

3-12-2026

**RE: In Support of S 140**

Dear Chair Hashim, Vice Chair Norris, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

The National Life Without Parole Leadership Council promotes a society that recognizes the human capacity for transformation, promotes true accountability, and creates opportunities for healing and making amends. The Council is comprised of 14 members from across the U.S., each of whom were once sentenced to life without parole (LWOP). Our collective experience has equipped us with unique insights into the potential for human transformation and rehabilitation. Our members have demonstrated significant transformation and now contribute positively to their communities through mentorship, earning college degrees, and working with individuals being released from jail and prison. Moreover, we have seen zero recidivism among our members, reaffirming our belief that no person is beyond redemption.

We understand that the Vermont legislature is considering **Senate bill S. 140**, which if passed, would create a second look sentencing review process for individuals incarcerated in that State. The bill proposes a sentence review process for individuals who have served a minimum of 10 years of incarceration or at least half of a sentence of five years or more. It would also establish a judicial review process for individuals 65 years of age or older with serious medical needs.

We understand and deeply respect the need to ensure public safety and justice for all members of society. We also recognize the human capacity for change and the meaningful contributions. Therein lies the necessity for mechanisms to be established to review cases individually, recognizing the possibility of transformation.

It's important to us that we address any skepticism around the possibility of LWOP-sentenced individuals being safely released. We offer the existence of our council, its members, and hundreds of others who once were sentenced to LWOP and are now released as evidence that transformation is possible.

Research by Human Rights Watch examining the lives of 110 people who were sentenced to LWOP in California but later released also supports this:

The detailed accounts of the individuals formerly sentenced to LWOP outlined in this report supplement a growing body of evidence suggesting the sentence of LWOP is an ineffective and even harmful tool for crime reduction. Recidivism data on these individuals in California in conjunction with interviews exploring how they live their everyday lives show that not only are they safe

**NLC MEMBERS**

APRIL BARBER

JOSE BURGOS

ALLEN BURNETT

STEVEN GREEN

WILLIAM HOFFMANN

JAMES LAVIGNE

ARTHUR  
LONGWORTH

THAISAN NGUON

SHEENA ROGERS

KELLY SAVAGE-  
RODRIGUEZ

JAMES SWANSEY

JAMES THOMAS

BRYAN WIDENHOUSE

DARA YIN

additions to the community, but they are contributing in important and positive ways.<sup>1</sup>

Among other things, their research found that 94 percent of respondents volunteer regularly, 84 percent financially assist others, 90 percent work full- or part-time, and 70 percent have stepped into a healthy adult role in the life of a young person. Most respondents expressed a profound sense of remorse for the harm they had caused earlier in their lives, and a strong desire to make amends as their primary driving force in life since returning home. “Every day I wake up and try to make amends for my crimes and try to do the best I can in memory of the victims in my case and their families,” one respondent told Human Rights Watch. “I’ll never be able to fully make up for it, but I’ll do my best to try.”

The notion that a person who commits grave harm is incapable of change, growth, and giving back to society is a paradigm that must be challenged. While there must be accountability for actions, there must also be room for rehabilitation, reconciliation, and reintegration.

We respectfully request your consideration and hope our perspective informs your deliberation on the proposed bill. Redemption is not only possible but is happening now, as evidenced by the individuals who were once sentenced to LWOP and are directly contributing positively to their communities.

We hope to engage in a deeper dialogue about this critical issue and are available for any further discussion or to provide any additional information you may find helpful.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Members of the National Life Without Parole Leadership Council (NLC)

April Barber- LWOP  
Served 31 years  
Sentenced commuted by Governor

Jose Burgos- LWOP  
Served 27 years  
Resentenced after change in laws

Allen Burnett- LWOP  
Served 28 years  
Sentenced commuted by Governor

Steven Green- LWOP  
Served 28 years  
Sentenced commuted by Governor

William Hoffmann- LWOP  
Served 20 years  
Sentenced commuted by Governor

James Lavigne- LWOP  
Served 31 years  
Sentenced commuted by Governor

Arthur Longworth- LWOP  
Served 38 years  
Resentenced after changes in laws

Thaisan Nguon- LWOP  
Served 20 years  
Sentenced commuted by Governor

Sheena Rogers- LWOP  
Served 25 years  
Resentenced after changes in laws

Kelly Savage-Rodriguez- LWOP  
Served 23 years  
Sentenced commuted by Governor

James Swansey- LWOP  
Served 28 years  
Resentenced after changes in laws

James Thomas- LWOP  
Served 30 years  
Resentenced after changes in laws

Bryan Widenhouse- LWOP  
Served 31 years  
Resentenced after changes in laws

Dara Yin-LWOP  
Served 20 years  
Sentenced commuted by Governor

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<sup>i</sup> *"I Just Want to Give Back": The Reintegration of People Sentenced to Life Without Parole.* (2023, June 28). Human Rights Watch. Retrieved March 14, 2025, from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/06/28/i-just-want-to-give-back/reintegration-of-people-sentenced-to-life-without-parole>