

Peace is Possible.

Transforming pain and anger into power and action



June 1, 2016

The Honorable Charlie Baker
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor
Statehouse – Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Parole Board Vacancy

Dear Governor Baker,

The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute is a center of healing, teaching, and learning for families and communities impacted by murder, grief, trauma, and loss. Our purpose is to transform society's response to homicide. We serve families on both sides: families of murder victims and families of people incarcerated for murder. The Peace Institute has twenty-two years of experience serving these families in the aftermath of homicide, including navigating the complexities of the criminal justice system from arrest to re-entry.

I founded the Peace Institute in 1994 after my own son Louis was murdered in the crossfire of a shoot-out. As a parent, I needed to know who could raise a child to kill. Doris was a mother just like me who tried her best to raise her son Charles. Charles was the young man who was convicted of killing Louis. I saw her shame and felt her pain. I realized that we were both impacted. I offered my hand and heart of forgiveness she accepted.

What forgiveness looked like in practice for my family was working together to get through the parole process, rather than opposing Charles' parole. At the same time, I did not want Charles to come home to our neighborhood and cause more harm or end up dead. Doris and I submitted recommendations to the Parole Board to impose certain conditions that would allow Charles to be both successful and accountable. These conditions included 200 hours of community service.

Through both my personal experience and my professional experience over the past two decades serving families on both sides of murder, I can tell you that the parole process can be re-traumatizing and re-triggering for all involved. At the Peace Institute, we work with families on both sides to support them through the process with the goal of ensuring that no matter the outcome of the process, families are able to live in peace.

I understand the complex and competing priorities during the parole process - I've been through it along with my two living children. It was not easy to build a relationship with the Bagues family, but it was necessary for our own healing process. I'm pleased to share with you that Charles Bagues was paroled in 2012 and continues to live peacefully with his family in our community.

I am aware that there will be an opening on the Parole Board as Ms. Sheila Dupre's term expires. On behalf of the Peace Institute, I urge you to consider an appointment to the Parole Board that reflects the needs and experiences of families of victims as well as the families of incarcerated people. Families on both sides are affected by similar challenges including grief and trauma that may manifest as drug addiction and mental illness. Our families would benefit greatly from the appointment of a person who

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Page 2

has been active in the fields of psychology, social work, bereavement counseling, or addiction treatment.

The Massachusetts Parole Board has plenty of representation from law enforcement, district attorney's offices, parole, probation and corrections – in fact, 90% of appointments since 2006 have been individuals with backgrounds in these fields. Now is the time to appoint someone who will use their social service expertise to recognize the impact of grief and trauma on the offender and both families and to make recommendations that are in the best interest of those families. We know from experience that family and community engagement is an essential component of a peaceful parole process.

I have come to see the parole process as an opportunity to look toward the possibility of healing, reconciliation, and accountability rather than staying stuck in the offenders' guilt which was already established at the time of their conviction. I believe your next appointment will have a profound impact on the tenor of the Parole Board. According to the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, 80% of incarcerated people have issues with substance abuse. The MA DOC also reports that 28% of men and 59% of women have documented mental health issues. Please take this opportunity to appoint psychologist or social worker who has professional experience responding to what families have been struggling with.

We have also noticed there are other areas where the Massachusetts Parole Board has room for improvement, particularly in ensuring that all victims' families are fully informed of their rights and all victims are properly notified by the state about the status of the person incarcerated for harming or killing them or their family member.

The Peace Institute is here and willing to be a resource to your administration and your appointees as we all share a vision of a more just and peaceful Commonwealth.

In service,

Chaplain Clementina Chery

Cc: Steven Kadish, Chief of Staff
Lon Povich, Chief Legal Counsel

Overview:

Jobs Not Jails (JNJ) is conducting a survey to determine which policy issues are of the utmost importance to be considered for legislation in the upcoming session (January 2017-July 2018). The major goals of JNJ are to reform the current criminal justice system in Massachusetts, put an end to the creation of new prisons, and redirect funds to create long-term job opportunities in high crime Massachusetts neighborhoods. The JNJ organization focuses primarily on the pre-incarceration and post-release/reentry stages of the criminal justice system, so please keep this in mind in your responses. Please take a few moments to help us prioritize our policy options, your input is greatly appreciated!

I. Incarceration and Sentencing

Please rank the following policy issues in order of preference, 1 being the most preferred, 9 being the least.

___ **Treatment First** (the diversion to substance abuse treatment and mental health services as a first course of action for non-violent cases)

___ **Reclassification** (reclassifying some criminal misdemeanors as civil misdemeanors so individuals won't carry a CORI)

___ **Court Diversion** (i.e. specialty courts: drug, veterans, homeless, mental health, etc. We understand that often to participate in these specialty courts you have to take guilty pleas and they go on your CORI)

___ **Mandatory Minimums** (repealing long mandatory minimum sentences on non-violent drug offenses)

___ **Bail** (reforming the process to assess intention to show up to court)

___ **Incarceration Alternatives** (in relation to non-violent offenders such as motor vehicle violations, larceny violations below \$1500, etc.)

___ **Restorative Justice** (determining which cases it can be applied to, what costs would be incurred and what to do when the victim appears uninterested)

___ **Programming** (increasing program opportunities for prisoners who are incarcerated; we understand that if we are going to increase the request for good time, we also need to have adequate programs so people can access programs in order to take advantage of good time)

___ **"Good Time"** (increasing actions', such as participating in programs, effect on lessening the length of one's sentence)

___ **Other** (please specify below)

II. Recidivism

Please rank the following policy issues in order of preference, 1 being the most preferred, 9 being the least.

___ **Prison Resources** (increasing job training and treatment within prison)

___ **Reentry Lifestyle Funding** (increasing funding to be put towards housing, treatment, mental health services and healthcare access)

___ **Reentry Job Funding** (increasing funding to be put towards job training, job placement and wage supplements to insure hiring)

___ **"Good Time" Accessibility** (allowing those serving mandatory minimum drug sentences the option of "good time")

___ **CORI Access** (Currently, most felonies can be sealed after 10 years and misdemeanors after 5 years; should we work on shortening these times even further?)

___ **DOC Classification** (fixing classification's relationship to eligibility for programs)

___ **CORI Reform** (asking for further lowering from 10 years/5 years, initiating a certificate of rehabilitation model)

___ **Expungement** (expunging juvenile records and stopping the school to prison pipeline)

___ **Pre-Release Plans** (allowing all prisoners to have a pre-release plan; currently excludes mandatory minimum offenders)

___ **Other** (please specify below)

III. Supervision of Former Prisoners

Please rank the following policy issues in order of preference, 1 being the most preferred, 3 being the least.

___ **Parole Fees** (repeal fees of \$80-\$90/month as they burden ex-prisoners who are working in low wage jobs)

___ **Targeted Supervision** (tailor supervision – i.e. parole and probation - to only those at highest risk to re-offending relation to parole and probation)

___ **Other** (please specify below)

IV. General Info (optional)

1. What is your name?

2. What organization are you affiliated with? (If any)

3. Please provide the best way to contact you (address, email, phone number) below