

September 28, 2010

Washington Clemency and Pardons Board
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 40116
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Board Members:

I have known Barry Massey's wife Rhonda in a professional capacity since 2007. Both Rhonda and I work for the Snohomish County Public Defender, she as a criminal defense investigator, and I as a forensic social worker. Our lives are spent mutually protecting a vulnerable and disadvantaged population from threat of injustice. In addition to our status as colleagues, I consider Rhonda a true friend and a person of tremendous integrity. Over the course of the last year, Rhonda has shared her husband Barry's moving story with me. Initially captivated by the tragic events surrounding his childhood and incarceration, I had no idea of the redemptive power of Barry's story until I met him in person.

Barry is like no other human being I have ever encountered. One would assume that 23 years of imprisonment and a childhood lost would have a hardening effect. Quite the opposite, Barry has grown into a gentle and compassionate soul, capable of reaching anyone he meets. In the course of my work with indigent criminal defendants, many of whom suffer with mental illness, I have crossed paths with every type of antisocial attitude or behavior imaginable. I consider myself a good judge of character, and Barry strikes me as a solidly good man. He is morally sound, emotionally healthy, and outstanding in his ability to empathize.

In terms of development, Barry is much further along than the average person. He is intelligent, authentic, and remarkably balanced, the type of person others implicitly trust and seek guidance from. He is a leader who doesn't attempt to lead, but who projects a sense of calm and safety that naturally attracts. Barry holds no grudge or animosity in his heart. He seems completely at peace with himself, thoughtful and sensitive even to those who have competing interests from his own. Regrettably, he has been unable, despite a personal desire, to reach out to Paul Wang's surviving family. Nevertheless, Barry shows genuine concern for the Wang family's grief, feels they are justified in their response, and respects their need for distance.

I have no doubt that Barry will spread his good nature and positivity wherever he goes. With respect to his family, he is nothing short of a loving husband and devoted father possessing all of the natural instincts and positive qualities those roles should entail. His dreams in the community include helping to physically rehabilitate disabled adults as well as starting an at-risk youth program to deter delinquency. While his aspirations are commendable, Barry is cognizant of the challenges that may lie ahead should he be granted freedom. He understands that he will need to make considerable adjustments of his own before he endeavors to help others. Therefore, he is responsibly seeking out a healthy support system to ensure a successful transition.

I am proud that Barry has asked for my help in this process. Among all the others who want to welcome him home, I will gladly lend Barry my personal support. As far as I am concerned, Barry can look to me as a resource, lifeline, mentor or friend, because I would be honored to be any one of those things.

The fact that Barry Massey has matured into such an extraordinary man, all within an environment perhaps least known for its nurturance, is a testament to his character more than anything else. Barry embodies hope and humanity in spite of incredible odds. I can't help but think he has a lot to teach us about the human spirit, only he can't be heard. Please consider giving him freedom so we can experience what he has to give.

Respectfully,

Eric Johnsen, MSW