

BENNIE GRAY JR.

#259595



November 17, 2013

Connecticut Sentencing Commission
Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy
Central Connecticut State University
Downtown Campus, Room 212
185 Main Street, New Britain, CT 06051

RE: November 21, 2013 Sentencing Commission Public Hearing

Dear Commission:

I am one of the many inmates who will be affected by House Bill No. 6581, regarding youth offenders. At this time I would like to present my written testimony which is attached. It is entitled "The Way That I am Took Time."

Thank you,

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "B. Gray", written over the words "Respectfully submitted".

" THE WAY THAT I AM TOOK TIME "

The question I've often asked myself and the constant theme of my incarceration has been, "How do I make peace with myself?" My first response to how I was feeling is I know I was not a dumb kid. I was a lot smarter than my actions would suggest, but this truth still did not prevent me from making the errors I made. So this frustrated me. Early into my incarceration I was extremely hard on myself. I went from being a star football player, voted homecoming king for two consecutive years, and class president to becoming INMATE NUMBER 259596. How I got here is not simple, but it made a lot of sense to me at the time in my undeveloped mind.

I grew up different than a lot of my peers. I had my mother and my father in the house with me. My mother [REDACTED] and my father [REDACTED] were hard working people. Unlike my siblings I over achieved to maintain their approval. When it came to the classroom I've had great grades since elementary school. When I made it to Junior High I was promoted to honors classes. I also did odd jobs in the community which included raking leaves, shoveling snow, and cutting grass. I even taught myself to cut hair by the age of 12. I started sports at age 9, and won 2 out of 3 Peewee League Superbowls in football. I still remember the day I told my dad I wanted to play football. I was about 8 years old and I sat between my father's legs on the carpet, and I watched the Chicago Bears. I was so amazed and fascinated

by what they were doing. I started to pull at my father's leg seeking his attention as I told him, "Daddy I want to do that." "I want to play football." I was a little too young at the time and highly disappointed when I learned I would have to wait another year until I turned 9 before I could play, but when the time came I was ready and both of my parents were there cheering me on. I was not a troubled kid at that point, and the streets and other outside forces did not have any affects on me until issues in my home arose.

The turning point of my young life was around the time my parents split and got divorced. It destroyed me because my father was my idol and the whole process left him looking like the bad guy. On top of that I had to wrap my head around the fact that my hero was really a drug addict who allowed our family to be broke up. I felt betrayed and I felt like all of the effort I had put forth trying to get good grades and being a good athlete so I could get into college was for nothing. I will never forget this one particular game my freshman year in highschool where I was starting varsity and I scored. The crowd was going crazy so by force of habit I looked into the stands and my mother nor my father was there. Some may have felt I should have still been happy, but I wasn't. I accomplished all that I did academically and athletically to make them proud so now I was feeling like "what am I doing it for." As time went on I started to question everything. I didn't trust my parents anymore. They broke up our family and they never asked me or my siblings' our opinion or nothing.

They didn't consider how it would affect us and that bothered me. I found myself hanging out and trying things I never wanted to try before because it went against what I once believed, but all of my beliefs were rooted in the words of my parents. I lost trust in their words so I wanted to figure out this big world on my own.

Soon I found myself trying to mix two worlds. In the day I would be in high school and at night in the streets. It was a juggling act I couldn't maintain. Before I knew it my actions at night started to affect my grades. By 11th grade I fathered my daughter [REDACTED]. Fatherhood sprung itself upon me whether I was ready or not, and the reality is I was just a kid myself. A tug of war took place in my mind. I didn't want to let go of my dreams, but at the same time I had to live up to my responsibilities to my child. Selling drugs made sense to me. Confused about everything from being a father to who I was as a person in this big world I just did the best I could with what I was working with. This led to a lot of bad decisions on my part in hindsight, but I didn't have experience with issues I was facing so the way I was operating was not based in wisdom it was based in blame. I blamed my parents so I acted out, and I continued to act out until it landed me in prison.

My biggest accomplishment by far while being incarcerated is maturing into a man. It was not an easy road and I made a lot of mistakes along the way, but I made it. The first thing I did was stop blaming anyone for my mistakes.

I may not have pulled the trigger that night, but I was there. I realize that in every situation I have power. I could have done a lot of things differently. When I started to look at me and not worry about the actions of others I stopped wasting time and I started to seriously work on me. I realized that what happened in my past is behind me. I have no more control over that, but I can start today and work towards changing my future. I blamed my co-defendant for the way my life turned out from the day I came in prison until about December of 2010. Then I finally got to the point I forgave him and myself. I wanted to end the blame cycle that had been in my life for far too long. When I did that I saw myself in new light and the possibilities were endless with someone of my talents. When I adopted that attitude I found my smile in this uncomfortable situation and even though I had been incarcerated for well over a decade I had found a way to redeem my days. I really started to believe in me in my future after prison. On April 8, 2012 I was the first inmate at Radgowski C.I. to be baptised in an open ceremony. I am presently a praise team leader and a member of the choir at Enfield C.I. I am a Christian. It wasn't an easy transition, but it fits me and I've found the peace I've been looking for. I am a long distance dad, but I believe I do a good job because my advice comes from a good place of experience and stability. I love my children and I would love to be there helping them along as they go through the maturity process. I work as a barber for two prisons; [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], I have college credits from Asnuntuck Community College in Introduction to

Geography, I passed a college Computer Keyboarding course, and I was trained by Master Chef Barry Dufault, of world renown Johnson and Wells Culinary Arts School, in food service, product awareness and management. I am also ServSafe certified by the National Restaurant Association. Further more I am presently involved in drug treatment programs year around as a volunteer mentor, and I mentor a character development program called P.E.P (People Empowering People) sponsored and facilitated by staff from the University of Connecticut. In the class I've shared my life experiences with other prisoners with hope I can encourage and inspire someone else.

I'll be the first to admit that I experimented with my purpose in life as a kid and the bad decisions I made along the way definately got me here, but I am clearly not the kid I once was. I stand here all of these years later as a man in need of a second chance.

Respectfully submitted,



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