

September 24, 2019

Representative Graham Filler
House of Representatives
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Re: HB 4980-85

I have read quite a few of articles in which individuals indicated that the Clean Slate package makes it easier for people to get a second chance after they've served their criminal sentences, paid their debt to society, and remained crime-free. However, in my case it **does not affect** me; this is due to the fact **that I was convicted of multiple non-assaultive convictions (four) during one criminal investigation over a course of four (4) years. I also have one prior offense, which was committed within the four years of the other offenses and within the same investigation resulting in five felony convictions in total.** However, even though I have been a model citizen, I will **never** become eligible for expungement under the new bills and continue to endure endless retribution for a crime in which I already served my time.

I struggled through school and the teachers just passed me to get me out of their class. I did graduate, but I could not read or write. At the age of 10, I was placed in a juvenile facility because my mother did not want to deal with me any longer. I spent about a year there and once released I lived here and there with friends, and sometimes with my older sister. I was selling small amounts of marijuana at that time and working odd jobs. I met a guy that asked me to go to his stepfather's house to "watch out" when he was taking some cocaine from his step-father's stash; he gave me two big ladles-full of cocaine for looking out for him. At that point in my life I had never seen nor sold any cocaine.

At that time in my life – my early teens – I was seeing a lot of violence, and one of my best friends killed himself right next to me playing Russian roulette (brain matter went all over me). I was run over by another drug dealer during an argument in a bar and I was fighting a lot. I could feel my life in a spiral to hell.

At the age of 27, I was functionally illiterate and without strong family roots, but I had a lot of ambition to achieve some sort of success. I was arrested on drug charges and after 3-1/2 years (1,375 days) in Oakland County Jail, on November 4, 1996, an Oakland County jury convicted me of conspiracy to deliver over 650 grams of cocaine, possession with intent to deliver between 50-225 grams of cocaine, and two counts of delivery of less than 50 grams of cocaine.

On December 12, 1997, I was sentenced to a term of life imprisonment without parole, 10-30 years, 2-30 years, each sentence to run consecutively to the others.

During my time in the Oakland County Jail awaiting trial and sentencing, I met another prisoner who mentored me and helped me learn to read. This prisoner was well educated and

assisted me for free; he told me that if I did not learn how to read and write, I would probably die in prison.

After I arrived in the Michigan Department of Corrections, I immediately began to make a path forward toward rehabilitation. After working for Prison Legal Services for some years, I applied for membership in the Paralegal/Legal Assistant Section of the State Bar. On October 1, 2008, I received confirmation of membership and I continue to be a member in good standing.

I prepared my own commutation petition, and on September 30, 2010, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm granted me a commutation of my life sentence. I spent approximately 17 ½ years in prison, but by good fortune I was able to find the help from other persons to further my educational development. I developed skills and a strong support system which has made my re-entry into society far easier than most. I worked hard to overcome my illiteracy and learned to channel my desire for success into avenues that would help others while increasing my own skills.

Since my release on January 4, 2011, I have been employed at the State Appellate Defender Office (SADO), and I have completed my associate's degree at Lansing Community College, with a major in Paralegal Studies and a minor in Business, along with a General Associate Degree. I graduated as a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and summa cum laude. Besides working at SADO, I have started three small businesses (handyman and Lawn Care), and Rodriguez Property Group LLC, in which I purchase homes and remodel them and rent them out. On June 30, 2012, I was married and have a stepdaughter; I also have a wide circle of friends.

But I will always have to stand in the shadows because of my past without any feeling that I have paid my debt to society. I was convicted of multiple non-assaultive convictions (**five**) during one criminal investigation that I served my time for. My felony convictions continue to deny me many basic rights of citizenship and continue to do so for decades, there is no means of remediation and no way for me to join the community in which I live wholeheartedly without expungement.

What Rights Do Convicted Felons Lose:

1. Right to Serve on a Jury
2. Felons Cannot Join the Military
3. Professional Licenses (i.e can't be a notary)
4. Traveling Abroad (i.e, cant go to Canada)
5. Employment Rights
6. Public Social Benefits and Housing
7. Gun Ownership
8. Parental Benefits such as adoption