

03/24/2025

To: Chairman Lawrence R. Klemin and the Judiciary Committee

Regarding: SB 2128

From: Skyler C. Larson

Position: In Opposition

Victor Hugo wrote a novel in 1862 called *Les Misérables*. Over the past century and a half, this book has been adapted into musical, and even movie formats. Although written in 1862, *Les Misérables* takes place in 1815 during the stressful time of the French Revolution.

In the beginning of the movie. Jean Valjean is in prison. He is going to be released. Javert, who at this point is a prison guard. Confronts Jean Valjean, He calls Valjean by his inmate ID number 24601 and gives him a yellow slip of paper that marks Valjean as a dangerous man. This paper is one that Jean Valjean is required to keep with him, and to show any potential employers, landlords, and law enforcement. Long story short Jean Valjean is on a lifetime parole and served 19 years in prison for stealing bread to feed his sisters family and running from the police.

Jean Valjean struggles to make ends meet. Its not for lack of trying. He is making a momentous effort to gain employment, and is turned down at every at every corner, because of this he cannot afford housing, and eats scraps. In a desperate attempt to sleep off the cold ground, and maybe find a meal, Jean Valjean visits the local church.

The bishop of this church takes in Jean Valjean. He gives food and a bed for the night. Yet Jean Valjean struggles to sleep, he tosses and turns knowing that in the morning he will have to leave.

In my own personal experience, people do not rise to the occasion. People always fall back to what they know. A child who falls knows that comfort is a close by parent, that child will run to the close parent. A soldier under attack will fall back on weeks and months and maybe years of drills upon drills to survive and win. A surgeon will fall back to memorized textbooks and medical journals to be successful in a complex medical procedure. This bill makes our inmates the exception to this rule. This bill will halt forward positive growth of the inmate population. The author of *Les Misérables* knew this back in 1862. Its a real shame that being a decent human being is even in question today, 163 years after this book was published.

The kind Bishop wakes to find that he was robbed in the night all the silver was taken except two silver candle sticks. Shortly after this realization, two lawmen drag Jean Valjean back to the church to return the silver They laugh and say that Jean Valjean said he was gifted the silver. The bishop replied while reaching for the silver candle sticks, That is right, my friend you left so early surely something slipped your mind, you forgot I gave these also would you leave the best behind? The Bishop handed Jean Valjean the last silver in that church.

Jean Valjean then uses that silver to change. He works in local government; he runs successful businesses and goes out of his way to help those in need, at times he even puts his own personal safety at risk to save lives. The Bishop showed such a kindness to a man who was unaware of what kindness was, and because Jean Valjean had learned this lesson. He now had something to FALLBACK on, other than stealing bread and silver.

The other person I had mentioned earlier is Javert. This man of the law only views life in two ways. Good and Bad. Right and Wrong. The lawful and the Lawless. He is dead set on upholding the letter of the law. During the movie and in the book, Javert rises in the ranks of law and becomes an inspector.

He chases down Jean Valjean. He only sees a criminal deserving of no redemption. Over the years that this book takes place. Jean Valjean and Javert have several run ins. Every time Jean Valjean is the bigger person and even saves Javerts life. No matter what Jean Valjean does, no matter how many good and virtuous deeds Valjean completes proving his change. Javert hunts and becomes less and less forgiving. This unwillingness to see positive change in people, ultimately destroys Javert. Lack of understanding change in people drives Javert to jump off a bridge into a river.

In the musical to help illustrate this internal struggle Javert sings

Who is this man, what sort of devil is he?

To have me caught in a trap and choose to let me go free?
It was his hour at last to put a seal on my fate
Wipe up the past and watch me clean up the slate
All it would take was a flick of his knife
Vengeance was his and he gave me back my life
Damned if I'll live in the debt of a thief
Damned if I'll yield at the end of the chase
I am the law and the law is not mocked
I'll spit his pity right back in his face
There is nothing on earth that we share
It is either Valjean or Javert
How can I now allow this man to hold dominion over me?
This desperate man that I have hunted
He gave me my life, he gave me freedom
I should have perished by his hand
It was his right
It was my right to die as well
Instead I live, but live in hell
And my thoughts fly apart
Can this man be believed?
Shall his sins be forgiven?
Shall his crimes be reprieved?
And must I now begin to doubt
What I never doubted all those years?
My heart is stone but still it trembles
The world I have known
Is lost in shadow
Is he from heaven or from hell?
And does he know
That granting me my life today?
This man has killed me, even so

This bill just doesnt affect the lives of inmates. This bill doesnt just take away many opportunities to change, learn, and grow new skills for inmates to FALLBACK ON.

This bill takes hope away from the officers. We wont get to see the fruits of our labor. We will be forced to take the humanity out of the rehabilitation.

As an employee of the State of North Dakota, and as a proud officer of the DOCR. I do not want my legacy to be built upon a bill like this. It would be spitting in the face of every employee who has given time, talents, tears, and blood, to transform lives, influence change and strengthen the community.

I have seen several men take advantage of what the DOCR has to offer and better their lives and their families.

Most recently, I ran into an ex-inmate taking a lunch break at a sandwich shop. I didnt recognize him at first. He had to remind me of his name, that is how different he looked. He had a contagious smile, a firm healthy handshake, and told stories about his children.

Oddly enough at a different sandwich shop, another ex-inmate was working at the counter, He too smiled broadly when he noticed me. We spoke for a long while about how his oldest daughter was gearing up for the police academy. The pride he took in his children making honorable career choices, seemed to radiate through the room.

Another ex-inmate, who left the NDDOCR and changed forever, took advantage of our CDL program, according to his social media he drives truck and appears to spend his free time catching up with is family. I havent made the time to reach out and see how he is doing yet, but I plan to at some point.

In the Bible, Book of Galatians Chapter 6: 7-10 it reads:

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men

These examples of change are just some examples of what is currently being sowed and reaped within the NDDOCR.

Thank You, I will now stand for questions.