Elderly Prisoner No Longer A Threat
by Ricardo Ferrell

Despite serving over 43 years on a parolable life sentence, Darnell Bolden, 66, sits languishing in a Michigan prison even after being assessed by the MDOC as having a low risk of violence as well as an unlikelihood of reoffending. Bolden, undoubtedly fits the category of those elderly prisoners who criminal justice advocates and some Michigan Legislatures are echoing the message of change as it relates to the need for reform efforts to be inclusive of seriously considering paroling elderly prisoners, especially those with chronic care illnesses. This particular prisoner over the last four decades has only accumulated a minimal number of misconducts. And none were of a violent nature such as assaultive behavior, etc. Bolden has been a mentor to younger prisoners always lending good advice and encouragement in areas like the importance of obtaining their educational goals GED, College, Skilled Trade or any other such opportunity which would better prepare an individual for eventual reentry into society as some 95% will likely become returning citizens. He (Bolden) has been an example for fellow prisoners to model themselves after. Recently, Bolden was able to mediate between two gangs by utilizing Alternative Dispute Resolution Skills he taught himself by reading, studying and applying the model used by Win Win Facilitation an ADR operated by former Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Wendy M. Baxter and Conflict Management Skills he learned in the I-CAN Program. Bolden continues to show himself worthy of fair and positive parole consideration by the Michigan Parole Board, however, last year on his 65th birthday he received the standard Notice indicating the Parole Board's decision which reads: "The Majority of the Parole Board has 'NO INTEREST' in your case. Your next consideration date is scheduled for August 12, 2022."

In the interest of a fundamental sense of fairness it would seem that a logical minded individual would realize that Bolden poses a low risk to public safety as he obviously demonstrates by way of his conduct and adjustment during his long period of incarceration, a readiness to finally be paroled. Realistically speaking what besides the nature of his original offense are the parole board considering in their repeated denials of Bolden's release? Shouldn't they (parole board) also consider other factors in the determination of Bolden's suitability to be granted parole? Its apparent his many accomplishments; strong support network; gainful employment offers; mental stability; substantially showing of his ability to succeed; expressing remorse for his crimes; showing empathy for his victim(s); and taking full responsibility for the harm he caused by his actions during the commission of his offense were not fairly considered during the course of the Executive Session among all the Michigan Parole Board Members when they rendered their majority decision to continue Darnell Bolden five additional years. In essence he (Bolden) would be 70 years old at his next scheduled file review. As this writer outlined in an article titled, 'Incarcerating Beyond Necessary' Bolden's situation is quite indicative to why there exist a dire need for parole reform for parolable lifers who has served 3, 4, 5 decades on a sentence which in all intents and purposes should be treated the same as those serving for similar offenses who received long indeterminate term-of-years sentences. Irrespective of the opinions of lawmakers, prosecuting attorneys, parole board members, and general public - parolable lifers certainly aren't the 'worst of the worst' often they actually are the most well behaved prisoners usually tutoring and mentoring other incarcerated individuals and once paroled have the lowest percentage of those who contribute to recidivism.

-- The MDOC and Michigan Parole Board should seriously look at ways to release elderly prisoners like Darnell Bolden who has unequivocally been proven by COMPAS assessments and other factors not to be a danger or risk to public safety. SAVE MILLIONS BY PAROLING THE ELDERLY. --