Why ‘The Drum’?

“Cross-culturally the drum has symbolized the collective conscience and heart beat of a community. The sound of the drum has long been associated with a call to community meetings, the dissemination of information and a way for spread-out communities to stay connected.

Returning citizens comprise such a community and, as such, they face unique challenges and difficult obstacles.

In my personal experience as a returning citizen, it was a source of hope to find that the challenges I faced in re-integration, specifically in the areas of technology, relationships (personal, social, etc.), PTSD, trouble sleeping, depression, and thoughts of suicide—were not unique to me, but that almost everyone in my situation has had similar experiences. There is so much to be gained in the sharing of our experiences and The Drum will be our meeting place.”

-Antonio Williams, juvenile lifer released July 2017
For more than 42 years, I cried, hoped, and prayed for change in my status beginning as a 17 year-old, up until almost my 60th birthday. Now with my status changed, I am still crying, hoping, and praying for more than 200 plus juvenile lifers without parole, who like myself (until just recently) are waiting for their prayers to be answered.

On October 12, 2017 there were oral arguments before the Court’s seven justices in both the cases of former 17-year-old Skinner and of Hyatt, where the outcome will affect the 200 plus other JLWOP.


In Hyatt, the Court of Appeals held it was bound to follow Skinner (2015), but declared a conflict, expressing its own independent opinion that a jury need not make the sentencing decision.

Subsequently, the Court of Appeals convened a conflict-resolution panel, which unanimously agreed that no jury is required during resentencing. Nevertheless, a four-judge majority of the conflict panel ordered resentencing, believing that the trial court had erred by failing to decide whether the defendant exhibited “irreparable corruption” so as to deserve life without parole.

The conflict panel also declared the appellate standard of review in these cases to be “abuse of discretion” based on the notion that sentencing a juvenile to life without parole is “inherently suspect” and probably disproportionate.

The Michigan Supreme Court directed oral argument to address whether the Court of Appeals Conflict Resolution panel erred by applying a heightened standard of consideration and review for sentences imposed under MCL 769.25.

I had an opportunity to see and hear oral argument at the Supreme Court. I am going to report what I heard and saw in the next article.

-Edward Sanders, juvenile lifer released July 2017