



Written Testimony of Dr. Shaneva D. McReynolds, President of FAMM

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dr. Shaneva D. McReynolds, and I serve as the president of FAMM, formerly known as Families Against Mandatory Minimums. I appreciate your time and the chance to share my personal story, which I hope will provide context and clarity as you consider sentencing policies, and the guideline changes you are reviewing.

I grew up in one of Chicago's most challenging neighborhoods—Englewood. In our neighborhood, many hold the adage that “nothing good comes from Englewood.” The community's struggles are well known. For many residents, education stops at the eighth grade, and survival becomes the primary focus. Yet even in this desperate environment, a sense of community prevailed. Neighbors taught one another how to navigate the hardships of daily life, and despite the obstacles, it was in Englewood that I experienced some of the most formative moments of my childhood.

During this period, I lived with my aunt and uncle, who, despite their modest incomes—my uncle working as a high school janitor and my aunt as a hospital cafeteria worker—provided stability and love in a small two-bedroom apartment. Their family of six children, along with me, forged bonds that helped shape who I am today. Later, when I returned to live with my military father, I was exposed to opportunities and experiences that differed greatly from those in Englewood.

It was during my youth that I met my childhood sweetheart—a young man whose life mirrored the struggles of our community. His family background was different than most in Englewood—growing up with both parents in a long-standing marriage—he was the baby boy of six children, with a mother who never worked and a father who went from job to job to support their family. Even so, he, too, was shaped by the harsh realities of our community. After dropping out of high school, he turned to selling drugs—not as a way to gain wealth or power, but simply to survive and support his family. In the process, he even managed to help his two sisters attend school.

Eventually—like far too many others—he found himself ensnared in the criminal justice system. Twenty-two years after our paths first crossed, I reconnected with him, only to learn that he had pleaded guilty to conspiring to distribute 1.5 kilograms or more of crack cocaine under a “10-to-life” plea deal. Due to the well-known sentencing disparities between crack and powder cocaine, he ultimately received a 235-month federal prison term—nearly 20 years. Although he knew the difference between right and wrong and was prepared to take responsibility for his actions, the punishment did not reflect who he was as a person or the struggle he faced simply trying to survive. By pushing his earliest release date to as late as 2025, the guidelines forced a sentence that was far too long, overshadowing any sense of justice or rehabilitation.



The need for change was evident not only to our family and countless others, but also to lawmakers, judges, and this agency. After reforms implemented during the Obama administration—measures recognizing that sentencing must account for mitigating factors—my husband’s sentence was significantly reduced. We were reunited earlier than the original guideline sentence would have allowed.

In 2012, we reconnected; he proposed in 2013, and we married in a federal prison in 2014. Thanks to the sentencing reform, he was able to come home in 2015, in time to share precious moments with his family, including his mother’s final year of life. Today, we celebrate milestones that once seemed impossible: our 10th wedding anniversary, his successful transition into civilian life, and his establishment of a trucking company that employs returning citizens.

His story stands as a testament to the transformative power of reform and the potential for renewal. It also demonstrates just how excessive his original sentence was—he did not need 12 more years to become the man he is today. This amazing man, whom I am proud to do life with, also appeared before this very Commission in July 2023—alongside two other gentlemen—to testify about the retroactivity of guideline amendments, the very provision that brought him home over 10 years early.

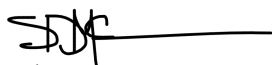
My husband’s story—like those of so many others—shows that our legal system too often fails to consider the full context of an individual’s life. It treats people in a black-and-white manner, disregarding the mitigating factors that can and do change the trajectory of a person’s life. His journey from a neighborhood where survival was the norm to becoming a productive member of society reveals the system’s inability to address human complexity.

These stories also demonstrate that current drug sentences frequently fail to meet the purposes of punishment. However, you have the power to make this system a little more just. I am thrilled that, under the revised guidelines, the base offense level for someone like Jeffery could now be capped at 30 instead of the base offense level of 40 that he received.

I respectfully ask that you consider stories like Jeffery’s when evaluating sentencing guidelines. Not every offender is a hardened criminal or a mastermind; many, like my husband, are ordinary people caught in circumstances that demand compassion and understanding. I urge you to account for the mitigating factors—such as upbringing, intent, and the possibility of rehabilitation—so that justice may be tempered with mercy, and so that our system can allow for redemption and true reintegration into society.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,



Shaneva D. McReynolds, Ph.D.
President
FAMM