



May 18, 2020

Office of Governor Michael L. Parson
P.O. Box 720
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Governor Parson,

I am writing to you as someone who was nearly executed for a crime I did not commit. I was fully exonerated in 1993 and am now the Executive Director of Witness to Innocence, an organization of people who have been exonerated from death row. I am writing to ask you to stop the execution of Walter Barton tomorrow.

I am living proof that our court system does make mistakes. If innocent people can make it onto death row, what would prevent an innocent person from being executed? The executive authority to issue a Stay of Execution and call a Board of Inquiry acts as a safeguard against unjust outcomes. Please consider the new evidence that casts serious doubt on the integrity of Mr. Barton's conviction.

There are troubling similarities between Mr. Barton's case and those of the 168 people who, like me, were exonerated after a death sentence. Our cases were fraught with official misconduct, perjury and false accusation, and false and misleading forensic evidence. All of these issues are present in Mr. Barton's case.

Official misconduct is present in over 80% of wrongful death sentences. Mr. Barton's five trials were full of what Missouri Supreme Court Justices have called "mishaps and misdeeds" including official misconduct when a prosecutor withheld critical information.

Perjury or false accusation is present in over 75% of wrongful death sentences. A key witness against Mr. Barton was a jailhouse informant who had a criminal charge against her dismissed in exchange for her testimony. Jailhouse informants make up the vast majority of false accusations found in wrongful convictions.

False or misleading forensic evidence is present in over 30% of wrongful death sentences. New analysis of forensic evidence in Mr. Barton's case contradicts the State expert's testimony at trial and instead supports the idea that Mr. Barton is innocent.

An execution is irreversible. It is the highest and most severe punishment, and so it should be held to the highest standards of accountability. As you know, the Missouri Supreme Court was split four to three in its verdict on Mr. Barton's case. That means three of the people entrusted to best understand Missouri law believe that Mr. Barton should not be executed tomorrow. To kill someone under such circumstance is reckless and unconscionable and far from exercising the highest standards of accountability.

On behalf of all of the death row exoneree members of Witness to Innocence, I urge you stay the execution of Walter Barton and call a Board of Inquiry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kirk Bloodsworth".

Kirk Bloodsworth
Executive Director