

## A LETTER FROM: **Darlene Powell Garlington, Ph.D.**

I respectfully beseech you to grant my husband, **Dr. Ernest C. Garlington**, clemency. I believe he is the epitome of the qualities and characteristics outlined in the criteria for clemency, and fully demonstrates the intent of your mission and vision for clemency. Ernie personifies excellence and the embodiment of model inmate conduct. As such, granting Ernie clemency will serve to inspire and motivate other inmates to emulate his positive behaviors.

Prior to my husband's incarceration, our family's greatest challenge was getting him to strike a balance between home and community responsibilities and commitments. If anyone was in need, he would make adjustments to his schedule for our family to help them. Ernie has taught our children — and me — the honor of commitment and service to others. His dreams have always included a way for others to benefit. For example, when he built an addition onto our home, he designed it as a place where foster children could come for retreats. In everyday life, Ernie finds ways to incorporate his love for others. At Christmas he dressed up as Santa Claus and distributed presents. He has personally reconnected children with extended family several states away. He has counseled others in their anger, their grief, their despair. I have never known him to turn his back on anyone asking for help. Although he appeared to be stretched too thin at times, he never once neglected our family priorities — we just wanted more time with him. Our family joke was that we would have to make him sign a contract to stop working on the house, committing us to community events or signing up for another project, in order to take a vacation somewhere as a family. He good-naturedly signed it and always took us where we wanted to go.



Because of the incredible closeness our family enjoys, the past four years without the focus, stability and security of his presence have been devastating. We always wanted more time with Ernie, and now we don't have him home at all. Without the grace of God and Ernie's unwavering faith, we would not have persevered. There were days when I didn't think I would make it, but Ernie would pray with me on the phone every night and I would concentrate on keeping my children focused and moving forward.

My husband is also my friend. He is the rock in our family and always demonstrated his dedication, devotion and personal sacrifice by his actions. He made good investments and worked hard — often working two jobs. I fell in love with him partly because I saw how he took care of his mother. Due to her health challenges, Ernie would regularly shop and clean for her. He purchased and furnished a home for her. However, after our crisis, he wasn't able to help her keep it. She is nearly 90 years old and her heart aches to have her son home. Ernie also took care of my aging parents. When my father had a total knee replacement, Ernie massaged his knee and acted as a physical therapist, encouraging my Dad back to health and mobility. My mother has a debilitating disease and barely responds, but when she hears Ernie's voice on the phone, she tries to communicate with him. She needs him home, too. Although our children have done well, they constantly fight feelings of sadness and frustration at not having Ernie physically present in their daily lives.



He and I believe there is a purpose and plan for our life together—We dream of sharing our testimony and serving the community. This is our main focus. We also dream of sharing a full life. Ernie is a giving and thoughtful husband, and I miss the little things he did for me that no one else does. He colored my hair for me, brought me coffee every morning, took me bike riding and grocery shopping. He found joy in sharing his awareness of nature with me. He would often point out a deer among the trees, the sound of birds or the rushing of water. We are humbled, and these mundane things in everyday life that we once took for granted, we now envision as luxuries.

Although Ernie supports us emotionally, we also need him home to help support us financially. My children and I have experienced extreme financial hardship as a result of the legal battle. In addition to the exorbitant legal fees, our home went into foreclosure, I was forced to file bankruptcy and my children had to incur unanticipated student loan debt. In fact, my financial situation is so dire that I couldn't afford to hire an attorney and needed to represent myself in court to enforce a legal agreement with my children's biological father, Derek Hopson. He had previously been found in contempt of court for nonpayment of child support. Mr. Hopson also refused to honor our agreement to share the cost of our children's college education. I won the case, but he recently appealed, leaving me to argue my brief before the Supreme Court of Appeals. We are awaiting the decision. Despite our son's efforts to communicate with him, Mr. Hopson has not shown a genuine interest in re-establishing a relationship with our son. DJ needs at least one father figure fully involved in his life, the man who has consistently and lovingly been involved, Ernie. Ideally, my son would have both men in his life.

While incarcerated, my husband has continued to demonstrate his strong leadership skills and commitment to serving others. When friends visit Ernie, they inevitably call me and tell me how he lifted their spirits. They say, "I feel empowered to move forward with my goals after visiting Ernie. He is encouraging, optimistic, motivating and positive." Ernie is a natural motivator and inspires others to realize their dreams. We all gain strength by spending an hour with him. I call my visits with him my therapy sessions. Ernie listens, encourages and affirms each person with a special focus that makes you feel as if, *"to the world you are one person, but to him you are the world."*

Ernie's resiliency is really built on focusing on the positive and being mindful of his blessings, even in a negative situation. I know that he feels unbearable pain, anxiety, frustration and sadness being incarcerated. I see it in his eyes and hear it in his voice when we focus on family events, especially involving the children or our parents. However, although he deeply misses us, he finds strength in making the best of an unfair situation. His initiative and passion in developing inmate education programs motivates and inspires all who are involved to fully commit to bringing his vision to fruition. This extraordinary work will continue and expand exponentially once Ernie returns home. He will not forget from whence he came and will work toward improving the criminal justice system with an emphasis on rehabilitation. His unique background, expertise and compassion for others will enable him to have a tremendous impact.

I hope and pray that you will recognize the significant and compelling reasons for the Board to waive the four-year stipulation. My husband will have been incarcerated for four years in May 2012, and granting him clemency now will allow him to attend our children's graduations and care for aging parents. We have provided evidence of specific, extraordinary circumstances and his exemplary conduct to support our request.

My family would like to sincerely thank you for your consideration of Ernie's case. While we will rejoice personally if his clemency is granted, no small part of that joy will be in the possibilities before us, from which our community and many others will benefit as well.

Sincerely,

Darlene Powell Garlington, Ph.D.