

1-27-21

My name is Christopher Tapp

I want to thank Senator Ricks for sponsoring this legislation and all of the members of the committee for considering this important bill today.

Some of you heard testimony from me on this bill last year and I thank you for your support. I sincerely hope that this bill passes again this year and is signed into law. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be here again.

When I heard that the bill had been vetoed I was heartbroken. I thought of Charles Fain, another exonerated Idahoan who is in his 70's and who continues to work to support himself after losing 18 years on death row for a horrible crime he didn't commit. I hope he does not have to wait another year to try again. I ask for your support again this year.

In 1998 I was found guilty of a rape and murder that I did not commit. I spent 20 years and 53 days in prison while the real perpetrator walked free.

In 2017 I was released from prison and 2 years later, in 2019, my innocence was finally confirmed by DNA evidence and the DNA donor admitting he acted alone in this horrible crime.

I am so grateful for the tenacity of Carol Dodge - the mother of the woman who I was wrongfully convicted of raping and murdering - and the relentless efforts of the Idaho Innocence Project, Judges for Justice, my public defender John Thomas, the Innocence Project and countless others that helped me.

Thanks to those like Carol and the Idaho Innocence Project who never gave up, I am able to be here in front of you today and not sitting in a prison cell for a horrible crime that someone else committed.

I cannot put into words the feeling of finally confirming my innocence after more than two decades in prison.

Being in prison is as horrible as you can imagine - and being there when you are innocent is that much worse. I missed out on 20 years of my life. I wasn't able to spend my father's last years with him or go to his funeral when he passed.

I was released from prison with nothing but my freedom. I had no financial resources - no way to rebuild my life or to meet my daily needs. I was released with no more than the clothes on my back, left completely reliant on family and friends to help me while I tried to rebuild my life.

Finding employment was challenging because even though DNA confirmed that I was innocent and the courts recognized this and vacated my conviction, I still had a felony conviction on my record that prevented me from getting most jobs.

I lost 20 years of earning for my future and was left labeled with a felony conviction making it hard to start making up for lost time.

I am humbled to stand here before you today and be able to speak on behalf of all wrongfully convicted innocent people. I am so grateful that you are considering this bill that would provide a way for exonerees to restart their lives once freed. I strongly support this bill so that when an innocent person is exonerated in Idaho they have financial help to start rebuilding their lives.

I thank you for your time and urge you to pass this bill.

Thank you.