

**Testimony of Barbara Minnehan before the Joint Public Safety Committee on 4/4/2013 in support of Senate bill 1139.**

My name is Barbara Minnehan. I am a resident of Milford, Massachusetts, and the wife of Michael Minnehan, who died while in the custody of the Department of Correction on February 25, 2012. Michael was serving a 5-7 year sentence at Pondville Correctional Center when he became violently ill. Just a few days before he suddenly became sick, he was approved for parole with the condition that he first spend about 6 months in pre-release. Unfortunately, Michael instead spent the next 7 months struggling for his life at the Boston Medical Center, where he was eventually diagnosed with an abscess of the pancreas. Over 20 surgeries later, he died.

When Michael was in the hospital in critical condition, I tried to get him medical release. A medical release would not have brought him home – he was too sick – but it would have allowed me to be by his bedside alone, and to speak with him and visit him more easily. To my surprise, I was told that there is no such thing as medical release for prisoners in Massachusetts. The Department of Correction told me there was no way I could petition to have him released. Michael was in a constant life or death situation while in intensive care. I would regularly get calls from BMC asking if I could get there because they had to perform an emergency operation and weren't sure he would make it. It was an incredibly stressful time and frustrating to have the additional barrier of DOC visitation restrictions. I was only allowed to visit Michael for one hour twice a week despite him being in critical condition and even then, I encountered multiple problems trying to see him and had to be very persistent. Each time I visited Michael it would take me an hour and a half to get to the Boston Medical Center through public transportation. I would be gone from 9am until 5pm and only get to spend an hour with him. There was always at least one guard in the room, which I felt was so unnecessary given the fact that Michael was on a breathing tube, his abdomen was completely open from previous surgeries and he was clearly incapacitated.

Even if Michael had recovered enough to leave the ICU, his doctors told me that he would need to be in intensive rehabilitation in the hospital for a very long time- far past his parole release date and expiration of his sentence. Michael had no prior criminal history. He made a mistake and committed fraud while an insurance agent, but he paid for it with his life. Michael was an active member of our church and very involved in community service projects. The worst part about it is that, although he was so close to release, he was not allowed to die with dignity outside the custody of the DOC at a medical facility that would allow me and his other loved ones to be by his side at all times.

There were people in the DOC who wanted to help and who I believe would certainly have done whatever possible to get Michael released based on his medical condition, but there was

simply no way for them to do this. This is nonsensical to me. I urge you to pass this medical release bill from your committee and at least allow for the possibility of people like Michael, who clearly posed no threat to society, to have their loved ones, and not the correctional facility, administer their care under what are already such heartbreaking and difficult circumstances.

Thank you.

Barabara Minnehan

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