

**Testimony of Alice Craig
Proponent of Senate Bill 336
Senate Judiciary Hearing
February 14, 2018**

Dear Chairman Wilborn and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am writing in my personal capacity to express my strong support for SB 336. As this committee knows SB 336 proposes a means of compensation for the wrongfully convicted in the state of Kansas. I have been a supervising attorney in the Paul E. Wilson Project for Innocence and Post-Conviction Remedies for the last 14 years and a defense attorney for 23 years. The Project has been litigating state and federal post-conviction habeas cases since 1965. Our clinic represented Floyd Bledsoe and Richard Jones in their exoneration efforts.

Before you are three men, Floyd Bledsoe, Richard Jones and Lamonte McIntyre, who almost twenty years ago were thrust into a dystopian world where they were treated as robbers, rapists and murders. It's a story line that has been told in books, movies and real life. From Roger Thornhill in North by Northwest, Andy Dufresne in Shawshank Redemption and Tom Robinson in To Kill a Mockingbird these stories are over and over. These stories usually stop at release but for our exonerees, this is just the beginning and the consequences are very real.

Why are we so fascinated by these stories? Why do people want to hear from these three men? Because they are stories of people overcoming injustice at the hands of our legal system. The heart of our democracy lies in the belief that our justice system is the rule of law, but that the same law applies to each and every one of us regardless of rank or privilege. Justice deals with fairness, equity and equality. A legal system that is inaccurate loses validity in the eyes of citizens; therefore, states must take sufficient measures to improve the system when it fails. This may be accomplished through comprehensive statute reform and compensation to make the wrongfully convicted whole again.

The obligation to make amends for wrongful acts is not only a philosophical ideal but a religious principle. If one has harmed another, then there is a moral obligation to repair the damage. The government's obligation does not end with the release of the wrongfully convicted. These men are suffering lasting effects from the harm done to them. They are released with nothing. No food, clothes, phone or money.

When individuals are wrongfully imprisoned, their lives, and their families, and generations are destroyed. Compensation is imperative for helping these families get back on their feet. While someone is wrongfully imprisoned, they are unable to provide financial support to their family. They cannot build up their career or obtain promotions and raises. Saving for retirement or a catastrophic event like an illness in the family is impossible. In addition to the needs of their family, some wrongfully imprisoned persons suffer mental health challenges as a result of being incarcerated, including posttraumatic stress disorder. Compensation is essential for helping these individuals obtain the services they require.

As a state we cannot undo all the wrongs of the past. We can accept the responsibility by acknowledging past wrongs, particularly when people today are still suffering the effects of those

wrong decisions. Senate Bill 336 is one measure to make these lives whole again and regain the trust of citizens. Acknowledge the wrong and make it right.

Respectfully,

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