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Charlottesville, VA

The Honorable Ralph Northam
Office of the Governor
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

3/11/2019

Subject: Character Letter for Jesse Crosson

Dear Governor Northam,

My name is Karen Pape, and I have owned a successful small business in Charlottesville for 30 years. I am 63 years old and am a native Virginian. I have known Jesse Crosson since the early 1990's when he was in middle school at Tandem School, a Quaker friends preparatory school in Charlottesville. Jesse was a classmate of my son.

Jesse and my son were friendly in middle school and early high school. He was the kind of boy that you always remember. He was gentle, a little vulnerable and insecure, but he was genuine, intelligent and honest. I always liked him, and, although I worried about his fragile nature, I never distrusted him or had any concern about his intentions or veracity.

I have to say that when he was arrested for abduction, robbery and unlawful wounding, I was extremely surprised and sad. I kept wondering how we, as a community, had failed him. I knew that Jesse had done something bad, but it just didn't match with the boy I had known a few years earlier. It was extremely hard to understand what events had led him to this result, and the only way I could make sense of it was that Jesse's fragility led him down a path of associating with some dangerous people. He became addicted to cocaine, and he lost his way. It was terrible, and his mother was devastated. It changed her life path as she quit practicing law when Jesse received a sentence that was extraordinarily strict for a very young man, with no chance of parole. It was really painful to think that a boy who had been so smart and full of promise would essentially spend the rest of his life in prison. His sentencing guidelines were for 11-16 years in prison, and he received 32 years. As a result, to date, he has spent almost half of his life in jail.

Over time, I have come to understand that, in the very best of situations, incarceration has two purposes. First, there is punishment, and Jesse has certainly been punished, because he has spent his entire adult life in prison. Secondly, and perhaps more important, there are the grander ideas of rehabilitation and redemption, and I think that these should be the ideal goals of incarceration. And, I believe that Jesse is a perfect example of them.

Jesse has really worked to develop himself within the prison system. He received his BA from Ohio State University and graduated from the state electrical apprenticeship. He has been engaged in his spiritual development over the last 16 years, and has been a mentor to other prisoners suffering from mental illness. He has been conflict free for 12 years.

I have stayed in touch with Jesse through social media and I have to say that he has been a real inspiration for me in my own time of the loss of my husband of 40 years. To see him thriving in a situation that I honestly don't know if I could survive has given me greater courage in my own life. I admire Jesse Crosson for the way he has faced his punishment and tuned his life around.

I think that Jesse has the grounded-ness, the courage and the serenity to have a very successful life, and I believe that he will use his life experience to help others. I know he can make a great, positive impact in this world if he is free to do so, and it would be a travesty to keep this man in prison for what may be the remainder of his life.

While I cannot provide housing or employment, I can certainly be an advisor to Jesse and I know that his wonderful mother, Nancy, will give him the support he will need.

I hope you will help him. Please feel free to call me if you have any other questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Pape