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EXPANDING VICTIM AWARENESS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CORRECTIONAL
SERVICES

VICTIM'S RIGHTS WEEK CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

THIS CERTIFICATE IS AWARDED TO

LIFER'S CONFERENCE MEMBERS

FOR THEIR TIRELESS WORK AND DEDICATION TO MAKE MUCH NEEDED FUNDING FOR
MADD MARYLAND AND HELPING IMPAIRED
DRIVING CRIMINALS

Debra Nieghoff 4/22/13
John Worley

With Annual Events that coincide with the National Crime Victims' Rights Week, the Lifers Conference at MCI-H has become a recognized leader in providing forums for the Voices of Victims. Walk-a-thons and individual contributions have benefitted the House of Ruth, MD. MADD, and the Crime Victims Resource Center of Maryland, Inc.

On April 23, 2013, the Lifers Conference was recognized for being an example of giving back to the community and successfully demonstrating how inmates can be part of restorative justice. This prestigious award was presented by Lisa Spicknall, MD Chapter of MADD, along with Debra Nieghoff, DPSCS Office of Victim Services. Mr. Gary Maynard, former Secretary of the DPSCS also signed the award.

The first victim awareness meeting for the Lifers Conference occurred in June 2009. Representatives of MADD, Mrs. Jan Withers spoke of the tragic loss of her daughter and, Lisa Spicknall, spoke of the unimaginable loss of her young children, Richie and Destiny. John Worley, Publisher of the Prison Journal also attended. This group has built upon that first meeting, expanding victim awareness throughout our membership and our incarcerated peers.

THE LIFERS CONFERENCE



As a symbol of our awareness, The Lifers Conference planted a tree on the prison grounds on April 29, 2009, in lasting memory of all who have suffered a loss through another person's criminal actions, violent behavior or recklessness. A rededication ceremony was held on June 21, 2011.

The planting of the Scarlet Brandywine Dwarf Crab Apple tree was made possible by the generosity of the MCI-H Community Correctional Service Committee, (CCSC), and the Family Tree Nursery of Maryland. The image of this tree has become an embraced symbol of the Lifers Conference, imprinted on all publications and events.

The Lifers Conference at the Maryland Correctional Institution of Hagerstown is a membership of concerned men who responsibly advocate for prison and parole reform while providing helpful and informative programs.

The primary objective is to change public perceptions, and see a return to merit based re-entry for those persons sentenced to a parole eligible life sentence in the State of Maryland.

This group was established in July 2008, and is recognized as a Service group within the prison. The By-Laws and Constitution were ratified on August 6, 2008, with amendments and revisions in January 2015.

The Lifers Conference was formed in response to the continuous and overwhelming political influence effecting meaningful parole considerations for those sentenced to parole eligible life sentences, and the increasing number of men, women and children impacted by those decisions by the Office of the Governor.

The States of Maryland, California and Oklahoma are the three remaining states that require gubernatorial approval for parole release for persons sentenced to a parole eligible life sentence, after a Parole Commission makes an independent merit based determination of parole suitability. For more information on Parole eligibility for those sentenced to parole eligible life sentences in MD, SEE: The Annotated Code of Maryland, Correctional Services Articles § 7-301 et seq., and COMAR 2.08.01.18

As a collective Group, our Goals can be placed in three basic categories. **1). Advocate** to inform the public and our elected officials in the MD General Assembly and the Governor that there are many in the DPSCS, Division of Corrections, who are deserving of a meaningful opportunity for parole release. **2). Promote** the transformation (s) of those who have developed a greater understanding of their actions, who are remorseful; those who have benefitted from self-rehabilitation and those who have been punished by decades of imprisonment. **3). Sponsor** programs of interest to the membership and general population.

MERIT BASED RE-ENTRY

A compelling number of men have reached, or exceeded the sentencing objectives of the Judges who imposed their parole eligible life terms or other lengthy sentences years ago. Many of those sentencing Judges clearly anticipated meaningful parole consideration be given to those persons. Despite the rehabilitative efforts made by these same defendants, parole has become elusive in the state of Maryland as officials are motivated by their own political ambitions. The entire process fails when parole considerations are not based on earned merit and left to political agendas as evidenced by the last 21 yrs.

Now is the time for the Maryland General Assembly to remove the Governor from the parole process to prevent an abuse of discretion. With Merit Based re-entry, the MD Parole Commission would be able to determine parole suitability. In Maryland up until 1995, Lifers were found to be suitable for work-release programs and eventual supervised parole.

As part of a publicized media event, former Gov. Parrish Glendening announced his Life means Life policy in 1995. Many years later he would admit his actions were for a bump in his approval ratings. Though his popularity did not rise, he also failed to issue a clarification that the statement was not meant to be all inclusive, (SEE: 2/20/2011 Baltimore Sun Newspaper, Dan Rodericks reporting). Former Gov. Robert Ehrlich, Jr., used the power of commutation for Lifers approximately six times during his single term as governor. Gov. Ehrlich's successor, Gov. Martin O'Malley promoted a failed parole model based on a political agenda, granting a mere two Lifer commutations. On May 30, 2015 Gov. O'Malley announced his candidacy for President of the United States.

We need your help and involvement to remove the Governor from the parole process and return to merit based re-entry. If you have a suggestion or proposed course of action, please accept this invitation to lend your support.

In conclusion, the Lifers Conference acknowledges our Families, Friends and Supporters. Your involvement matters. Together, we can continue the advocacy for prison and parole reform. Should we be able to provide you with any additional information, or, if you would like to address this membership, please contact our advisor:

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