

Forlesia Cook

The Honorable Representatives/s
United States house of Representatives
Washington, DC 2515

Subject: Request for Criminal Justice Reform in Washington, D.C,

Dear Representative,

I am speaking today in support of legislative reform following the tragic murder of my grandson, Marty William McMillan Jr., in Washington, DC, on April 23, 2017.

I represent not only myself but also my daughter, Aisha Young, and his siblings, as well as many others who are suffering from the impact of murders in the District of Columbia. I am a Washingtonian, born here on July 7, 1956. I never understood the judicial system regarding murders until it happened to my family. My daughter has shared how she essentially had to solve our grandson's murder case—tracking down who killed him and how he got caught up in that situation after meeting a girl on a dating site and deciding to visit her. If it hadn't been for her detective work, the killer may have gotten away with it.

Marty was my firstborn grandchild, and I was very close to him. He faced struggles, and I was always trying to support him. He listened to me and fought through his challenges, working towards change, and I was so proud of him. He was feeling good about himself and how he was applying himself to build a better life. He was happy and had been working toward a newfound future, discussing his goals of becoming an electrician and participating in an Apprenticeship program while working on a project downtown DC to learn his trade. I had not seen him so enthusiastic in many years. We were proud of him; I even purchase a car for him, so he could get to all the places he needed to go. Every day, he would come home tired after starting work at 5:00 AM. He was doing so well that they moved him up to more responsibilities and assignments. They loved his enthusiasm. After his murder, I received his acceptance letter in the mail, confirming that he had been officially accepted into the program even before taking the test. He was on his way to a bright future. The particular week before he was murdered, he had been given overtime; it was the first time he had worked seven consecutive days without a day off.

On the evening before the tragedy, he called me to say he was going out. I told him, "Great, grandson! You've been doing so well; you deserve some time to enjoy yourself and spend some of your hard-earned pay." He had just received his first paycheck and was setting up an account at the credit union. We joked about how he was now big time, having a credit union instead of a regular bank, and he laughed along.

I had long prayed for this day. We were happy he was on his way to becoming a productive member of society.

However, everything changed on April 23, 2017. He went to meet a girl he had met on Plenty of Fish, and he never returned. After three days without hearing from him, I felt something was wrong. My grandson would never go this long without contacting me. I was at work and didn't realize he hadn't come home until Wednesday morning. I thought he might have gone to work, but it was heavily raining outside, and construction workers typically don't work in such weather. He should have been at home or downstairs. When I went to check, he wasn't there. I began calling him, but there was no answer all day, and I hadn't heard from him the day before either. Something was definitely wrong. I called his father, who also hadn't heard from him, and then I called my daughter—she hadn't heard from him either. His father said he would call the police. I also called his job, and they confirmed he hadn't shown up. At that point, I knew something was terribly wrong. He loved that job and was so enthusiastic about the opportunity; there was no way he wouldn't go to work.

My daughter, who had moved to North Carolina after her youngest son and daughter's father was murdered in Maryland (with no justice for that murder), called me and said she was on her way to DC. She left work that Friday and immediately started going through Marty's belongings—his laptop, phones, and any information she could find. The Black and Missing Foundation asked her to speak at an event they were hosting because Captain Dickerson, DC police Chief at that time, had taken an interest in her case, she called an Adventist also asked him to help us, there was something strange about this case, and he did, and that's when they started working on Marty's missing case. I considered hiring a private detective and had even made an appointment, but by that time, three weeks had passed without any updates. Deep down, I knew my grandson was likely gone from this world. It was impossible that we would not have heard anything from him.

The private detective informed me that she would visit the 5th District to check on the status of the case regarding my missing loved one before I officially hired her. After her visit, she called me back and said, "Ms. Cook, Marty's case hasn't even been assigned yet."

My world turned upside down. It felt as though everything had gone dark, and even breathing became painful. We had no answers, and it seemed like no one really cared except for the activists who were helping us—my daughter and Marty's father. We drove all over the DMV area trying to find his car to help us locate where he might be. Questions flooded my mind: Where is he? What has happened to him? Where do we go to look for him? Who do we talk to?

The activist asked if we wanted to speak to the news. He organized interviews for us, and I appeared on the news, asking anyone who had seen or heard something to please contact the missing persons division. Weeks passed and we felt lost, but my daughter continued to drive here every weekend, despite her job. She started uncovering information and putting the pieces together.

One day, my daughter told me the car ping near Eastern Avenue Northeast I drove the area as I drove passed Foote Street. Something told me to look in that direction. To my surprise, I saw a car that looked like his. I quickly called my daughter and asked her for the license plate number. She recited it to me, and when I confirmed it, I realized it was his. She urged me to call the detective and let them know I had found his car.

The detective assigned to my grandson's case contacted me and instructed me to stay put and not approach the car. They assured me they were on their way. When they arrived, they confirmed that it was indeed his car. One of the detectives walked around the vehicle, examining the surroundings, and said, "Marty is somewhere around here." I asked if he was sure, and while I felt a sense of relief, that turned out not to be the case. The person driving the car was a young man wearing an ankle monitor, which we later discovered had been given to him by the killer; we were not aware of that at the time.

After I mentioned this to the captain, she decided to remove the initial detective from the case and assign Detective Partman instead. He called us to inform us he was taking over and wanted to meet with my daughter to discuss her findings and persuade her to share that information with him. Initially reluctant, my daughter eventually agreed to share what she had learned.

Her investigation had revealed crucial details, including the apartment my grandson visited the night he was killed, down to the exact door number where the killer lived. Detective Partman acted quickly on this information, obtaining a warrant to search the apartment where Marty's blood was discovered. However, at that point, Marty's body had not yet been found. The detective used this evidence to begin building a case against the residents of that apartment, bringing them in for questioning.

The girl was questioned by the detective, but she claimed not to know Marty and insisted she had never seen or heard of him. Although the detective couldn't extract more information from her, they did find guns and drugs in the closet, leading to an arrest based on those charges.

Months passed, during which I constantly monitored the news, urging the community to "see something, say something." Nonetheless, we still lacked concrete evidence confirming Marty had been murdered, aside from the blood found in his apartment.

In response, I organized rallies in front of the municipal building to raise awareness about the missing persons in D.C. and the lack of answers surrounding their cases. I also held events in front of the Department of Justice and coordinated a march to the Lincoln Memorial, carrying a banner that displayed the names and images of murdered and missing loved ones. Although we were told that we could only conduct these activities on weekends at the Department of Justice, I was determined to draw attention to our cases and highlight how Marty's case was being handled. I wanted to do everything I could to bring awareness to the judicial system and emphasize that laws regarding murder needed to change.

I was frustrated, knowing that my grandson was gone and that something was seriously wrong, especially since we hadn't heard from him in so long. It became apparent to me that Detective Partman was not making progress with the killer or the girl who had lured him to his death. She witnessed everything and remained silent. It was clear the detective knew she was lying, but he couldn't charge her with withholding evidence.

On Marty's birthday, January 11, 2018, just before a body was found on Suitland Parkway in Maryland, my daughter received a call after she had been calling the coroner's office repeatedly to inquire if it was her son. On that day, she received the devastating news that the remains belonged to Marty. It had been nine long months since we had last heard from him.

Our family was heartbroken, but we felt a sense of relief that we had found him, even if he was just bones. At least we were able to bring him home. This marked the beginning of the investigation, which aimed to bring charges against those responsible. It took Detective Partman several weeks to present the case to the grand jury, allowing him to pursue charges against the killer and the girl involved. He also tried to pursue charges against others who helped move the body, as well as the girl as an accessory to the crime. In the end, he was only able to charge the killer, while there were complications regarding the girl and the person who had been driving Marty's car.

Once we got to the hearings, things started to get really strange. So far, only one person had been charged, and the girl was still pending. Trying to hold her accountable was a serious problem for Detective Partmen, who was dealing with the Grand Jury. His hands were tied, and so was the prosecutor. He was saying things to my family that didn't make sense to me. I kept insisting that our family had been through hell—my grandson died a vicious death.

What they were offering us felt inadequate. They couldn't charge him with first-degree murder, yet he had moved the body to another state, which should have been a federal case. Instead, they were arguing it shouldn't even count as a federal case. He shot my grandson in cold blood seven times, and they didn't consider that first-degree murder? I also discussing the time he would get for second-degree murder, and then manslaughter, acting like we would be lucky if we even got that.

After going through all those hearings, I was totally overwhelmed, depressed, and unmotivated to see any justice. So, I got on the bus and went to Mayor Bowser's office to request a meeting with her to discuss our case. One of her assistants had time to talk with me. I don't remember her name, but if I had time to wait, I told them no problem, I would stay as long as it takes. I met with her in a conference room, and she told me she was familiar with Marty's case. As we discussed the case, she informed me that they could only make some decisions because DC is not a federal jurisdiction, which was one of the problems. They were getting together and initiating federal cases to send those cases to the feds. I asked what qualified for that type of case. When she finished explaining, I realized that Marty's case qualified for transfer to the federal case. She agreed and said she would speak to that person about putting Marty's case on the list. I would receive a call, but that call never came.

The bottom line is that murder in DC is treated as a joke when it comes to justice. Marty's killer received only 16 years, which will likely be served concurrently with the time he was already serving for guns and drugs charges. In total, he may end up doing just 10 years in an actual jail, and 5 of those years could be on probation.

The young lady who witnessed everything did not come forward or say anything after the incident. She lied to the detectives and was only given probation for her involvement. She didn't even provide evidence until after Marty's body was found. The others involved received no time at all. So, the person who killed my grandson in cold blood, moved his body, and covered up the crime for months will serve less time than someone who was caught selling small amount drugs.

How can that be? We had to solve our own case, suffering for 9 months searching for Marty's remains, begging for justice. After years of waiting for the trial, the judge, after

hearing our impact statements, asked the killer if he had anything to say. I dare her say listening those impact statements must have felt a lot of stressed has been a long stress day for you. He killed our loved one, and after everything we went through—spanning months and years—she seemed to have more sympathy for him than for us, the victims. How long do we have to suffer? I had two heart attacks over this. What about us? We are given a piece of paper outlining the rights of the criminal, but what rights does he have after killing my grandson?

This must change. We need to stop giving killers minimal time, allowing them to come back out and potentially kill someone else. They get off with such little time, and repeat offenders, like this one, seem to go unpunished. If things don't change, killers will have no reason to think twice about committing murder. They get a brief vacation from life—three meals and a cot—all funded by our taxpayer dollars. Meanwhile, the victims of murdered loved ones continue to pay taxes and receive nothing in return. This is wrong, and someone needs to change these laws. I don't care who makes the changes; it just needs to happen. I am simply asking for someone to do the right thing, please.

Thank you for listening and it took this administration for this to be addressed or heard, I appreciate you taking the time to read my plea to DC to make these changes. If you take a life, you should serve a life sentence. It's just that simple.