



City of Chicago



R2014-45

Office of the City Clerk

Document Tracking Sheet

Meeting Date:

1/15/2014

Sponsor(s):

Brookins (21)
Moreno (1)
Fioretti (2)
Sawyer (6)
Chandler (24)
Burnett (27)
Resolution

Type:

Title:

Expression of support for commutation of remaining
sentence of Jesse Webster

Committee(s) Assignment:

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, Jesse Webster grew up in Chicago, part of an impoverished family of seven; and

WHEREAS, when Mr. Webster was 16 years old, he dropped out of the 9th grade to take a job in a car wash in order to help his step-father support the family; and

WHEREAS, a client of the car wash – a drug dealer – offered the youngster a job as his driver, and Mr. Webster accepted and eventually became a drug dealer on his own; and

WHEREAS, in 1995 Mr. Webster learned that law enforcement authorities were looking for him, and he turned himself in for questioning; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Webster was taken into custody, charged with three counts of drug conspiracy and attempting to possess illegal drugs for distribution, as well as two counts of filing false income tax returns; and

WHEREAS, the drug charges stemmed from a deal that was not consummated, a deal that was negotiated with a federal informant; and

WHEREAS, rather than risk death by becoming a confidential informant against a dangerous gang with which he was not affiliated, Mr. Webster took his case to trial and was found guilty on the tax charges and on two of the drug trafficking charges; and

WHEREAS, having no prior criminal convictions, Mr. Webster, who was then 28 years of age, was sentenced by Judge James B. Zagel to the mandatory “minimum” then applicable to his drug-related offenses: life imprisonment without the possibility of parole; and

WHEREAS, at the sentencing, Judge Zagel stated that he considered the sentence excessive, but that he had no legal alternative to the life sentence; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Webster is one of many first-time offenders sentenced to life without possibility of parole for a nonviolent offense; and

WHEREAS, since the date of Mr. Webster’s sentencing, the penalty for crimes similar to his has been greatly reduced, but that reduction is not retroactive to cases such as Mr. Webster’s; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Webster has spent 18 years in prison for a first-time conviction of a non-violent crime, and acknowledges his culpability for his offenses. While incarcerated, he completed his GED and works as a tutor to other inmates; and

WHEREAS, in light of the subsequent changes in sentencing guidelines applicable to offenses similar to his, Mr. Webster has petitioned President Barack Obama to commute the remainder of his sentence; and

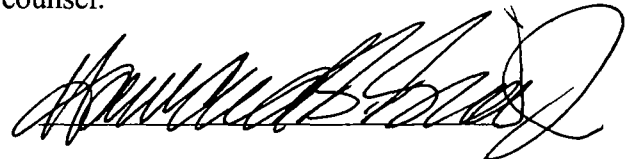
WHEREAS, Judge Zagel and both of Mr. Webster's prosecutors have filed written statements in support of Mr. Webster's petition for commutation of his sentence; and

WHEREAS, the sentence of life without possibility of parole, especially for a first and nonviolent offense, is characterized by some as a "slow death" sentence, because it offers the person convicted no incentive to rehabilitate himself and no real hope; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that we, the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, do hereby express the support of the City Council for the commutation of the remaining portion of the sentence of Mr. Jesse Webster; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we do hereby memorialize President Barack Obama to commute Mr. Webster's sentence; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that suitable copies of this Resolution be presented to President Obama and to Mr. Webster, his family and his counsel.



Alderman, 21st Ward

Roll # 15 (6)

Michael D. Chung 24

Walter 27th

Ruth 2nd

Joe Moreno 15th