

Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 336
Lamonte McIntyre
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
February 14, 2018

Good morning Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Lamonte McIntyre and I spent 23 years in prison for a crime I did not commit. The state of Kansas arrested me when I was just 17 years old and I just got out in October, at age 41.

At the time of my arrest, I was just a teenager. I loved doing gymnastics moves, telling jokes and spending time with my family. I was finishing high school in Kansas City, planning for my future and working part time at a restaurant where my mother also worked. My family was very close, and I enjoyed life with three brothers and an older sister. My mother worked hard and had the dream of running a restaurant.

Then on April 15, 1994 my entire world was shattered. I heard from my grandmother that the police were looking for me and wanted to talk to me. I was completely bewildered by this, and went with my mother right away to see what they wanted. Police officers arrested me for a double homicide. I told them they had the wrong person and that I didn't know anything about it. Although I was shocked to be charged, I still believed in the justice system. I was sure everything would be cleared up and I would go home. When the jury found me guilty, I couldn't believe it. The entire situation felt surreal. As I later found out, even the victims' families believed I was innocent.

Walking through the prison gates as a teenager was the most terrifying thing in the world. Two days after I got there other inmates attacked me. At such a young age I was vulnerable and every day was a fight just to stay alive. For the first few years I would wake up and wonder what kind of violence I would encounter and how I was going to survive. I rarely slept. I never had peace. My family lived four hours away from the prison I was first sent to. Despite this distance, mom would come to visit once a month and I would call her, but I couldn't bear to tell her what I had to go through every day.

As the years went by I tried to make the best of my situation. Education was my focus, and I finished my high school degree and enrolled in trade school courses. Then I took college classes, which I had to pay for myself, and worked towards my associate's degree. God kept me going and I joined a church group. I mentored younger inmates to give them the guidance that I needed when I first got to prison.

On October 13, 2017, thanks to the work of the Midwest Innocence Project, Centurion Ministries, and my lawyers, my case was dismissed and I was set free. My case was called a "miscarriage of justice" in the courtroom, and that was certainly true. It was an incredible feeling when the truth finally came out and I walked out of the courthouse a free man. Everything was new and exciting at first, but now the reality of everything that I lost is setting in and I know I have monumental challenges ahead of me.

The state of Kansas took away 23 years of my life and has given me nothing to rebuild. The state took away my youth. It took away every birthday and Christmas with my family, and every hard time when they needed me and I couldn't be there. I missed joyful occasions and I missed sad ones too. I had nieces and nephews born while I was in custody who are young men and women now. I missed their entire childhoods. I was not able to comfort my mother when she buried her father, my beloved grandfather.

The state also took financially from my family and me. My mother took what little money she had saved from working multiple jobs and paid lawyers to appeal my conviction in 1996. I was crushed when their efforts did not succeed. After that, I spent two more decades in prison. During that time, I had no opportunity to establish a career, build a family, buy a home, or save money for my retirement. At the same time, the state took thousands of dollars that I earned from years of working in prison to cover fees like room and board. I paid to keep myself locked up in a place where I never should have been. Meanwhile, my family suffered greatly as

well. My mother broke down emotionally and was hospitalized. My brothers and sisters struggled to cope with losing my presence, and family celebrations and holidays became a time of pain, not joy. It was not just me who was imprisoned, my entire family paid an incredible price and the years of pain have taken their toll on all of us.

When I left prison three months ago, all I had were the clothes that my lawyers gave to me and a small forced savings on my Lansing Correctional Facility inmate account I'm still dependent on other people's kindness just to have basic necessities. I'm trying to build a normal life. Since my exoneration I've enrolled in barber school and after that I plan to finish college. My dream is to open my own hair salon. But it's a struggle to pay for food, gas and everything else while I'm trying to finish my education and start a career.

The state of Kansas can't give me back the 23 years it took from me. But it can pass this compensation law so I can start my path to a successful future. This law would provide a fair amount of money for each year that I lost in prison. It would help me get the resources I need to heal from my wrongful conviction. We have much work to do to make our system more just so what happened to me doesn't happen to another innocent person. But we can start here. Supporting compensation for the wrongfully convicted should be something we can all agree on. I hope you will support this law to help exonerees in Kansas finally get the justice we deserve,