

Richard Moore Does Not Deserve To Be Executed

By Celia Dawahare and Noah Berg

Who are the “worst of the worst” offenders in South Carolina? Who are the people who are so abhorrent that South Carolina has decided to take their life? Who do you imagine? Perhaps a serial killer with 10 victims who has never shown any remorse for his crime. Perhaps somebody who brutally killed, tortured, and sexually assaulted women and children. Maybe you believe the death penalty is appropriate for somebody who is still a danger to society from prison, like an offender who killed correctional officers while incarcerated.

With South Carolina resuming executions after a 13 year hiatus, among the first to go will be Richard Moore. Richard is by no conceivable metric the worst of the worst offenders that the death penalty is supposed to target. While incarcerated on death row for the last 25 years, Richard has taken full responsibility for his crimes and, in doing so, has earned support from the former Director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections, a Former SC Supreme Court Justice, and even some jurors who originally sentenced him to death. These voices of support for Richard’s clemency show the progress South Carolina has made since his trial and how this execution would not demonstrate the values of today’s South Carolina. Additionally, Richard has touched the lives of countless individuals and, as interns who worked with Richard last summer, we are lucky to be in that group.

On September 16th, 1999 Richard made an irreversible mistake that forever changed his life and the lives of many others. He entered a convenience store early in the morning. Richard was unarmed, he did not bring a gun, a knife, or any weapon in with him to the store. His intention was never to kill. After a verbal altercation with a store employee, James Mahoney, Mr. Mahoney pulled a gun on Richard. After a fight between the two men, Richard took possession of the gun, and a fatal shootout occurred. Tragically, Mr. Mahoney’s life was lost.

Richard is the only person on death row in South Carolina to be sentenced to death for a crime that was partially in self-defense, and he is the only remaining person who was sentenced to death by an all-white jury. Still, Richard makes absolutely no excuses for himself and what he did. He knows what he did was absolutely wrong and, as a family man himself, he is pained every day by knowing he took James Mahoney from his family. Richard would be immensely thankful to continue living in incarceration for the rest of his life so he can keep atoning for his crime and writing his incredible story of rehabilitation, serving as a testament to the positive change our prison system can bring about.

The Richard Moore who killed James Mahoney no longer exists. In a world where so many fathers with all of the resources in the world don’t care for their children, Richard has been an exceptional parent despite being on death row. He calls his children as often as possible. His son, now a

graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, recalled learning times tables through lessons Richard sent in the mail. Richard also instilled a love of one's country and family in his daughter, Alexandria, who served in the Air Force. Richard is now a doting grandfather of his two grandchildren who love him immensely.

Another challenge Richard has overcome is navigating prison life, where he has been a truly model inmate, according to Former SCDC Director, Jon Ozmint. In his over 20 years in prison, Richard has essentially zero disciplinary record, an extraordinarily rare feat. Ozmint believes Richard would be a "good lifer" where Richard could continue his mentorship to young incarcerated men, grow in his Christian faith, and be the father and grandfather that his family needs.

At Justice 360, Richard Moore is a man whose reputation precedes him. When we began as interns at Justice 360, we heard countless stories of all the ways Richard has transformed his life in prison. Still, when we first met Richard, we were both a bit nervous. After we walked past dozens of locked doors, Richard saw the two of us standing behind his attorney and introduced himself to us with a big hug and smile. Immediately, we knew he was a man without an ounce of hate or resentment in his heart. To hug two strangers, and make us feel instantly welcomed and cared for, showed his positivity and his deep love and appreciation for others.

We were amazed at how someone in Richard's shoes could maintain such a positive outlook on life. Despite his own problems, Richard continuously chooses to pour himself into others. In a situation that could so effortlessly turn somebody selfish and hostile, Richard transformed himself into a generous, kind, and honest man. Richard is a prime example of handling hardship with grace and, thus, is a role model for many of his same fate. In our own lives, Richard has inspired us to be more forgiving and selfless people. We firmly believe if we all carried ourselves with the compassion, bravery, and honor that Richard does, the world would be a better place.

If South Carolina executes Richard, they will tell inmates that there is nothing they can do to improve themselves in the eyes of the law after a crime. Richard has taken every possible step to become a better person for himself, for his family, and to make amends for his crime the best he knows how. If Governor McMaster grants clemency to Richard, he would incentivize inmates around the state to truly change their lives for the better to be productive American citizens, either from prison or back in society for lower level offenders. We would wholeheartedly support the Governor's decision to do so. To voice your support for Richard, please encourage Governor McMaster to grant clemency to Richard by signing Richard's petition on Action Network's website.

Celia Dawahare and Noah Berg interned at Justice 360 in the Summer of 2023.

Celia Dawahare is originally from Lexington, Kentucky, and is currently a senior Criminology and Criminal Justice student at the University of South Carolina. While at USC, she interned with Justice 360 and worked as a research assistant for John Blume at Cornell University. Currently, she is interning with South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.

Noah Berg is originally from Wilmington, North Carolina. He is currently the Juvenile Justice Reform AmeriCorps VISTA at Rhode Island for Community and Justice, and the co-director of the Post-Panetti Research Project at Cornell University. As an undergraduate at Cornell, he interned with Justice 360, the American Bar Association Death Penalty Representation Project, and the Federal Public Defender for the District of Columbia.