

**INNOCENCE  
PROJECT**

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December 19, 2024

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The three signatories to this letter over the last four decades have participated with colleagues in more than three hundred exonerations of innocent people who were wrongly convicted. Many were sentenced to death. Many were convicted of homicide but were just lucky not to be sentenced to death. All of them were caught up in a capital punishment system, whether state or federal, fraught with endless procedural bars, mind-numbing technical litigation, and emotional rollercoaster rides. It wreaks pain, fear, and anger on the families of victims, defendants, witnesses, and everyone connected to the process. For what purpose?

Every scientifically sound study of the death penalty in America shows it does not deter. It is a public policy based on retribution, too often understood by the public to be vengeance.

Our life's work proves the risk of executing an innocent is unacceptably high. Whether it be racial bias, false confessions, eyewitness misidentification, unreliable forensic science, perjury, law enforcement misconduct, or just plain human error the innocence movement has demonstrated there are more wrongful convictions than those who toil in the system ever imagined. We know of many examples of wrongful executions and undoubtedly there are many more that escaped attention or serious investigation. And make no mistake, much of the unreliable forensic science that resulted in wrongful convictions came not from state labs but was sworn to with absolute (albeit false) confidence by agents/examiners from the FBI lab.

As of today, the Registry of Exonerations documents 3,630 exonerations since 1989 and more than 32,750 years lost. Since 1989, as the risk of executing the innocent became salient, public support for the death penalty has dropped dramatically. Indeed, the United States is one of the few democracies that still employs it.

President Biden when you ran in 2020 you had the courage to break with past political convention and come out against the death penalty. That was an important step. But now we urge you to go further by commuting the sentences of 40 people on federal death row to life sentences. It will be a moral statement for our country and it will be heard around the world. Seamus Heaney said it best in his great poem *The Cure at Troy*. He recorded a reading of it for

an Innocence Project gala (hyperlinked [here](#)). He was too sick to travel and died a few months later. But these words continue to inspire and speak to this moment.

Human beings suffer.  
They torture one another,  
They get hurt and get hard.  
No poem or play or song  
Can fully right a wrong  
Inflicted and endured.  
The innocent in the gaols  
Beat on their bars together.  
A hunger striker's father  
Stands in the graveyard dumb.  
The police widow in veils  
Faints at the funeral home.

History says, Don't hope  
On this side of the grave...  
But then, once in a lifetime  
The longed-for tidal wave  
Of justice can rise up,  
And hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change  
On the far side of revenge.  
Believe that a further shore  
Is reachable from here.  
Believe in miracles  
And cures and healing wells.

Call miracle self-healing:  
The utter, self-revealing  
Double-take of feeling.  
If there's a fire on the mountain  
Or lightning and storm  
And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing  
The outcry and the birth-cry  
Of new life at its term.  
It means once in a lifetime  
That justice can rise up  
And hope and history rhyme.

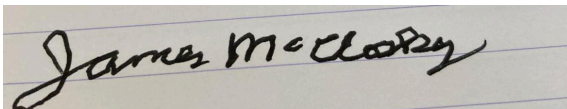
Respectfully submitted with hope and humility,



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Co-Founder & Special Counsel, Innocence Project



Jim McCloskey  
Founder, Centurion Ministries

**CENTURION** seeking  
freedom for  
the innocent  
in prison