

**Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee
March 1, 2021**

Testimony in Support of HB 2002

Chair Bynum and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Leeanna Kern, and I am testifying in support of House Bill 2002.

I have a 17 year old daughter Alena and a 25 year old son. At the age of 16 my son was charged with robbery 2 under a measure 11. When he completed his mandatory sentence of about 6 years, he was able to come back home.

We assumed he would fit back into society. All three of us imagined that with all our love and support that he would settle in and put his past behind him and have the successful future that he wanted. However even with family support he struggled.

It was clear to all of us that he needed more support. I was trying to connect with the probation and parole officer about better support services. For example I suggested some type of mentor or support group, but his parole officer said that he has to be the one to ask for those support services. The problem with rules like this is that a person who has been exposed to that much trauma generally doesn't know the support they may need, especially when they were so young when they went into the system.

What I feel while watching my son struggle in this system, is that they need someone to advocate for them to help them get the support they may not know they need. I feel upon release, that possibly a support group and mentor for the first six months could make a huge difference for the future of these people -- any support that would encourage him to reach the goals that he wants to achieve, but that he may need help reaching.

You don't need to be a parent to imagine how hard it is to live in prison. It's not an encouraging place or a healing place, or a place that prepares people to be who we want them to be when they return home. The transition from being in such a heavily structured environment to a new found freedom needs much more than just simply family support.

HB 2002 proposes the kinds of changes that would help my son, our family, and our community be strong and successful. I hope you'll choose to support families like ours, and vote yes on HB 2002.