

Dear Attorney General Raúl Torrez and Solicitor General Aletheia Allen,

I'm writing to you not just as a concerned citizen, but as a concerned sister, mother, and daughter. In June, my family received news that my brother, Jesse Tooker, would finally have the chance to go before the parole board under New Mexico's Second Chance Law. For the first time in a long time, our family had hope.

Jesse went into the system when he was barely 17 years old. I was just 10. Now it's three decades later, and I'm a mother of three, an 18-year-old daughter studying law, and two sons, 14 and 8. My father, who is almost 70, has prayed for decades to see his son free again. When we heard that Jesse would have a chance at parole, it was an answered prayer. We came together as a family. We found him a place to live, a job, counseling, mentorship, and even college opportunities. We were ready to help him start a new life, surrounded by love and support.

We don't make excuses for what happened, and we are not underscoring the gravity of it. It was terrible, and Jesse has carried that weight every day since. He was a hurting, lost teenager then. The man he is today bears no resemblance to the child who entered the system. For almost 30 years, he has worked to grow, to heal, and to help others do the same. He's become a mentor, a light, and a man who wants to give back. Our family was ready to be made whole again.

Then, just as quickly as that hope appeared, it was taken away. Your office's statement is not only crushing Jesse's chance but also putting many other people at risk of losing theirs. It broke our hearts to learn that what was promised as a "second chance" was not truly a chance at all. I am traveling more than 12 hours to this meeting with my father, my daughter, my brother, and his wife, because we need to understand why this happened. We all just want answers. We want to know why families like ours were given hope, only to have it taken away.

Jesse has been a mentor, an advocate, an administrator, and a minister within the prison system. He has taught physical education, led programs, and guided others to make better choices and stay out of trouble. Even when he didn't believe he would ever be released, he devoted his life to helping others who might get that chance. That's the kind of man he is.

I still believe in second chances, I always will. I believe in redemption. I believe that when we say someone has earned a new beginning, we should mean it. And I also believe that even now, both of you have the opportunity to make this right, to restore hope to families who have prayed and waited for years.

My daughter is studying law because she believes in true justice, the kind that gives people the chance to change. She's coming to this meeting to see that kind of justice in

action. I want her to see that we are a country that stands for compassion, fairness, and, above all, that we are a country that stands by our word.

Please, help us make sure the Second Chance Law lives up to its name. Give families like ours a reason to keep believing in a system that should stand for healing, restoration, and hope.

Respectfully,

Sarah Htoutou

Killeen, Texas

(254) 285-7244

sjhtoutou@gmail.com