

Death Row Exonerees Sign-On Letter Appealing for Clemency for Troy Davis

Chairman James E. Donald
Georgia State Board of Pardons & Paroles
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, SE
Suite 458, Balcony Level, East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334

May 1, 2011

Dear Chairperson Donald and Members of the Board:

We, the undersigned, are alive today because some individual or small group of individuals decided that our insistent and persistent proclamations of innocence warranted one more look before we were sent to our death by execution. We are among the 138 individuals who have been legally exonerated and released from death rows in the United States since 1973. We are alive because a few thoughtful persons – attorneys, journalists, judges, jurists, etc. – had lingering doubts about our cases that caused them to say “stop” at a critical moment and halt the march to the execution chamber. When our innocence was ultimately revealed, when our lives were saved, and when our freedom was won, we thanked God and those individuals of conscience who took actions that allowed the truth to eventually come to light.

We are America’s exonerated death row survivors. We are living proof that a system operated by human beings is capable of making an irreversible mistake. And while we have had our wrongful convictions overturned and have been freed from death row, we know that we are extremely fortunate to have been able to establish our innocence. We also know that many innocent people who have been executed or who face execution have not been so fortunate. Not all those with innocence claims have had access to the kinds of physical evidence, like DNA, that our courts accept as most reliable. However, we strongly believe that the examples of our cases are reason enough for those with power over life and death to choose life. We also believe that those in authority have a unique moral consideration when encountering individuals with cases where doubt still lingers about innocence or guilt.

One such case is the case of Troy Anthony Davis, whose 1991 conviction for killing Savannah police officer Mark MacPhail rested almost solely on witness testimony. We know that today, 20 years later, witness evidence is considered much less reliable than it was then. This has meant that, even though most of the witnesses who testified against him have now recanted, Troy Davis has been unable to convince the courts to overturn his conviction, or even his death sentence.

Troy Davis has been able to raise serious doubts about his guilt, however. Several witnesses testified at the evidentiary hearing last summer that they had been coerced by police into making false statements against Troy Davis. This courtroom testimony reinforced previous statements in sworn affidavits. Also at this hearing, one witness testified for the first time that he saw an alternative suspect, and not Troy Davis, commit the crime. We don’t know if Troy Davis is in fact innocent, but, as people who were wrongfully sentenced to death (and in some cases scheduled for execution), we believe it is vitally important that no execution go forward when there are doubts about guilt. It is absolutely essential to ensuring that the innocent are not executed.

When you issued a temporary stay for Troy Davis in 2007, you stated that the Board "*will not allow an execution to proceed in this State unless and until its members are convinced that there is no doubt as to the guilt of the accused.*" This standard is a welcome development, and we urge you to apply it again now. Doubts persist in the case of Troy Davis, and commuting his sentence will reassure the people of Georgia that you will never permit an innocent person to be put to death in their name.

Freddie Lee Pitts, an exonerated death row survivor who faced execution by the state of Florida for a crime he didn't commit, once said, "You can release an innocent man from prison, but you can't release him from the grave."

Thank you for considering our request.

Respectfully,

Kirk Bloodsworth, Exonerated and freed from death row Maryland

Clarence Brandley, Exonerated and freed from death row in Texas

Dan Bright, Exonerated and freed from death row in Louisiana

Albert Burrell, Exonerated and freed from death row in Louisiana

Perry Cobb, Exonerated and freed from death row in Illinois

Gary Drinkard, Exonerated and freed from death row in Alabama

Nathson Fields, Exonerated and freed from death row in Illinois

Gary Gauger, Exonerated and freed from death row in Illinois

Michael Graham, Exonerated and freed from death row in Louisiana

Shujaa Graham, Exonerated and freed from death row in California

Paul House, Exonerated and freed from death row in Tennessee

Derrick Jamison, Exonerated and freed from death row in Ohio

Dale Johnston, Exonerated and freed from death row in Ohio

Ron Keine, Exonerated and freed from death row in New Mexico

Ron Kitchen, Exonerated and freed from death row in Illinois

Ray Krone, Exonerated and freed from death row in Arizona

Herman Lindsey, Exonerated and freed from death row in Florida

Juan Melendez, Exonerated and freed from death row in Florida

Randal Padgett, Exonerated and freed from death row in Alabama

Freddie Lee Pitts, Exonerated and freed from death row in Florida

Randy Steidl, Exonerated and freed from death row in Illinois

John Thompson, Exonerated and freed from death row in Louisiana

Delbert Tibbs, Exonerated and freed from death row in Florida

David Keaton, Exonerated and freed from death row in Florida

Greg Wilhoit, Exonerated and freed from death row in Oklahoma

Harold Wilson, Exonerated and freed from death row in Pennsylvania