

Hello,

2019

My name is Robin, I am an inmate housed at the Denver Women's Correctional Facility in Denver Colorado. I graciously ask for a few moments of your time to see what could be the changing face of incarceration. This story is not merely about myself it is an inclusive chronicle of numerous incarcerated women in the state of Colorado.

For years, I have been unrecognized, unheard, and unseen in a system that accentuates banishment and gender disparity. My situation involves an act of violence that occurred in 1990. I was involved in an altercation that would leave my friend deceased. One year later, after being released on bond, I would go to trial. In addition to being charged with the death of my friend, I was charged with two counts of burglary. I was convicted of felony murder based upon the burglary insinuation and given a forty-year prison sentence. My incarceration to date has culminated into twenty-nine years. I am one of three women in the state of Colorado's current penal system that has been incarcerated the longest. In Colorado's history, with numerous applications for clemency considerations, not one African American woman has ever been granted clemency from a Colorado governor. Prior to being incarcerated, I abstained from any form of drug use; neither did I drink excessively. I had no involvement with violent activities or groups that perpetuated violence. Violence is not an accepted norm; therefore, I ask no predilection be made, as opinions are subjective at their core. To those who may be reading my story I respectfully request an open mind. I ask I not be held to a prima facie conclusion suggesting some hidden propensity lingered within. I did not transform into a twenty six year old suburban maniac. I have no propensity toward deliberate forms of violence or outrage. That is not my psychological makeup or innate behavior. I seek to bring into focus an issue that has been ignored in the state of Colorado for decades. Specifically three decades of my imprisonment.

I grew up in an upper middle class neighborhood. I attended the University of New Orleans, Louisiana and Regis University, Denver. I received a college degree and in my life, before prison, I had no interaction with judicial proceedings other than a misdemeanor as a youth. While in society, I was a registered voter, a single parent and worked forty hours a week in a group home for mentally challenged adults. Along with paying taxes,

I was an honest contributor to societal standards. I believed in America's system of justice. I recall the statute of the woman holding two equal scales signifying justice with eyes blindfolded. Sadly, the facts are that justice is not blind, nor is it colorblind, economically blind, special interest group blind, politically or gender visually impaired. Very personally, I discovered that Colorado, particularly, the former governor of Colorado, John Hickenlooper is not mindful of equality. I was taken aback seeing that the voice of truth, equality and justice for all is stifled behind partisanship and personal agendas.

On August 16<sup>th</sup> 2017, former governor John Hickenlooper visited with a small number of women at the Denver Women's Correctional Facility. I was one of several women asked to attend this town hall format. When I called my daughter to tell her, in excitement, she insisted I sit in the front row. Well, I sat in the front row. I remember the local Fox News Network was in attendance. When I was asked to sign a media release form I thought to myself, this must be a big deal. I listened and watched former governor John Hickenlooper, now presidential candidate, John Hickenlooper give false hope concerning clemency petitions he would review. He asked several women if they had written their letters to him. If they had not he insisted they do so expeditiously. Hickenlooper stated, as he tapped his index finger against his cheek, that he felt several reprieves would be forthcoming. Yes, indeed they did come, but for male inmates not for the women. As he opened up the floor for question, I asked Mr. Hickenlooper, what he thought about disparity in treatment between men and women inmates. Part of my dialog appeared on the local Fox newscast that same evening. Now, I realize his appearance at the Denver Women's Correctional Facility was a politically motivated, well-orchestrated move. The women were positioned like pawns on a chess game while former governor Hickenlooper used us to checkmate his opponents.

**I AM THE VOICE FOR CHANGE IN COLORADO'S SELECTION PROCESS FOR EXECUTIVE  
COMMUTATIONS OF STATE PRISON SENTENCES**

I hold partially to the theory of solipsism. Solipsism suggests that the self can know nothing but its own modification and that the self is the only existent thing. I say in part I hold to this theory. I know I am independently capable of modifying my behavior, attitudes and actions as I have done so in twenty-nine years of incarceration. In as much, I could not have survived in this environment, for this long, if it had not been for

my belief and faith in the existence of an Omnipotent Creator. Through Him, I have been given the strength to overcome adversity and ask others to band together with me to ensure that justice and equality touches everyone. Everyone, whether the individual is male or female.

In 2013, I applied for executive clemency with the former governor of the state of Colorado, John Hickenlooper. Mr. Hickenlooper served two terms as the incumbent governor. On September 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, Hickenlooper filed paperwork forming the Giddy Up PAC. The Giddy Up PAC is a federal political action committee formed to advance the former governor one-step closer to a bid for the office of president of the United States. In my life before incarceration, I was neither a democrat or a republican. I voted for the individual I believed was the best candidate to hold a particular office. Being an African American woman, I would not have voted for Barack Obama as president simply because of his ethnicity. My vote would be based solely on a candidate's ability to operate as commander in chief and leader of one of the strongest countries in the world. In the last 16 years, Colorado's clemency recipients were awarded to only two females. Former governor, John Hickenlooper, presidential aspirant, commuted in his two terms as governor the sentence of one female. This woman served eight years of a 64-year sentence for a drug offense. The criteria for applying for clemency was purposely waived by Hickenlooper's clemency administration board. The criteria states that a petitioner must serve at least ten years to meet the eligibility requirements. Former governor Hickenlooper has shown a clear discriminatory and gender biased attitude when he commuted the sentence of one woman in comparison to 33 plus men. What about the dozens of women who applied for clemency including myself. Many were flatly denied while others were passed onto the newly elected governor, Jared Polis.

In Hickenlooper's defense, he might suggest that his selection was based upon several factors; perhaps the former governor believed the sentence for this particular individual was extreme based on the offense being drug related and non-violent. This woman may have non-violent offenses; however, what about Hickenlooper, granting clemency to several men whose offenses were violent? Yes, some of his selections were men who at the time of their crimes were juveniles, but not all. One man was caught by police attempting to place his mother's deceased body into the trunk of his car. Hickenlooper granted this man clemency. These selections appeared in the Denver Post around mid November through December of 2018.

For the one woman Hickenlooper, granted clemency his Executive Order states in part: "This individual was sentenced to the department of corrections for 64 years in 2010 for a drug related crime. [Controlled substance-possession with intent] a habitual criminal. She was sentenced to additional time in the department of corrections for other crimes to run concurrently with the 64-year sentence." In looking at his Executive Order, it is apparent that her multiple convictions and subsequent prison sentences, albeit extreme, was not primarily based upon her substance abuse but her habitual drug distribution activities as well.

Additionally, former governor John Hickenlooper penned a letter for this individual to present to the parole board, which she will see in December of 2024. Her previous parole eligibility date was 2039. In this letter, he states: "One important aspect of each clemency decision is an examination of who the applicant is now compared with who the applicant was at the time of the crime." He continues to convey that the purpose of this commutation is two-fold. It will give this individual an opportunity to take advantage of programming that will prepare her for success in the world beyond the department of corrections and will give time to show the community including the members of the parole board that she is ready for reentry into society. She is a model offender, has strong work positions, worked in the print shop for four years and is currently an offender care aid. This offender completed a number of rehabilitative programs including anger management and stress management." *It is important to note not one rehabilitative program addressed her drug related history.*

*My question is in addition to reviewing this one particular application; what other petitions did former governor John Hickenlooper actually review? **Here are the facts:** I have since 1991, to present given due diligence to rehabilitative measures, which includes obtaining several letters from Denver Women's Correctional Facility highly ranked employees with whom endorsed my request for reprieve. I have worked toward and received over 75 certificates. These achievements range from: Anger Management, Drug and Alcohol Education group, PTSD Recovery, Coping Skills, Cognitive Thinking, 7-Habits, Alternatives to Violence, Blue Print for Change, Relationship Skills, Offender Care Aid, Gang Intervention, Impact of Crime on Victims, Juvenile Law Education, IT Essentials, Computer Aided Drafting, Business Technology, along with an Academic Scholarship from CU Boulder. I have received Certification accreditation in Counseling totaling over 2,000 hours of one-on-one and classroom instruction. I've been awarded numerous rehabilitation certificates signed by professional counseling clinicians and former Colorado District Attorney appointees. These are a few of several accomplishments, I acquired in 29 years of incarceration. Copies of these certificates were included with my original petition. Moreover, I have a work history spanning over eight years with Colorado Correctional Industries, Print Shop.*

In 2014, a year after I submitted my petition for clemency with presidential hopeful John Hickenlooper, I was asked to give a presentation to wardens from almost every correctional facility in Colorado. During this time, I volunteered to participate in a pilot program entitled HOPE. This program included mentoring new and troubled offenders to assist them in developing tools to navigate and manage themselves through this environment. The certificate reads: In appreciation for your involvement and assistance in providing the Denver Women's Correctional Facility with the HOPE program overview... during the warden's meeting... The positive attitude you exhibited along with your willingness to stand in front of each warden and share you story clearly demonstrated your sincerity to positive reflection and improvement and most importantly your commitment to

helping and mentoring other offenders faced with similar challenges... For this we thank you signed Steven T. Hager, Director of Prisons, May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014.

What was the standard Hickenlooper based his decision to commute dozens of men and one woman upon. What made those individuals more worthy of consideration for clemency over myself and several other women? I encourage you to ask Mr. Hickenlooper that question. It matters little whether he is a democrat or a republican. The more important issue here is based upon his own words that the examination of the applicant is based on who the person is today as opposed to who they were when the crime occurred. Likewise, the examination of his candidacy for president of the United States should be based upon this standard as well. Who was he prior to entering the race for the office of president? This man shook my hand, asked for my name, repeating Robin, like his wife's name. Throughout the afternoon, Mr. Hickenlooper, looked into the faces of the women he visited at this facility on August 16, 2017 and told several clemency applicants what he thought we wanted to hear. As repeated to me "he lured us into a false sense of hope." In hindsight, it was a classic political move. Deliver the speech to rouse the candidates' constituency. I believed his political rhetoric.

Around mid November 2018, up until January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019, toward the end of John Hickenlooper's term as governor, I watched dozens of women; including myself, anticipate an answer of reprieve. Every day for weeks leading to his last day in office, I would hear the voices of fear. Friends would ask those waiting if they had received any legal mail. So many returned from the mailroom in tears or with their heads dipped down in defeat. In examination of the topic of Executive Clemency, it's understandable why a majority may believe those requesting a commutation only originate from convictions involving violence. For the single female recipient, she has currently served less than ten years for habitual non-violent offenses. Obviously, former governor John Hickenlooper, felt it necessary to mitigate her sentence. There exists in dissimilar cases where a mitigating circumstance pre-existed the occurrences. I agree, illegal actions should reverberate into an ultimate sanction. However, the unbalanced scales of reprieve left dozens of women incarcerated for various offenses, void of serious clemency consideration. All, except one. She received her news directly from the office of the governor. She was informed by a personal phone call that Hickenlooper, had signed an Executive Order, granting her clemency. she served eight years on a 64-year sentence. My term has been almost 30 years into a 40-year sentence. Some others have these numbers: *28 yrs., 22 yrs., 20 yrs., 27 yrs., 15 yrs., life without parole.*

Please understand I have no ill feelings toward the woman who received a commuted sentence. I congratulated her, hugged her and celebrated with her. It's not what former governor Hickenlooper did for her that disturbs me. It's what he did not do! Certainly more than one percent of female clemency hopefuls had some quality worthy of consideration. One question needs addressing. This being the plausibility, in reasoning,

that not one single African American woman, within Colorado's modern correctional history, has ever qualified nor accomplished the standard for receiving a governor's reprieve? Ninety-nine percent of Colorado's female applicants, and one hundred percent of African American female clemency applicants, were poignantly ignored and dismissed as insignificant by this presidential candidate.

I have shown, and proven myself a transformed woman. Through self-motivation in my rehabilitation efforts, I believed, I moved closer toward achieving a favorable review from Colorado's former governor, now presidential candidate, John Hickenlooper. I have accomplished many goals in 29 years of incarceration hoping to regain a place in society.

I realize I risk ridicule by sharing my past there is no absence of understanding if an attitude of disdain is determined on me. I apologize for the harm I've created in choosing a decision that will forever have an impact. Prison is more than bars and wire fences. Prison is the face of society having been affected by those who have chosen an alternate path. For many like myself a path that caused devastation and despair. I contradicted the rules that govern our moral standard and humanity. What I seek is the opportunity to make a difference through my error. Perhaps, I can turn my darkness into a beacon of light, forgiveness, and hope. In many forms, prison has been my infinite hurdle. I pray, one day, I'll rise above this obstacle. All Americans are entitled the freedom to voice their opinions. Likewise, the fact that I am incarcerated does not exclude me from this privilege.

I understand this can be an overwhelmingly controversial subject. In as much, I welcome any response to the words I've shared with society. Please feel free to contact me with your comments. Thank you.

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