

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
FROM: Jarrett Adams, Exoneree
DATE: December 16, 2015
RE: Senate Bill 322 (resolution of claims against the state for wrongful imprisonment of innocent persons)

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Jarrett Adams and I am Judicial Law Clerk for the United States Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit Court. Before graduating law school and becoming a law clerk, I was serving a 28-year sentence in a Wisconsin state prison for a crime I did not commit. With the help of the Wisconsin Innocence Project, my conviction was reversed and all charges were dismissed on the prosecutor's motion. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 322, because the needs of those wrongfully convicted are great and as of now they afford so little.

In 1998, I was barely seventeen years old when I was falsely accused and ultimately wrongfully convicted of a rape that never happened. After years of appeals, the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed my conviction for ineffective assistant of counsel due to my lawyer's failure to call an alibi witness who corroborated my innocence and undermined the entire state's case.

I served nearly 10 years in prison before the courts reversed my conviction and granted me freedom. Ten years in prison have a tremendous negative societal and economic impact that this committee has the opportunity to correct. Years in prison mean years of isolation from society, years of missed opportunities to contribute to society, years of missed economic growth and development, years of loved ones growing older without you, years of mental and psychological affects and more importantly, years you are being left behind by society to never catch up.

Before my life was stolen from me, I was a working teenager, with a good track record and good credit, saving for college, surrounded by my loved ones. Following release, I returned home to aging or deceased family members, absolutely no credit and no means of obtaining employment or paying for school. Please do not be confused by my current status as an attorney and law clerk. Yes, I have figured out a way to turn my mess into my message; however, my road has been challenging and remains challenged by my wrongful conviction. I still need help and so many of my fellow exonerees have not even begun to receive a glimpse of support. Currently, when a wrongfully convicted person is released from prison in Wisconsin, he is afforded nothing but the ability to request at most \$25,000 to reenter society. Men and women are being released at the age of retirement with nothing to retire on. Because of these laws, many people are forced to live in shelters or with family members. Those who need medication and mental healthcare are forced to go without. There are no programs designed to help those wrongfully convicted reenter society. However, those who are convicted and released from prison are afforded services by the state.

When wrongfully convicted men and women are released with nothing, they are likely to be a burden to their family and taxpayers. With the support provided by Senate Bill 322, exonerees will have a fighting a chance of rebuilding their lives and contributing to society. I am asking this Committee to pass Senate Bill 322 not only because it is the just thing to do, but also because its passage ensures the health and safety of the community and all of its members, including exonerees.

Respectfully,

Jarrett Adams

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