and advocacy to focus on and combat the high rate of unem-

ployment in Chicago neighborhoods, particularly in Austin, Garfield Park and Englewood. According to EAT, these neighborhoods, which are predominately Black, have an average income of one-half to one-third, respectively, of those found throughout the rest of the Chicago.

Some of their campaigns include Cannabis Equity, Produce Protest (providing fresh produce), Breathe Act Illinois, Freedom Summer, Voter Registration and the Guar-

anteed Income Pilot Program, which will provide 50-55 formally incarcerated individuals \$500 a month.

For more information or how to volunteer or donate contact:

Equity And Transformation (EAT)
10 W. 35th St,
Chicago IL 60616

info@eatchicago.org ■

SAFE-T ACT, from page 1

cash bail in Illinois—making it the first state in the United States to do so. In addition to the elimination of money bond and increased pretrial protections, this bill makes numerous other important changes to police accountability systems, use of force policies, prison gerrymandering, and much more. This article summarizes some key provisions of the 764-page legislation, with an emphasis on the issues that will directly affect people who are locked up.

How Does the Act Impact People Who Are Currently Incarcerated?

Discretionary Credit - 730 ILCS 5/3-6-3(a)(3)

The Act increases the maximum amount of discretionary credit that can be granted from 180 to 365 days for people who are serving sentences of five years or longer. It also adds additional factors that can be considered in determining whether discretionary credit should be granted. Now, participation in programming offered by the facility, demonstrated commitment to rehabilitation, and improvements in disciplinary history should be considered in making discretionary credit decisions.

Earned Credit - 730 ILCS 5/3-6-3(a)(4)

The Act includes several provisions related to earned credit. First, it adds provisions that make it easier to earn credit. The Act modifies and simplifies the formula for earning credit, so now every 1 day that an incarcerated person participates in a qualifying program results in 1 day of earned sentence credit. The programs and placements through which sentence credit can be earned have been modified so that incarcerated people can earn credit while in a work release program and while living in an adult transition center. It also added a provision stating that participating in self-improvement programs, volunteer work, or work assignments that have not previously counted for sentence credit, earns 0.5 days of credit for each day of participation in those activities. In addition, the Act added a provision that 120 days of credit is earned for obtaining an Associate Degree.

Second, the Act loosened some of the restrictions around sentence credit. The Act removed the provision that credit cannot be earned while on electronic detention or in a boot camp. The Act also relaxed restrictions on changes in participation in programs. Now, if an incarcerated person begins participation in a program that would earn sentence credit, but had to stop participation due to illness, lockdown, or another condition beyond their control, they will still earn credit for the days that they did participate. The Act also removed the 30-day limit on how much earned sentence credit can be restored if it is lost.

Mandatory Supervised Release - 730 ILCS 5/5-1-1

Under the Act, supervised release is no longer mandatory for individuals convicted of Class 3 or 4 felonies. Now, the Prison Review Board will conduct a risk and needs assessment to determine whether a supervised release term is necessary. The Act also reduced the length of terms of mandatory supervised release for certain offenses. With some exceptions, Class X felonies now require an 18 month term of supervised release, instead of the previous three year term. In addition, Class 1 and 2 felonies, with certain exceptions and restrictions, now require a mandatory term of 12 months instead of two years.

Eligibility for Programs Restricted by Felony Background - 730 ILCS 5/5-6-3.8

Convictions entered prior to the effective date of the Act for certain drug offenses will be treated as a Class A misdemeanor for the purposes of evaluating a defendant's eligibility for programs of qualified probation, impact incarceration, or any other diversion, deflection, probation, or

other program for which felony background or delinquency background is a factor in determining eligibility.

Home Detention - 730 ILCS 5/5-4.5-100(b)

The Act clarified whether sentence credit can be earned while on home detention. It explained that sentence credit can be earned when the detention includes "restrictions on liberty," such as curfews restricting movement for more than 12 hours per day or electronic monitoring. But importantly, the Act clarified that 24 hour home confinement and/or electronic monitoring is not required for home detention to count toward sentencing credit. The Act also removed the restriction on earning sentence credit while on home detention that existed for people convicted of specific types of charges.

Prison Gerrymandering - 730 ILCS 205

With this Act, Illinois became the tenth state to end prison gerrymandering. When Illinois uses population data to draw state legislative district maps, incarcerated people are counted at their prison location instead of their home addresses. Therefore, districts in which prisons reside get money and resources apportioned to them based on populations that include incarcerated people—people who cannot vote in the communities where they are counted and who cannot access the resources that are distributed by the local government. And because the census only occurs every ten years, prisoners are often not recounted for several years after they return to their home communities. This hurts Black and brown communities the most, because Black and brown people are overrepresented in the prison system and prisons are located in predominantly white, downstate districts.

Once the Act is in effect, prisoners will be counted at the location of their last residence before incarceration for the purposes of state legislative redistricting. This provision will not go into effect until 2025, which will not change district maps until 2031, though some advocates continue to push for a more immediate reform. The Act does not apply to congressional districts or local districts, like those for city councils.



Rights for Pregnant Prisoners - 55 ILCS 5/3-15003; 730 ILCS 5/3-6; 730 ILCS 125/17

The SAFE-T Act requires that pregnant prisoners are able to be with their newborn baby for 72 hours after birth, and that they have access to diapers and educational materials regarding prenatal care, postpartum recovery, and parenting skills. The law also requires corrections officials to receive medical and mental health care training related to the treatment of pregnant women and restricts the use of segregation for more than 30 days while pregnant or in the month after birth.

Reporting of Deaths in Custody - 730 ILCS 210

This legislation creates a process for reporting and standards around how investigations are handled for deaths in prisons, jails, lock-up, or deaths as a result of an officer's use of force. It requires notification of next of kin as soon as possible with an accurate account.

How Does the Act Impact Future Sentencing?

These changes are not retroactive.

Story continues on page 4

Continued from page 3

Felony-Murder - 720 ILCS 5/9-1(a)(3)

The Act narrows the scope of Illinois's felony-murder law. It clarifies that in order to be charged with first-degree murder while committing or attempting to commit a forcible felony other than second degree murder in which an individual dies, a participant must have caused the death of a person. Before this change goes into effect, a person can be charged with felony-murder only for participating in an underlying felony where someone died.

“Three Strikes” and “Habitual Criminal” Provision

- 730 ILCS 5/5-4.5-95(a)

The Act changes the criteria for “habitual criminal” status, requiring that the first offense was committed when the defendant was 21 years of age or older, and requires that offenses were “forcible” felonies, not just felonies, for “three strikes” provision.

Mandatory Minimum Sentencing

- 730 ILCS 5/5-4-1(c-1.5)

The Act allows the court to sentence someone to a shorter prison term, probation, or conditional discharge, even where there is a mandatory minimum sentence, if the offense involves the use or possession of drugs, retail theft, or driving on a revoked license due to unpaid financial obligations. To impose less than the mandatory minimum, the court must find that the defendant does not pose a risk to public safety and that the interest of justice requires it, and must state its reasons on the record.

Less than 4 Months Remaining on Sentence for Class 3 or 4 Felony - 730 ILCS 5/5-8-6(a)

If a person is convicted of a Class 3 or 4 felony that is not considered a violent crime, and has less than 4 months remaining on their sentence, incarceration in a penitentiary is prohibited, but the person may be confined within an adult transition center or other facility or program within IDOC.

How will the Act Change Policing?

Military Surplus Equipment

- 20 ILCS 260/17c; 55 ILCS 5/3-6041; 65 ILCS 5/11-5.1-2

The Act prohibits the Illinois State Police, Sheriff's Offices, and local police departments, from receiving certain pieces of surplus military equipment. Those agencies are no longer able to receive tracked armored vehicles (like tanks), weaponized aircraft, vehicles, or vessels, firearms or ammunition of 0.50 calibre or higher, grenade launchers, or bayonets through state or federal programs that facilitate the acquisition of such equipment. It is important to note that those departments are not prohibited from purchasing military style equipment on their own, they are only prohibited from receiving the equipment through a state or federal program.

Anonymous Complaints - 50 ILCS 725/3.8(a)

The Act eliminates the requirement that all complaints against law enforcement officers must be accompanied by a sworn statement by the person who is making the complaint. Now, complaints can be made anonymously, and the provision requiring that people who make false complaints are referred to the State's Attorney for prosecution is removed.

Misconduct Records - 50 ILCS 205/25

The Act requires that law enforcement agencies permanently retain records of officer misconduct.



Body Cameras - 50 ILCS 706/10-15

The Act requires that all law enforcement agencies implement the use of body cameras. It also prohibits officers from reviewing body camera footage before completing incident reports. But it includes a provision that officers may turn off their body cameras when they are in a correctional facility with a surveillance system.

Right to Communicate with Attorney and Family in Police Custody - 725 ILCS 5/103-3

The Act gives people in police custody the right to make three phone calls “as soon as possible upon being taken into police custody, but no later than three hours after arrival in the first place of custody.” Police must give a person in custody access to a telephone and access to their own contact list. The police custody facility must post a sign notifying the person in custody of this right and providing the phone number of the public defender's office.

Ban on Chokeholds - 720 ILCS 5/7-5.5.

The Act bans chokeholds in all cases in which an officer has not been authorized to use deadly force.

“Resisting Arrest” Arrests - 720 ILCS 5/31-1(d)

The Act prohibits police from arresting a person for resisting arrest “unless there is an underlying offence for which the person was initially subject to arrest.”

How Does the Act Impact Pretrial Detention?

The Pretrial Fairness Act

The SAFE-T Act included the passage of the Pretrial Fairness Act (“PFA”), an effort that organizers across the state have been pushing for since the Coalition to End Money Bond and the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice formed in 2016. The PFA makes Illinois the first state to completely abolish money bond. Effective in January 2023, this means that Illinois local and state governments will no longer be able to demand cash bail as a condition for release from jail.

While ending the use of money bond is a historic win, the passage of the wider PFA is critical to making sure that ending money bond results in decarceration instead of increased detention without the option for cash bail. To do so, the Act creates a presumption of pretrial release instead of detention. It states: “It is presumed that a defendant is entitled to release on personal recognizance on the condition that the defendant attend all required court proceedings and the defendant does not commit any criminal offense, and complies with all terms of pretrial release. . .” 725 ILCS 5/110-2(a). It further limits when detention can be imposed to two situations: “when it is determined that the defendant poses a specific, real and present threat to a person, or has a high likelihood of willful flight.” 725 ILCS 5/110-2(c).

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It also creates a “detention eligibility net” which sets forth a list of the charges that are eligible for detention. These include sex crimes, domestic violence crimes, gun felonies, non-probationable forcible felonies, and felonies Class 3 and above. 725 ILCS 5/110-6.1. All charges that are not included in the Act require release.

Therefore, to detain someone pretrial, the prosecution must prove (1) there is probable cause that the accused person committed a qualifying offense, (2) that the accused person poses a specific threat to a person or has a high likelihood of flight, and (3) that there are no less restrictive conditions that can prevent the threat to a person or the likelihood of flight.

Furthermore, the PFA sets the process for violations of pretrial conditions and decreases penalties for those violations. 725 ILCS 5/110-6. The PFA also reformed the warrant process by becoming the first state to make a distinction between failing to appear to court and willful fleeing—reducing penalties for accidental failures to appear. 725 ILCS 5/110-3.

Additionally, the PFA reforms electronic monitoring by guaranteeing that people on monitors have movement beyond their home and that their time spent on electronic monitoring will count toward any sentence. 725 ILCS 5/110-5(h). Under the Act, a judge must reconsider

electronic monitoring every 60 days to determine if a person can be released from electronic monitoring. 725 ILCS 5/110-5(i).

The PFA regulates risk assessment tools, by requiring that they are not the only basis for incarceration and allowing accused people to challenge the validity of the risk assessment tools used in their case. 725 ILCS 5/110-5(d).

Finally, the PFA assures that there is transparency and data collection through each county court system by creating a Pretrial Practices Data Oversight Board which will collect quarterly data on pretrial practices in each county. 20 ILCS 3930/7.7.

Additional Provisions

Crime Victims Compensation - 740 ILCS 45/2

The Act improves the application process for victims of crime, and expands the eligible group of victims to include “anyone living in the household of a person killed or injured in a relationship that is substantially similar to that of a parent, spouse, or child,” as well as increases the maximum compensation to \$10,000. The new law makes it so that a victim’s criminal history cannot automatically prevent compensation, but no compensation may be awarded to a victim while

Story continues on page 7

WASHINGTON PARK

By Jon Mettler

What I would give to just walk down a city street
To look up at the blue sky, to be free
To smell the fresh air of a downtown café
To linger in a restaurant, to be able to walk away,

On a cool, crisp, sunny autumn afternoon
Or a sweet, warm day in the month of June
To be able to lay on a beach, tanned by the sun
To be free to walk in a crowd, not noticed by anyone,

To take a walk in the park, strolling slowly by a lake
Watching all the parents and children happily at play
Listening to laughing, sounds of nature all around
To be filled with love, joy and happiness, no sadness to be found,

What I would give just to see you smile one more time
Feeling the warmth in your heart would last a lifetime
Holding your hands and gazing into your eyes
Playing with my daughter, being able to sing her favorite lullaby,

In spring to see the lilies growing wild in the fields
The fragrance of the roses of summer, pink, yellow and red
Seeing the fireworks at night on the Fourth of July
Oh, so beautiful and bright, high up in the sky,

How every night I dream of that walk through the park
Feeding the ducks and swans as it closes after dark
Seeing familiar faces smiling and waving as they pass by
Time stands still for many, but for me it tends to fly,

Roads as they wind, up, down and around the bend
Men, women and children, fishing, wishing there was more time to spend
With each other, the love and memories at their life’s start
For in my heart, I continually walk through my beloved Washington Park. ■

CONVICT

By Jon Mettler

You call me a convict, I once was like you
Call me a thief and a liar, I once was a husband and a father too
You think you are so much better, but that’s just not the case
You have faults too, you knew when to walk away,

I once paid taxes and held a steady job
I loved my wife and daughter, but then I began to beg, steal and rob
You and I are really just the same
Walking down the city streets, I am easier to blame.

You call me a convict; I am nothing like you
I once had pride and dignity, but now that’s over and through
You took that all away from me when I came to this place
You can’t even look me in the eye, I left my family in disgrace.

So, when you are sitting at your dinner table, please think of me
My lonely wife, son and daughter, you took my identity
I have made many mistakes in my life as I am sure so have you
I bet before my sentence is over, you will now be in here with me too.

Now you are a convict, how does that feel?
To be labeled by society, something so real
No longer a person, judged, ridiculed by others, it is so sad
How life for us is over, for all I ever wanted to be was just a dad. ■

Do you want to submit an essay, poem, letter or artwork for publication in a future issue of Stateville Speaks? See page 7 for address and submission guidelines.



AMERICA, LOOK AT ME



By Valdez Lamont Jordan

Photo by Mathew Schwartz

America, look at me, can you look past the stigma, the rumors, the fear and see that most of us were raised in gang-related, illegal drug and alcohol abused, criminal and violent infected environments. That many of our communities were/are warzones with warfare like activities taking place, America, look at me.

Take a real close look inside the prison system at us who was 14 to 24 years old when we entered the system. How many of us have gunshot wounds, stab wounds, scars on our faces, heads and bodies from violence which came from before most reached the age of majority, America, look at me.

Look at how many of us who were sexually abused, raped, or molested as children and kept this secret locked away inside with no form of help, therapy or healing, America, look at me.

Look at how many of us who were violently abused, seriously neglected, or simply abandoned by parent, guardian, teacher, community leaders, lawmakers and all others who were supposed to have our best interest at heart but didn't because they didn't know how to deal with us, so we were cast aside, disregarded and given up on, America, look at me.

Look at how young many of us were

when initiated into gangs, given guns and drugs and was misguided, misused, manipulated and programmed by those who influenced, promoted and convinced us that violence and bloodshed was the best and most productive way to live, America, look at me.

Look at how ignorant we were, how immature we were and although not quite so innocent, look at how unconscious to life and living we actually were America, look at me.

Look at how we were warehoused and how we ducked, blocked, dodged, managed and survived the real criminals, sexual predators, violent, sick, sadistic, hateful, and evil inmates and officers that we were forced to live and deal with America, look at me.

Look at how the lawmakers, state's attorneys, police and judges mislabeled, misrepresented and misjudged us, then misinformed and misled you into believing that we were super predators and career criminals incapable of being educated, rehabilitated and restored to useful citizenship, America, look at me.

In spite of it all, given little or no opportunity of official education, vocation or rehabilitation, look at how we turned our cells into classrooms, sought, gathered and shared productive knowledge and information, educated ourselves and challenged each other

to get better and do better and slowly begin to distance ourselves from the gangs, predators and career criminals, America, look at me.

After gaining positive knowledge, given official education, vocation and rehabilitation, look at how we have become accountable and responsible for our own actions past, present and future and are spiritual leaders, motivational speakers, teacher assistants, mentors, tutors, chairmen, peer educators, peacemakers, advisors and care givers and are the real reason the normal operation of Illinois prison system isn't full of violence, America, look at me.

When we entered the system, we could not articulate a sentence without using profanity or negative words, had destruction on our minds and didn't care about anyone not even ourselves. Now interview us and look at how we can hold an intellectual conversation with the best of them and how we want to and we're ready to contribute to our communities and give to those who need our help the most, America, look at me.

I can change, I have changed, I am change, please America, look at me.

My apologies....

I am sorry for the damage I have caused, and I am even more sorry for the damage that can never be repaired. ■

Continued from page 5
they are held in a correctional institution.

Traffic Fines - 625 ILCS 5/6-209.1(b)

The Act removes the state’s ability to suspend or cancel a person’s driver’s license because he or she failed to pay a fine or penalty for traffic violations, automated traffic law enforcement system violations, or abandoned vehicle fees.

What’s Next?

We celebrate these wins for justice and fairness in Illinois. They are a testament to the power of organizing and the power of the people. But we recognize that much is left to be done. People on the outside are continuing to push for deeper transformation of the criminal legal system in Illinois. Nationally, the Movement for Black Lives is pushing to make the Breathe Act a priority for the new presidential administration, with attention to the legislation’s guiding principles. We

must divest from policing, prisons, and surveillance, and invest in the things our communities require so that people can be free. And we must do the work of educating each other and making sure that the SAFE-T Act is properly implemented in Illinois.

This is a huge legislative package, so this article could not cover every detail or aspect of the legislation—please let Stateville Speaks know where you would like to see more detail and we will consider those suggestions for the next newsletter. If you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact Equity And Transformation (EAT) at 10 W. 35th St, Chicago, IL, 60616. In addition, if you or someone you know has a disability and would like to receive this article in a different format, contact EAT with your specific needs and EAT will make an effort to accommodate your request. ■

A SHOUTOUT TO MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS

To all those who have been left behind, incarcerated with the thought of never getting out: Never give up. Because the driving force, the spiritual force, will always be there with you as, long as you are real with yourself. If you’re innocent, fight for your innocence. If you’re guilty, fight for a change in your life. You can inspire others. As I leave you brothers and sisters, I just want you all to know that you can forever fight a system that will try to eliminate all human beings as a force of evil. Brothers and sisters, half of my heart still lies there, and I want you all to know I’m gonna do all that I can to bring forth formal justice to everyone who doesn’t have a voice. They talk about reform, then show ‘em reform. You’ll be hearing from me, my incarcerated brothers and my sisters.

Thank you.
Elijah



Above: Gerald Reed, with Mother Armanda Shackelford and supporters, following his release. Photo Credit: Black Lives Matter.

Elijah, whose legal name is Gerald Reed, was recently granted clemency after more than 30 years of wrongful imprisonment. Now that he has been released, he plans to start a website to assist incarcerated people in finding pen pals. ■

STATEVILLE SPEAKS
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Stateville Speaks needs artwork for publication in future issues. Please send us your illustrations or political cartoons. Artwork will be published in color. Unfortunately, we may not be able to return original work.

We also need essays and articles. Please limit submissions to around 500 words.

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POLITICAL 'TOON BY ARKEE

"FOR AN ARMED ROBBERY, I HEREBY SENTENCE YOU TO NATURAL LIFE IN PRISON."



THE PRISONER WAS A YOUNG 35 YEARS OLD.



HE WAS NOW AN OLD 85 YEAR OLD MAN.

NATURAL LIFE IS AN INHUMANE SENTENCE.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM SHOULD ALSO APPLY TO STATE PRISONS.

BY ARKEE - ©

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