

# REPORTBACK: Day of Action to End Death By Incarceration



**Dear CADBI members and supporters,**

*On October 18th, over 200 people traveled to the State Capitol for the Day of Action to End Death By Incarceration (aka Life Without Parole) and to support House Bill 2135, which would make people serving life sentences eligible for parole after 15 years. We held a rally on the steps of the Capitol, and visited dozens of legislators, bringing a clear message that Death By Incarceration sentencing harms our communities.*

*This inspiring and powerful event would not have been possible without months of hard work by CADBI members on both sides of the prison walls. **To everyone on the inside who helped spread the word by contacting friends, family, and community leaders, THANK YOU!***

*In addition to the 200 people who came to Harrisburg for the day of action, hundreds more who could not be there physically sent messages of support, donated money, and contacted their legislators about this issue. We could not have done this without you.*

*Included here is a little more info on how the Day of Action went, where things stand with the bill, and where we go from here.*

## Lobbying

Early in the morning, about 30 people from Philly and Pittsburgh drove up to Harrisburg to do lobby visits before the rally. We met with 17 legislators and staffers, including key members of the House Judiciary Committee, to express our support for HB2135 and stress the importance of ending Life Without Parole. In addition to members of the House Judiciary Committee, we also met with with other Democratic leaders in the General Assembly, as well as a few Senators to discuss the possibility of a companion bill being introduced in the Senate.



*CADBI supporters gather inside the capitol building.*

*Photo credit: Patricia Vickers*

In addition to our in-person lobbying efforts, we simultaneously held a call-in day so that people from across the state who were not able to come to Harrisburg could participate in the Day of Action. We asked people to call both their own representatives and Representatives Ron Marsico and Joseph A.



Petrarca, who chair the House Judiciary Committee, to ask them to support HB2135 and hold a House Judiciary Committee hearing on the bill.

## The Rally

Shortly after 11:00 am, crowds of people began showing up at the Capitol for the day of action. Three buses, along with several more cars, came from Philadelphia, as well as smaller delegations from Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Reading, the Lehigh Valley and elsewhere. We gathered on the steps of the Capitol to sing, chant, and listen to speakers.



*Steve Blackburn speaks on the capitol steps.  
Photo credit: Joe Piette*

Many people gave powerful testimony about the importance of ending Death By Incarceration (DBI), including: Kimberly King, who lost one brother to gun violence and has another brother serving DBI; Steve Blackburn, who was serving DBI until his sentence was commuted in 1990; Jude-Laure Denis, the Executive Director of POWER Northeast who talked about the importance of faith and the need to directly confront white supremacy; Eric Miskovitch, who was recently released from prison and is now fighting to bring others home; Representative Jason Dawkins (who was joined at the podium by Representatives Vanessa Lowery Brown, Ed Gainey, Joanna McClinton, and the recently elected Chris Rabb), who spoke about why he introduced the bill and his commitment to moving it forward; Patricia Vickers, a CADBI and Human Rights Coalition leader whose son Kerry Shakaboona Marshall is serving a DBI sentence and is also a leader in this movement; and Terri Harper, a member of the LifeLines Project who is currently serving a DBI sentence at SCI Muncy and addressed the crowd via pre-recorded audio. CADBI's own Russell Maroon Shoatz III officiated the program.

We also listened to the audio recording of the "Lady

Lifers" at SCI Muncy singing their original song "This is not my home," and the entire crowd joined together to sing and chant about the need to end Death By Incarceration. In addition to the Representatives mentioned above, Representatives Jordan Harris, Angel Cruz, Thaddeus Kirkland, and Donna Bullock also attended the rally. We had artwork on display from many people serving DBI sentences and their family members, as well as signs, banners, and individual placards people had filled out highlighting their own personal reasons for wanting to end Death By Incarceration.

## Taking Harrisburg by Song

After the rally, we divided up into six teams and entered the Capitol building to again take our message to those in power, this time in the form of song. The teams traveled to different offices for a very special kind of lobbying. Much like people might travel from house to house singing carols at Christmas time, we traveled to legislative offices singing songs about the need to end Life Without Parole. Songs included "Go Tell it to the House Reps" to the tune of "Go Tell it on the Mountain," "An Aging Face" to the tune of "Amazing Grace", "When The Lifers Come Walking Home" to the tune of "The Ants Go Marching," and several others. At every office, we also left a packet of information for legislators about why this issue is so important and what they can do to support HB2135.



*CADBI members serenaded legislators with songs supporting HB 2135 and demanding they bring our people home. Photo credit: Joe Piette*

Before we left the Capitol building, over 100 of us convened at the entrance to the House Republican caucus room, where most of the

Republican representatives were meeting. We took that opportunity to loudly serenade them with our message. In addition to the songs, the halls of the capitol filled with the sound of all of us chanting "How're we gonna bring our loved ones home alive / We're gonna pass HB2135!" We then marched to the Democratic caucus with the same message.

## Media

Of course, protests can reach more people than just those who are in attendance, and through this action we were hoping to reach people across the state through the media and through our own networks. We are happy to report that the Day of Action was covered by CBS21, the Philadelphia Tribune, WURD, Generocity, and Workers World. On the same day as the rally, the Harrisburg Fox News affiliate also ran a poll on whether or not Pennsylvania should reconsider Life Without Parole, and State College News ran a story on LWOP just days later. We also produced our own media, taking pictures and videos that were shared by hundreds on social media.

## What's next for HB2135?

The introduction of House Bill 2135 -- which would make everyone sentenced to Death By Incarceration eligible for parole after 15 years -- was an unprecedented step towards ending DBI in Pennsylvania. The bill was introduced by Rep. Jason Dawkins, and initially co-sponsored by Rep. Vanessa Lowery Brown and Rep. Leslie Acosta. Since the bill was introduced, Representatives Kinsey, Kim, McClinton, Cook-Artis, Gainey, J. Harris, M. Daley, Bullock, Bloom, Sims and Cohen have also signed on as co-sponsors.



*Rep. Jason Dawkins speaks about HB2135, a bill he introduced, which would allow Pennsylvanians incarcerated for life to apply for parole after 15 years. Photo credit: Patricia Vickers*

Curious about the singing? Here is just one of the many songs from the protest (sung to the tune of The Ants Go Marching One by One)

### *When Lifers Come Walking Home*

*When lifers come walking home again  
Hurrah! Hurrah!*

*We'll give them a hearty welcome then  
Hurrah! Hurrah!*

*Their moms will cheer and their kids will shout  
Their sweethearts they will all turn out  
We never thought we'd see the day  
When the lifers come walking home.*

*The lifers hold a precious key  
Hurrah! Hurrah!*

*To ending violence we believe  
Hurrah! Hurrah!*

*The lifers have done their time we say  
They're ready to serve and they've changed  
their ways*

*We never thought we'd see the day  
When the lifers come walking home.*

*Let love and friendship on that day,  
Hurrah, hurrah!*

*Their lives we will not throw away,  
Hurrah, hurrah!*

*And let each one perform some part,  
To fill with joy the future's heart,  
We never thought we'd see the day  
When the lifers come walking home.*

While we were not able to move HB2135 out of the House Judiciary Committee before the 2016 legislative session came to an end, Representative Dawkins has made clear that he intends to reintroduce the bill as soon as the new session begins in January. In the coming legislative session we will continue to put pressure on the House Judiciary Committee Chairs to hold a hearing and bring the bill up for a vote.

We want to emphasize the fact that this fight is far from over. It was very unlikely that a bill like this one would move forward the first time it was introduced, especially given the reactionary nature of the PA General Assembly. Passing this bill will be a multi-year struggle and will require continued and escalating pressure and mobilization from people inside and outside of prison. It is a huge step in the right direction



that so many people are speaking up in favor of this legislation, and that 14 State Representatives have already signed on in support.

## What's Next for CADBI?

In the coming months, CADBI will continue to build the movement to end Death By Incarceration in Pennsylvania. We will keep the pressure on our legislators, and make connections with organizations, religious networks, and individuals across the state to encourage them to join us in this fight.

We are asking everyone to help keep the pressure on by continuing to write their representatives, and the chairs of the House Judiciary Committee (Ron Marsico and Joseph Petrarca), to ask them to support HB2135, or whatever bills might follow it. Once you have written your own representatives, reach out to your friends and family and encourage them to write or call as well.

We are also always looking for more people to get involved with CADBI. We are an all-volunteer campaign made up of members both inside and outside of prison. If you are currently incarcerated and

are not yet a CADBI member but would like to join, please write to us at the following address and ask us to send you a membership form:

**CADBI % Decarcerate PA**  
**PO Box 40764**  
**Philadelphia PA 19107**

If you have friends or family in the Philadelphia area who would like to join, CADBI meetings happen every third Wednesday of the month at 6:30pm at 1515 Fairmount Ave, and everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend. If you know people who want to get involved but don't live in Philly or can't make the Wednesday meeting time, they can email us at [CADBIphilly@gmail.com](mailto:CADBIphilly@gmail.com) or call us at 267-606-0324.

We have an uphill battle, but we also have justice on our side. If we can keep mobilizing, keep building, and keep fighting, we can and will bring our loved ones home.

Thank you so much for being part of this movement.

In love and struggle,

The Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration



***The Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration works to end death by incarceration (aka "life without parole") sentences in Pennsylvania. The coalition's anchoring organizations include Decarcerate PA, Fight for Lifers, The Human Rights Coalition, and Right to Redemption.***

**Learn more at <http://decarceratepa.info/CADBI>**



[decarceratepa.info](http://decarceratepa.info)



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