

**TESTIMONY BY DEBORAH PRETLOW (DIN 99-G-0758)**  
**BEDFORD HILLS CORRECTIONAL FACILITY**  
**BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE**  
**COMMITTEE ON CRIME VICTIMS, CRIME & CORRECTION HEARING ON HOW**  
**THE ELDER PAROLE AND FAIR & TIMELY PAROLE BILLS WILL IMPROVE**  
**RELEASE LAWS AND PUBLIC SAFETY IN NEW YORK**

December 7, 2022

My name is Deborah Pretlow/DIN 99G0758. I am 53 years old. I am the mother of an awesome 33 year old daughter and the daughter of an amazing 83 year old woman. I have two older sisters and numerous nieces and nephews. I have loved and lost in here. I have grown as a person, a mother, a daughter, a sister, an aunt, and a woman. I have currently served twenty-five years and six months of twenty-five years to life term of imprisonment for kidnapping, robbery, and manslaughter in the first degree. I take full responsibility for taking the life of my victim, that of the child she carried and destroying the lives of her family, my family, and a society that trusted me.

I have sat before the Parole Board three times and all three times have been denied release. On August 3, 2021, I earned a Limited Credit Time Interview while at Taconic Correctional Facility. I was denied because I failed to remember a detail of the crime that I committed twenty-four and a half years prior: I took full responsibility throughout the interview. I sat before the parole board again, at Taconic Correctional Facility, six months later on February 8, 2022 for my Initial Parole Board Interview: 18 month hold. This time it was because the parole board said I had not gained insight into the crime I committed and recommended that I continue programming: I owned my responsibility. On November 1, 2022, at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility I sat before the Parole Board for a de novo interview. I was denied because of my instant offense and the panel of commissioners was not convinced of the series of events: I declared full responsibility. In all three interviews, the panel departed from my low and medium COMPAS Risk-Analysis scores. In all three interviews, it was stated on record that I had no opposition to my release.

There is so much I wish to share but I'll try to keep this as brief as I can. What I say is from personal experience, great insight, and absolute sincerity. This is not just about me but incarcerated individuals as a whole. The New York State Parole Board guidelines, rules, verbiage in the law, and risk-averse practices need to change. Unfortunately, the parole board is literally a backward-thinking institution. It focuses solely on our crimes.

The purpose of the parole board according to Executive Law §259, among other things, is not to solely focus on a static event: the instant offense; that is the purpose of the courts from indictment to sentencing. Nevertheless, that is precisely what the board focuses on. The verbiage

in the law such as the "deprecation" clause, which really means the seriousness of the crime, allows the parole board to justify keeping incarcerated individuals, people who have truly shown rehabilitation, in prison. There are two easy outs for the parole board. One is what a former commissioner said, "This gives commissioners an easy out... If you can always have the seriousness of the crime as your hook to keep people in prison, that's what you'll do." This is how the deuce club was formed as well. Unfortunately, the crime will never, ever change.

However, many people do, and I did. I am no longer a victim of abuse, I am a survivor. The facts are, that I was born into a household of abuse and trauma and was a victim of intimate abuse from ages 16 to 27, will also never change but again, I changed. Violence and abuse are not normal as I believed. It is unhealthy and I have worked hard to break that way of thinking and can recognize unhealthy behavior for what it is, unhealthy. I remove myself because I know better today. However, for the past 23 years, I have unequivocally stated that that is absolutely no reason or justification for my horribly bad choice on June 3, 1997. I did not make a mistake, I made a terrible, irrevocable, irresponsible bad choice.

The second easy out is that of cognitive dissonance. That is when a person holds two ideas, attitudes, or beliefs that are psychologically inconsistent. The parole board commissioners can not like us and then deny us release. They have to dislike us. A way in which to do that is to question us about the minute details of our horrible crimes, make disparaging comments in the form of questions, and test us to see how we will react. I am no longer an angry person, therefore never answer with anger. I do not, nor will I ever again, think, feel, or do as I did at 16 or 27. Yes, I was 27 and not a child but neither was I an adult who had all the answers. Who among us can say at 27, they knew everything? I am a woman with a healthy mind and healing spirit. I am a woman who considers everything and emotion is no longer my master, logic, and reason are what I live by. I not only love myself today, I like who I am. I speak of my experience for two reasons: One is that I know I have a voice, I matter and I am a forever-ending work in progress. The second is in the hope of helping other young girls and even older women understand they are not alone, do not have to hide behind shame, and can be survivors without taking lives, destroying and devastating so many others.

However, as I sat before the parole board I was retraumatized and spoke with my therapist about it; that is who I am today. In being forced to give the minute details over and over again, not only am I back there but so are the commissioners. They cannot see me for who I am today because now, they are emotionally affected by that day. They are there picturing me committing this crime: hence, cognitive dissonance.

I have insight, which did not come quickly or easily, that only I can have. Look at my packets. My remorse is not just in my tears but in my actions as well. I came back to Bedford Hills maximum prison voluntarily for a Master's Degree in Professional Studies with NY Theological

Seminary. I graduate in June. This is number 39 in my programming: special projects, community-based, therapeutic, and academic because this is who I am. In my mind, no one grows older, because in prison life stands still. I simply exist. I forget what day of the week it is because it is like one long day in which I take naps and wake up to the sameness. The parole board will never see me if it doesn't change to become forward-thinking.

Thank you for considering my thoughts. I hope you consider passing the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills.