

Testimony of William C. Buhl, Retired Circuit Judge
House Judiciary Committee Hearing March 19, 2024
on HB 4556, 4557, 4558, 4559 and 4560

I support these bills. I have 6 years experience as Prosecuting Attorney for Van Buren County, 14 years as a District Judge of the 7th District Court and 22 years as a Circuit Judge for the 36th Judicial Circuit. Since my retirement in 2011 I have represented numerous individuals as a defense attorney.

As a Prosecutor I prosecuted first degree murder cases. As a District Judge I issued warrants for first degree murder charges and presided over preliminary examinations on those charges. As a Circuit Judge I presided over first degree murder trials, and imposed sentences on those convicted of that crime. Since retirement I have corresponded with some of these individuals, and even assisted in locating necessities and a mentor for a person who got a second chance based on an appeal.

My extensive experience, and my studies of this area of the law, cause me to believe that life sentences with no provision for parole do not serve the needs of society, nor do they protect citizens from harm.

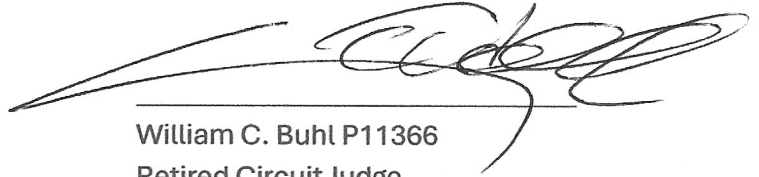
I am not going to cite authority for my assertions, leaving that to others presenting testimony and evidence to the Committee. My reasons for support are:

1. These sentences, like the death penalty, have not been shown to be a deterrent to the commission of crime.
2. The individuals who commit these types of crimes have a low recidivism rate.
3. It is very costly to the Department of Corrections to care for aging inmates that die in custody.
4. Very few Western Nations impose life sentences without an avenue of release after a number of years.
5. It is humane to allow individuals a second chance after paying their debt to society by serving years of imprisonment. People can change. We should give them hope and a reason to do so.

I came to believe that my role as a sentencing judge was primarily to protect the public. I don't see that life without parole does that. Does pure punishment necessitate requiring the perpetrator to die in prison? Even when it is not necessary to protect us? At

the very least a means of risk assessment should be provided. These bills provide some of those things. The cost savings would be better spent deterring crime.

Dated: March 18, 2024



William C. Buhl P11366
Retired Circuit Judge