

Floyd Bledsoe
House Committee on Judiciary on House Bill 2611
February 15, 2016

My name is Floyd Bledsoe, and I'm from Oskaloosa in Jefferson County. On December 8, 2015, I was exonerated for a crime I did not commit. After spending nearly 16 years behind bars for the murder and sexual assault of my sister-in-law Camille Arfmann, DNA evidence and a suicide note from my brother Tom revealed that he was the real perpetrator and that I was and am innocent. I am testifying today in hopes that my experiences may be of help to you in understanding and considering the real-life human implications that underlie this bill. And that they can help you determine what is the right outcome for all that those like me have lost.

Being in prison for a decade and half not only robbed me of my life. It robbed my children of a father and my wife of a husband. In 1999, I was 23-years-old, employed full-time, and making a life with my wife and our two sons when I was convicted of a crime I did not commit and sentenced to life in prison plus 16 years. My sons were 9-months-old and 2-and-½-years-old at the time. I have not seen them since that moment.

While I was in prison, my sons grew up without a father. Holidays and birthdays came and went and I could not celebrate them with my family. I missed every milestone with my sons and my loved ones. I did not get to play ball with them or teach them how to drive. Every memory that parents hold most precious occurred without me. My wrongful incarceration deprived me of all of those moments.

In addition to the relationships and life I have lost, my wrongful incarceration has also impacted me financially. I have lost years of wages and work-experience. And on top of that, I lost 40-acres of land I inherited while in prison. Had I not been incarcerated, I would have lived and on and worked this land. Instead, the land, valued at approximately \$50-55,000, was sold and used to pay for the wrongful death suit filed against me and to supplement the costs for my postconviction appeal. And even when I was able to work in prison, I was unable to collect all of my small wages. 25% of my earnings before taxes went straight to room and board, 5% went to restitution, and 2% to court costs. That means even when I attempted to gain skills, I was forced to pay the state for the fact that it was keeping me locked up for a crime I did not commit. The financial losses I have suffered from my wrongful conviction cannot be measured merely in a lost wage. They are so much more.

Beyond finances, just being in prison takes a toll. It is a cost that all of us who are wrongfully incarcerated pay. I would kindly ask that as you think about this bill, you visit a prison, and if that's not possible, visit one of your county jails. Go inside of a cell and imagine your life there. Think about being one of the people you see locked up, and then wonder what it would be like to know you have done none of the things you have been accused of.

Think about all the things in your daily life that you could no longer do. Think about your family and friends and how you'd have little to no contact with them. What would your life be like without them? What would their life be like without you? Would they believe you if you said you were innocent?

Finally, I would ask you to consider the life those of us lucky enough to get out are returning to. When after 16 years, my innocence was proved and the conviction was overturned, I was released back into the community without any support from the state. I was given no identification, no money, no services, no healthcare, no transportation, no place to live. If I had been released on probation or parole, the state would have done more for me. I would have been entitled to more services if I was in fact guilty.

Instead, I had to start over, relying on supporters for housing. My former jobs were not there anymore. My support networks are not the same. I have no employment history and no credit history to rely on. In short, I have had to start over from scratch with nothing to show for the time that was taken away from me.

The missing years can never come back. I will never get that time back or the relationships or career that could have been built during that time. As this committee considers HB 2611, I hope it will also consider—How much is that loss worth?