

# STATEVILLE SPEAKS

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE • SPRING 2019

## CRITICAL UPDATES ON LAWSUITS & LEGISLATION

By Joe Vazquez & Dawn Larsen

While changes on the inside may appear to be unbearably slow or even non-existent, there are very impressive efforts, by many people and organizations put forth to bring about positive change.

**Davis v. Baldwin** was filed June 2016 by Uptown People's Law Center and Winston & Strawn. The case addresses the use of extreme isolation by IDOC. In March 2017 the Federal District Court ruled that prisoners had alleged sufficient facts to prove that the extreme isolation the prisoner is subjected to, in solitary confinement violates the prohibition against "cruel and unusual punishment" of the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Additionally, the court also ruled that the conditions were so deplorable prisoners could not be transferred to solitary confinement without a hearing. This case was granted class action status and is still ongoing.

**Ross v. Gossett** was filed March 2015 by Uptown People's and Loevy and Loevy. This case pertains to the use of excessive force. This class action lawsuit is on behalf of hundreds of inmates from Menard, Illinois River, Big Muddy River and Lawrence Correctional Centers who experienced physical and sexual abuse, as well as destruction of property by tactical officers, dubbed "Orange Crush". This lawsuit is seeking both damages for injuries as well as the prohibition of future such practices.

**Illinois HB3214**, introduced by state Rep. Rita Mayfield (60th District), addresses the issue of parole or lack thereof, for those sentenced to natural life sentences or life without the possibility of parole. This bill applies to those who "have served the greater of (1) a term of imprisonment of at least 20 years; (2) 25% of his or her sentence; or (3) the minimum term of imprisonment for the most serious offense for which the person was convicted." This is a parole bill intended to create a fair parole system for everyone, and give those not currently eligible, the opportunity to go before the Prisoner



Photography by Emma Hogg

Review Board. This bill had a first reading and as of March 29, 2019 has been re-referred to the Rules Committee.

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**"Impressive efforts, by many people and organizations, to bring about positive change."**

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**Illinois HB2039**, also known as the Restoring Justice Act was introduced by state Rep. Kelly Cassidy (14th District) earlier this year, and the intention of this bill is that "When the state decriminalizes or lessens the penalty for an offense, the bill would allow a person already convicted of that offense to petition the courts for resentencing. The courts would review each petition, with judges exercising discretion to cut a petitioner's sentence." Essentially, the bill would provide a retroactive avenue for those convicted of crimes that later had the penalties reduced or altered. The current status of this bill is that it had a second reading in the House and as of April 12, 2019 been re-referred to the Rules Committee.

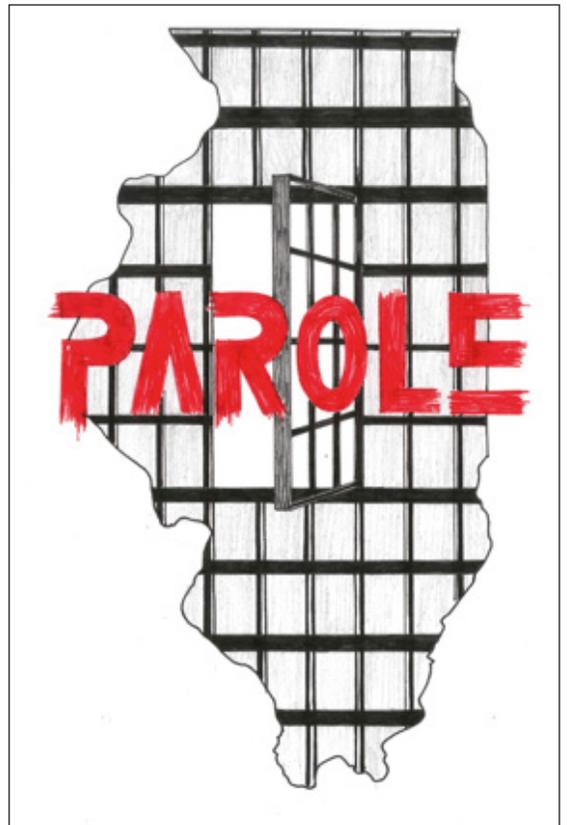
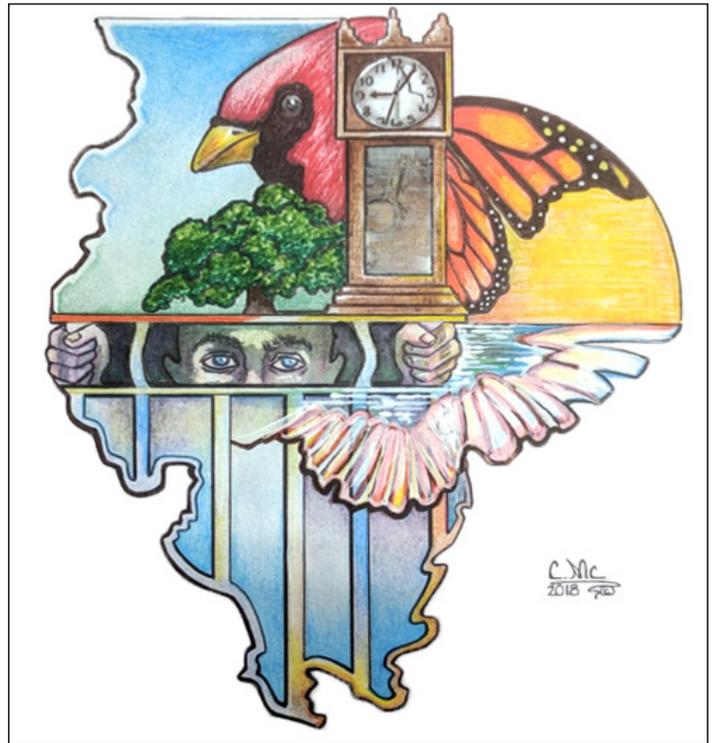
**Illinois HB2400**, also known as The Pathway to Community was introduced by state Rep. Arthur Turner (9th District). (HB 2400 re-

places the old Community Pathway bill known as HB 4173, which died in January 2019). The bill allows "a committed person at least 50 years old who has served at least 30 consecutive years to petition IDOC for participation in the program, which is a 5-year pilot program within IDOC. A maximum of 15 males and 15 females may be selected for the program and it excludes persons convicted of first-degree murder of a peace officer or firefighter and sexual predators."

Prior to being selected to participate in the program, a petitioner would have to prove they have been rehabilitated through several criterion set out by IDOC, including, but not limited to "the petitioner's successful participation in programs designed to restore him or her to a useful and productive life upon release, the genuine reform and changed behavior demonstrated over a period of years and the petitioner's remorse for the consequences of their criminal conduct." IDOC would also require the petitioner to complete an atonement and restorative justice program. After these conditions had been met, IDOC would offer "the victim and their family members an opportunity to participate in the final selection process for the Pathway to Community Program, up to \$1000.00 trauma-certified professional therapy

**SEE UPDATES, PAGE 6**

*Hope...Redemption...Change*



**Parole Illinois Art Contest Winners**

*Clockwise from left:*

*Roberto Hurtado (1st place)*

*Charles McLaurin (4th place)*

*Terry Dibble (2nd place)*

*Nickolas Haselrig (3rd place)*

# PAROLE ILLINOIS

# FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to another edition of Northwestern Illinois University's Stateville Speaks-if you are still here, then we are glad we are too. Without being overly optimistic, let's get right to it. The "P" word has surfaced. While Restore Justice Illinois has done an amazing job of passing HB 531 to restore parole to youth in Illinois, considerations for adults has gone flat.

Enter Parole Illinois. Spurred on by the Stateville Debate Team, an organized effort is forming to address what only 16 states, including Illinois, (& the District of Columbia) are denying, which is allowing for change, redemption and growth for adults and even for-

mer youth who have committed serious, prior crimes. No promises, just a look.

While it's been over 40 years since parole was abolished, the climate for it has not softened. We need to look where we are at in terms of retroactive youth sentencing, the release of elderly prisoners and the lack of compassionate release for the non-recovering sick and terminal prisoners. Though this campaign will not be quick or easy, it is certainly one that needs to occur.

In the meantime, perhaps more palatable will be with the tweaking of HB2400, which offers a way to strategically lay the groundwork for meaningful, future release and we believe,

if developed correctly, can allow for compassion and save the state (taxpayers) a lot of money.

Changing it up, we would like to thank T.C. Mabe for reminding us to look and find joy in the simplest of ways in even the harshest circumstances. We are truly amused, humbled and inspired by "Milk" and all that it really conveys.

And once more we thank you, our readers, for the reciprocity of information that we get while working on your newsletter. And wish us good fortune on our upcoming fundraiser to allow our dialogue to continue. ■



## KEEP IT GOING!

On the evening of June 15, a fundraiser will be held to benefit both Stateville Speaks and Parole Illinois. Chicago based, criminal defense attorney, Leonard Goodman has graciously offered to open his home and host this joint fundraiser. This will be a wonderful opportunity for us to raise funds to help offset some of the costs of producing the newsletter. Our goal is to continue to give you a voice and hope to continue to do so, as long as there is a need. And we can all agree that bringing back parole is a high priority for those incarcerated. This event can help the recently formed organization, Parole Illinois, gain some momentum. Illinois is one of only sixteen states, plus the District of Columbia, with no form of discretionary parole. We will update you on the fundraiser in the next edition. ■

## PAROLE ILLINOIS ART & ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

### Essay Contest:

1st Place: Marni Yong  
2nd Place: Karen McCarron  
3rd Place: Shawnette Green  
4th Place: Michael Carter, Michael Stone

### Art Contest (see opposite page):

1st Place: Roberto Hurtado  
2nd Place: Terry Dibble  
3rd Place: Nickolas Haselrig  
4th Place: Charles McLaurin  
Honorable Mentions: James Galambos,  
Devon Bennett

### Logo Contest:

1st Place: Corey Fox  
2nd Place: La Toyia Warren

Essays were judged by a panel of judges chaired by Former Director of the Northwestern Cook Writing Program, Dr. Penny Hirsch. The logo was judged by visual artist Ike Okafor-Newsum. Art was judged by everyone who voted!

We would like to thank the following people for helping to judge and process the submis-

sions, type the winning essays, process letters to everyone who submitted, create certificates for the winners, and provide technical help that was essential to running this contest:

David S., Penny H., Ike O.N., Curry C., Shirley S., Bob S., Kandi A., Hannah W., Angie S., Judy L., and Raissa K.

Sincerely,

- Howard, Joe, Felicity, and Shari  
for Parole Illinois ■

# DEAR STATEVILLE SPEAKS

I care to submit this correspondence to the Speaks, for I have been remiss in offering to the Speaks, my commentary, views, interpretation on the current system of parole, which is called – acronym – MSR – Mandatory Supervisory Release. Now after receiving and reading the Fall/Winter 2018 Speaks and the cover story “The Push for Parole”, it has been noted that Illinois abolished parole in 1978 – which was an integral part of the sentencing structure of Illinois that was referred to as indefinite sentence.

1. Where you went before a board whom decided if to grant one parole based upon??? Then it was supplanted by day for day and the name became Prisoner Review Board – acronym – PRB – that replaced the parole board (be mindful, you are still under parole even if it’s technical).

Then you have those of us who are sentenced under day for day that come under MSR which is governed by the PRB. Now from my standpoint MSR is an ugly mutation of parole that functions as a totalitarian apparatus that is discriminatory and bias, filled with nepotism and institutional racism.

2. Thus, before you are released you may be subjected to what is called, special conditions which is determined by the judgment of a partial, bias group of people that is referred to as the Prisoner Review Board. Now mind you, those special conditions can range from a number of things, from electronic monitoring,

mental issues, drug programs, anger management, etc.

As I perceive it, MSR is nothing but another layer of control and connotes restrictive, punitive, dictatorial and repressive action. Which supports the research that reveals that the United States spends an excess amount of money on a parole system – i.e., MSR for punitive policies.

3. Moreover, where is the professional input, insight, knowledge and evaluations that go into making these types of determinations? Yet the thinking is done in a vacuum, perfunctory and haphazardly. I am of the opinion that what is lacking and is absent from any decision-making process is the need for a re-entry apparatus that is completely independent. That will comprise of people from academia that evokes objectivity, fresh minds and fresh ideas. With degrees in Criminology, Corrections, Psychology and Social Science, that has the capacity to design a system that caters to those who are released from prison – as an individual, case by case, no lumping everyone in one analysis, based upon their needs and connecting those with the appropriate resources.

4. Which can provide a prisoner on release with the tools to transition into a meaningful human being equipped with the sustenance of living i.e. housing, apparel, transportation, education/vocational, a skill set, personal care, medical care. Without this, one is destined to fail and keep failing.

In addition, being released with just \$10.00 and having those who have lost essential family members to death or separation and after doing a substantial amount of time is a recipe for failure and death. Then you have those of us who have made the decision to serve their parole incarcerated or for some other reasons. Noted: My MSR date is currently 11/29/23, but if I opt out then it becomes 5/29/25.

5. Thus, I shall conclude where I began; I would concur that the restoration of a discretionary parole system is essential to the viable function of the correctional system. However, in order for said parole system to be effective it must have a constructive parole release criterion. Yet, when you supplant a system of bias with another you are treating the symptom, not the cause. Nevertheless, I’m not naïve to think that, as to what I have presented in this commentary, that the majority of the politicians in this state, or for that matter, lay people will endorse a dramatic overhaul of the MSR system.

6. However, I just am not the type of person who has educated himself, who can sit silently by and not express himself on matters in this country that affects his standing as a prisoner as well as a human being.

It has been said that “All that’s required for evil to triumph is for good men to remain silent”

- Larry Bell ■

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## LIFE WITHIN THE WALLS OF BARBWIRES & CHAIN LINK FENCES

By Tammy Englerth

Life in prison isn’t easy. It is already a harsh environment. Many women or men who come to prison have already experienced trauma in their lives, then they have to face more from their incarceration. We are judged on a daily basis. We are humans who made a mistake. Sometimes it’s very hard to understand others, but not one of us are any different than the next. We all have choices. It’s the choices we make that make us the person we are today. We have rights. Instead of judging one another, try seeing the other side. (Think about where the next person is, what might he or she be going through) Just because they don’t show it, they might be really going through something. So, every time you see someone just say hi or ask them how their doing. You never know – you could have just helped someone.

Through my whole incarceration I have seen so many people try to tear others down. Just like walking away from a fight or an argument doesn’t mean you’re weak. It means that you’ve grown, and you didn’t fall into their behavior. The Illinois Dept. of Corrections hasn’t offered much, but it doesn’t mean you can’t better yourself. You have a voice. Use it. You might not think people are listening. Trust me, they are. It only takes one person. So, don’t be afraid to use your voice. Everyone has a story to tell. Yes – we live in a harsh environment, but every circumstance can be used to the better. When you’re feeling like life is unfair and it’s too hard, think about people who have it worse, like people who are homeless, ill, handicapped and their survivors. So are we... no matter what your time is, it’s never final, but

you have to want to fight and use your voice. So, don’t stay silent, use your mistakes as steppingstones to a new future...the real test is when we walk out of these prison doors. ■

### SUBMISSIONS WANTED

Stateville Speaks wants to publish your article, essay, letter, poem or artwork in an upcoming issue. Please try to limit articles to around 500 words. Articles may be edited for length. Artwork may be printed in black and white, but published online in color. Due to the volume of submissions we receive, work will not be returned. If you have a topic you would like us to address in an upcoming edition, drop us a line and let us know. See page 7 for address.

# THE MILK

By Tim "T.C." Mabe

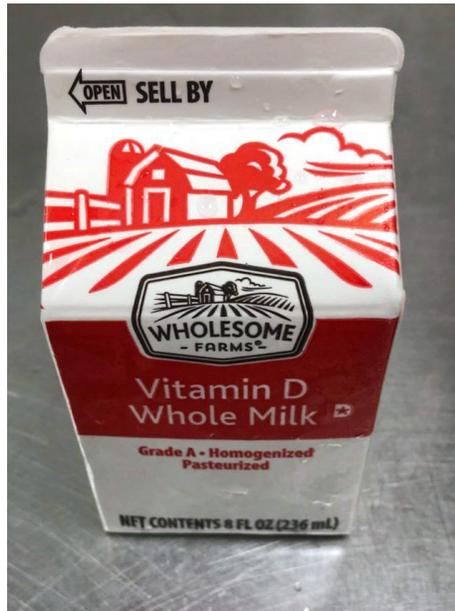
I can remember sitting in segregation, "THE HOLE", depressed, lonely and extremely hot & thirsty. It was July, Pontiac C.C. and I had just arrived – serving a one-year sentence for some infraction. I had no fan because it turns out – the property officer was on vacation. One of the hottest July's on record, and I've got no fan. I spent my days just sweating it out, waiting on my daily allotment of liquids. A 4-oz carton of juice at lunch, a small packet of Kool-Aid at dinner, and an 8-oz carton of frosty, ice-cold milk at breakfast.

The water in the sink was so nasty. It came out brown. The "hot" was scalding, the "cold" – lukewarm at best. But I still mixed it with my Kool-Aid and drank it, but I just couldn't bring myself to drink the water straight out of the faucet. I just couldn't do it. I used to soak my washcloth with it and rub myself all over in an attempt to try and keep cool – but it just made me stink even worse, mixed with my own sweat. It was terrible.

I remember laying on the floor, close to the bars, hoping a staff member would walk by so that I could get a small waft of a breeze – the heat was so intense. I'd wake up in the middle of the night, sweltering, drenched in sweat, so, so thirsty – and knowing I had no relief.

But then at approximately 4 – 5 am every day, we were served breakfast and with it – the milk. I'd always ask for an extra one but more often than not I was refused. But I'd get my one milk and feel the cold, wet drops of condensation on the carton and I would rub it against my forehead. It felt so good.

I'd open it and take a small sip – ABSOLUTELY GREAT!! I'd take a bigger swig –



man, **so good**. And then, I would allow myself a gulp! FANTASTIC!! The icy, life-bearing, full-body, precious, thirst-quenching ambrosia! I wanted to take another gulp – **but could I risk it?!?! I didn't want that moment of greatness to ever end but I loved it so much!** So, yes, I took another gulp!! This time **an even bigger one than the first!** Oh man, it went down so cold, so refreshing, so good! Mmm!!

But alas, I felt the carton was almost empty, due to my greediness of an ordinary cows blessing. There wasn't much left. I took a small sip, then another – and it was gone. It was over. The moment faded quickly, and the heat returned in full force. I had to wait another 24 hours to get another carton. Another day of sweat and thirst until my relief would come again.

"THE HOLE" can be a terrible place, any day of the week. But when it's **so hot** – you've got **no fan**, no good source of water, or any other type of liquid refreshment – man, that morning milk, is the stuff dreams are made of. ■



## IN REMEMBRANCE

Donzell Harris lost a battle with cancer on March 15, 2019. He spent 32 years behind the walls of several Illinois prisons never losing his determination to find a way out. Quiet and unassuming, Mr. Harris was a fixture in Menard's Law library always ready to answer a question or point the way to help someone find the answers they were seeking. If he wasn't debating a point of law with his fellow law clerks, he could be found meticulously pecking away on one of the old IBM typewriters crafting an argument. His journey has now begun. On behalf of all the law clerks at the M.C.C. library- Gregory C. Pecor ■

## TRIAL

By Shawn Turner

Well what do ya' know – it's finally time to fight for self-freedom and future existence as a human. **Trial...** I hope u don't think it's funny or take it as some kind of game, because it's no holds barred and if lost you feel like there is no one else to blame. **Trial...**Sometimes u win but most of the time you lose, u can copout or go the distance which one would us choose? **Trial...**Rather the deck of cards is not stacked against u, those jokers will always run wild, the state so cold they can finish you off with the testimony of a child. **Trial...**Don't rush it because time is money & dollar signs are written all over your face, be sure to prepare a good defense & not get beat with illegal facts on your case. **Trial...**A jury of twelve or put your destiny in the hands of a judge, there's only one God so the one with the black robe must really be a grudge. **Trial...**Paid lawyers are great, public defenders hesitate & if they want u bad enough, then the money spent was a mistake. **Trial...**Big courtroom full of lights-camera-and action so watch out- just like a movie you remember your script, or your life will get took, no doubt. **Trial...**I lost my life, but I hope the next person don't do the same, because after that you're no longer free & a number is now your name. **Trial...** ■

## LIFE AFTER NATURAL LIFE

By Eddie Williams

It rained today and left behind a murky view of steel bars and brick walls. For 32 years I've lived in a 5' by 9' cell and follow the same routine that's seldomly disrupted. Sitting on a rusty stool leaning on my paint chipped desk, listening to the unnatural sounds of snoring, farting, pissing and toilets being flushed. A few conversations and the occasional door being slammed, and me looking out the window every morning with nothing to look forward to and no incentives to act right.

Everything's a distant memory. No more letters and visits. Family and friends made their peace at my eulogy. Crying won't help me, and prayers do me no good. So, I build a wall behind the wall to become impervious to the pain. Losing my religion for the future...doing natural life without the possibility of parole. Freedom will come the day the coroner sets the time and date. ■

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## JAILBIRD

By Danny Armstrong

Locked inside this concrete cage, the bird  
refuses to sing -----  
Waiting on the coming dawn, and the  
promises that it brings.  
No key to turn the locks and loneliness  
remains -----  
Only the suffering and the pain attached  
to these large steel chains.  
Just this swing to rest my tired aching  
feet -----  
No pillow, no blanket and no songs to  
help me sleep.  
Do you remember happy songs, that brought  
us so much joy -----  
Just watch the faces and the smiles  
of every girl and boy.  
Then you will surely see that my song  
is truly missed -----  
I would sing so happily, if I only  
had one wish.  
My life can be summed up by saying  
just two words -----  
And I would hang my head in shame,  
because I am...., Jailbird. ■



Illustration: Rory Dobner

## WASTED TIME

By Jason Adkins

Is this Hell  
In a cell  
Adapting to the unknown?  
Caught for the crime  
Of wasting time  
Irresponsible is what I said.  
Now Ma' and Pa' are gone  
Even my little one's dead  
But I am not alone  
Suffering is by my side.  
That's what I try to hide  
Bottling it inside  
Doesn't leave much room  
For where I once  
Felt pride.  
Now I'm living  
With my demons  
My suffering  
My friends.  
Got caught wasting time  
Now a life wasted  
Is the price I pay  
Doing time with my demons  
My suffering  
My friends. ■

## LEANING ON...

By Patrick Comi

I'm navigating through this concrete jungle  
Leaning on my aspiration to carry me to heaven.  
Every day is the same struggles.  
I'm fighting doubts, I'm swinging at resentments, I'm  
punching dark thoughts about those who lied to the cops  
and left me to putrescent.  
Agony is riding my back - every time I break free, she's  
pulling me back. Strong bitch, but I'll never acknowledge  
defeat. I know I'll win as long as I endure on my feet.  
Leaning on my aspiration to carry me to heaven.  
Adjusting my state of mind to change my character, no  
longer blaming the enemy...I'm my own deliverer.  
Body and mind of a warrior free from indoctrination.  
I'm giving it back to the pagans...strictly meditation,  
keep your pharmaceutical medication.  
I'm leaning on my aspiration. ■

Thanks to Illinois Prison Talk (IPT)  
for support and further dissemination  
of Stateville Speaks,  
and your tireless reform efforts.  
Visit [illinoisprisontalk.com](http://illinoisprisontalk.com)  
to learn more.

## I, THE INVISIBLE MAN

By Anthony Spencer Sr.

I am the invisible man for none to see,  
I live in old memories and faded dreams.

No one really knows who I am,  
Due to the crimes I've committed on my fellow man.

In the shadow of a promising life,  
In shame, I left my family & wife.

So, in solitude I spend my days,  
Seeking the path to find my way.

Haunted and tormented I fight,  
The fatal mistake I made on that night.

I seek solace in my prayers,  
Hoping for forgiveness and someone to care.

For years this nightmare lasts,  
Overwhelming with the memories of the past.

Another day comes and ends,  
Lonely & isolated without a friend.

Jesus, where are you I cry,  
Is this the way I must die?

As an invisible man such as I,  
Sentenced to life in this cage, left to die.

So, I seek forgiveness in prayers every night,  
That this invisible man can be brought to sight. ■



## UPDATE

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and optional participation at no cost to the family members of the victim.”

The bill was put to a vote in Springfield several weeks ago and received 56 of the 61 votes needed. According to Bill Ryan, “the status of HB 2400 is postponed consideration. This means we will continue rollecall in January 2020”. He plans to continue advocating and bringing awareness to this bill throughout the summer and fall.

Other extremely important lawsuits and legislation regarding medical, mental health and medical co-pays, and juvenile parole will be covered in the upcoming issue. ■

# THEY GAVE ME LIFE

By Deon D. Green

“Life” is what I was given...  
Never again would I be free,  
They had sentenced me under the guidelines of inhumanity.  
Society I had been taken from, so that I can never be,  
Someone who could probably make a difference, in my community.  
They label me like some menace  
They even cage me like a beast,  
They just did not lock me up,  
They threw away the key.  
They even went on to say some of the most degrading things  
Such as: There is no rehabilitation for bad guys such as me.  
This system had set this plan for me WAAAY’ before my time,  
They knew that people and poverty eventually would lead to crime.  
I’m just another statistic  
A black man doing time,  
Society says I have no business being free on the outside  
As I replay the verdict over inside my mind, those people had found  
me guilty and sentenced me to die  
Instead they left me hanging in the Penitentiary for life.  
Inside they have me looking on the outside for a friend.  
They hope that I don’t find ‘no one’ who will take the time to reach back in.  
Don’t want to face the heartache of not seeing the world again,  
I too became a victim, to spend my whole life inside the Pen.  
I pray that there are people out there to advocate.  
I pray that legislation passes laws that will replace,  
This cruel and unusual punishment that I go through every day,  
Lord knows that I do not want to die inside this awful place.  
I fall to my knees and ask God please  
Bestow me with your grace  
Show me your Heavenly mercy, for those things I couldn’t change  
Forgive me for all the wrongs I’ve done  
I lift your Holy name, place your hands upon me,  
so that I may return to the world one day.  
They gave me life...■

## STATEVILLE SPEAKS

STAFF • SPRING 2019

**Senior Editor:** Gayle Tulipano

**Managing Editor:** Dawn Larsen

**Consulting Editor:** Bill Ryan

### Editors

Donald McDonald, Aldwin McNeal  
& Anaviel B. Rakemeyahu

### Assistant Editors

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Margaret Majos & Ron Kliner

### Women’s Issues

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### Cartoonist:

Arkee  
**Web & Graphic Design:** Sal Barry

\*\*\*

### Send letters & submissions to:

Stateville Speaks  
c/o Justice Studies  
LWH 4062  
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5500 N. St. Louis Ave.  
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Please limit essays to around 500 words.

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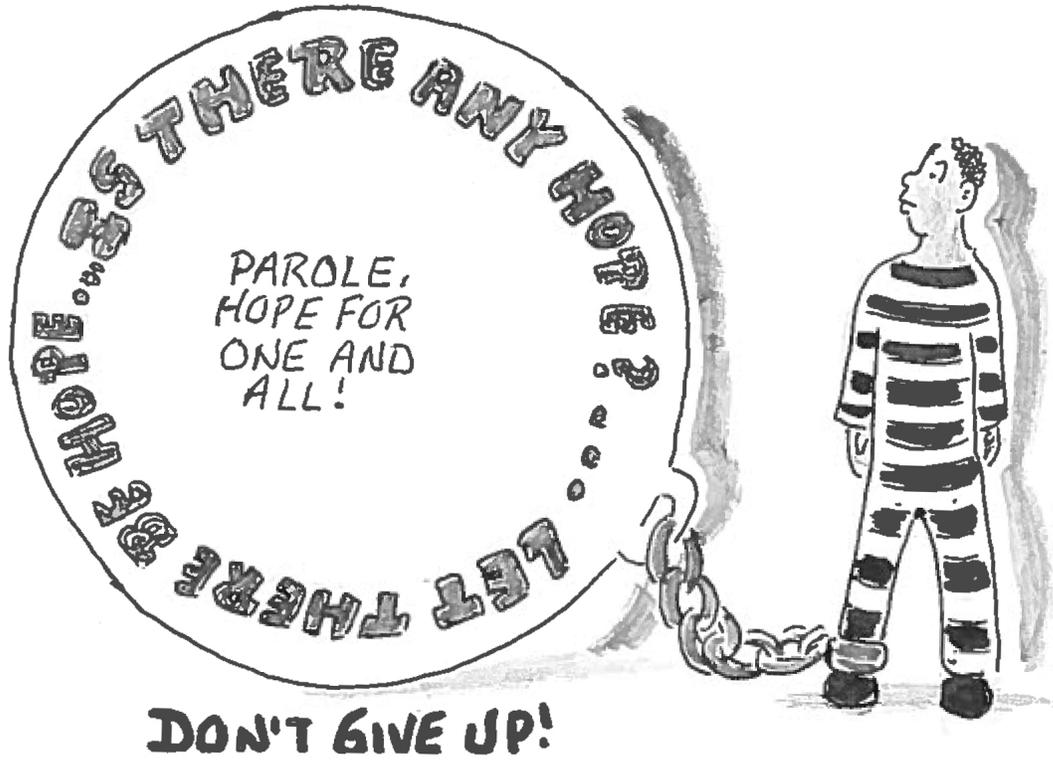
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