

June 23, 2009

The Honorable Juan Arambula
California State Assembly Member
Chair, Public Safety Committee
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0031

Fax: (916) 319-2131

Email: Assemblymember.Arambula@assembly.ca.gov

Re: Support for Senate Bill 399

Dear Chairman Arambula:

I support Senate Bill 399, and I do so from the perspective of a 30 year career in law enforcement. I am the former Warden of San Quentin State Prison, having worked my way up through the ranks from Correctional Officer to that position. I was the Director of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and the Chief of Adult Probation in San Francisco. During my career I have literally dealt with thousands of criminals and prisoners. I know who gets life without parole sentences and why.

I oppose the use of the sentence life without the possibility of parole for people under the age of 18 years old. I oppose it because it fails to recognize that youth are different from adults. Young people are more capable than adults of rehabilitation: behavioral research confirms what is recognized by U.S. and state laws: young people do not have adult levels of judgment, impulse control, or the ability to assess risks and consequences. There is widespread agreement among child development researchers that young people who commit crimes are more likely to reform their behavior and have a better chance at rehabilitation than adults.

Young people can and do change. I have seen this transformation myself, as young men enter prison and slowly come to grips with what they have done, the pain they have caused, and the steps they need to take to change. Many teenagers are incapable of fully understanding the consequences of their actions until they have matured.

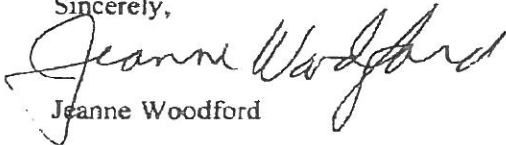
Our laws must evolve to recognize that effective public safety policy rewards offender change. I remember a young man who committed a murder in Los Angeles at the age of 17. When he came into San Quentin prison he looked like he was 14. He was a lucky one, though: he got a life with parole sentence, and with that came the possibility of education and other self-help programs. He earned a release date from the Board of Prison Terms and was paroled over 10 years ago. Since his release he has led a positive life *and* his carefully considered release has saved taxpayers millions. Every youth should have the

chance to work towards rehabilitation. Senate Bill 399 would offer that possibility and be another step towards solving our state's fiscal problems.

Enactment of Senate Bill 399 would not mean that violent people will simply be released to the streets. Instead, the system of periodic reviews and criteria proposed by the bill would create a system with careful checks and balances to determine whether people sentenced to life without parole as youth continue to pose a threat to the community.

I urge you to support this bill. We must acknowledge the critical difference between youth and adults, and imposes a sentence that recognizes young people's potential for growth and reform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne Woodford". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Jeanne Woodford

Former Warden of San Quentin Prison, 1999-2004

Former Director of the California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, 2004-2006

Chief of Adult Probation, San Francisco, 2006-2008