

COMPASSIONATE RELEASE IN MASSACHUSETTS

"ITS TIME HAS COME"

BY Francis Soffen

I came to prison in 1971 convicted of two murders. I have been here ever since. Now many in the "freeworld" say, "That's what he deserves", and I do not negate their right to hold that opinion, I just ask them to keep an open mind, listen, and try to see that this type of humane legislation is NOT about the individual, but is about forming a healing society.

When I came to prison I was a bull of a man. Strong as the ox that Paul Bunyon's legend describes. I was no angel on the streets and for most of my years inside I kept up the image of the tough guy from the hardknock streets. It sadly was not until this last leg of my journey that I learned to see the world through a truly different set of eyes. I am not going to expouse some late in life conversion story, just try to accept the fact that today I see much more clearly than ever before.

I am now in my early seventies, wheelchair bound, with multiple terminal illnesses. I am living in an assisted daily living unit here at the state's largest prison in Norfolk. Care in this setting is outrageously expensive. To treat me I must be sent to outside hospitals, triaged through the most expensive of processes, and then many times rerefered to another outside hospital. Prison guards must be paid to transport me, other guards must be paid to watch me at the hospital. I cannot even hold an ink pen, cannot bathe myself, and certainly pose no threat to anyone's safety. It is an insane waste of taxpayer dollars to keep me locked up like this, but the department of correction, parole board, and office of the governor just can't see fit to set me free. The cost of keeping a man like me in prison is too monetarily high, but it is also socially far too high as well.

When does punishment become torture? When is enough enough? I cannot see any reason why I must deapant this system in a box with a tab in the millions for the citizens to cover. The social fabric of any society is strengthened when justice is tempered with mercy. To keep old and dying prisoners, many infirm and bed ridden, behind bars is counter-productive to everything rehabilitation stands for. This is not about getting "off" the hook, but about changing the attitude that creates violence. that being an attitude if indifference. When people can dispose of one CLASS of humans it makes it easier to dispose of another. The opposite is also true. When you can have compassion and mercy for the oppressed, the lesser, and the fallen, you fertilize mercy throughout humanity.

I plan on continuing my story through this blog. I wanted to introduce folks to myself. My hopes are that I can bring you along on a bit of a journey. Stay tuned for more from the hidden recesses of the state prison system.

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ABOUT FRANK SOFFEN

Frank Soffen is a 70 year-old offender serving a life sentence for second degree murder. He has served a total of 37 years on that sentence in the Massachusetts Correctional System. During his incarceration, Frank was housed in minimum security facilities. He also participated in the state furlough program and successfully completed dozens of 12, 24, 48 and 72 hour unescorted furloughs into the community. Presently, Frank suffers from a number of very serious medical conditions. He has had four heart attacks, suffers from kidney and liver failure as well as other ailments. He is confined to a wheel chair, and requires assistance.

At the present time, Frank is housed at the Massachusetts Correctional Institution in Norfolk. There he resides in the Hospital Services Unit, Assisted Living Facility.

As previously demonstrated by his successful participation in dozens of unescorted furloughs, and his placement at minimum security facilities, Mr. Soffen poses no threat to public safety whatsoever. In fact, at his most recent parole hearing, held on July 25, 2006, one distinguished parole board member who voted in favor of paroling Mr. Soffen noted:

"For the following reasons, this Board member is of the opinion that Mr. Soffen should be released back into the community under parole supervision. First, Mr. Soffen has been incarcerated for approximately thirty four years on this sentence., a sentence which gave him parole eligibility in 1987. During his incarceration, he has displayed an overall positive institutional adjustment. In fact, during his thirty four years in custody, he has only incurred twelve disciplinary reports, a small number given the years of incarceration. During his incarceration, during a particularly volatile situation at the institution, **Mr. Soffen assisted in protecting a correctional officer who was being attacked by a fellow inmate. In fact, at his hearing, Correctional officer Scarpachi, now retired, supported Mr. Soffen's parole request. He indicated that while he was employed as a correctional officer in Walpole prison he was stabbed two times by an inmate. Mr. Soffen volunteered to enter the block and diffuse the situation according to Mr. Scarpachi. He did not know Mr. Soffen at the time, and credits Mr. Soffen with saving his life.** Second, he is now 67 years-old and suffers from major medical issues including suffering four heart attacks. He is unable to walk on his own and uses a wheelchair on most occasions. Physically, he does not appear to be a threat. He has a proposed home plan with his son in Springfield, Massachusetts and has extended family who were present at the hearing. and will be supportive in the community. Third, Mr. Soffen has displayed an excellent pattern of behavior during his 34 years of incarceration. He spent over three years in pre-release and successfully completed furloughs during this time. Finally, Mr. Soffen appeared remorseful for his actions and apologized to the victims' families throughout the course of the hearing. It appears that he understands the gravity of his offenses and the depth of the harm that he inflicted upon the family members of the victims.

For all of those reasons, this Board member is of the opinion that Mr. Soffen is a viable candidate for parole release at this time".

Unfortunately, despite the aforementioned favorable statements from a member of the state parole board, Mr. Soffen was denied parole and incredibly, given a five year review date.

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MEDICAL RELEASE
FOR
FRANK SOFFEN

TO SUPPORT FRANK SOFFEN

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