

Ohio inmate Percy Jones wrote the following open letter. Percy comments on Ohio's practice of sentencing children to life terms of incarceration. A life sentence is not as severe as a sentence of life without parole, which the United States Supreme Court recently declared unconstitutional for juvenile offenders who committed a non-murder criminal offense. But a sentence of life for a juvenile offender is still a draconian punishment for a child offender, a reality powerfully revealed in the critically acclaimed documentary *15 to Life: Kenneth's Story*. The injustice is even greater when the offender's freedom is left to the arbitrary decision-making of a biased parole board such as Ohio's. With the recent announcement of the formation of the Coalition for Public Safety, a coalition consisting of liberal and conservative organizations whose aim, as reported by the *New York Times*, is to "reduce prison populations, overhaul sentencing, reduce recidivism and take on similar initiatives," the time is right for concerned citizens to press their representatives to reform Ohio sentencing laws that punish juvenile offenders unjustly.

*In His Own Words:*

### **Juvenile Offender Percy Jones Considers the Ohio's Criminal Justice System's Failure to Give Second Chances to Juvenile Offenders**

My name is Percy Jones, and I'm 38-years-old. Currently I'm in prison, where I've been since I was 17 years old, due to a terrible mistake I made back then. I'm writing this open letter to bring attention to the unfair treatment of Ohio juvenile offenders who, like me, were placed in the Ohio prison system prior to the enactment of the state's truth-in-sentencing Senate Bill 2 laws, which went into effect July 1, 1996. Hundreds of Ohio juvenile offenders who were sentenced under the state's pre-July 1, 1996, sentencing laws are still in prison for crimes they committed when they were children.

Locking up juvenile offenders for decades at a time is just one sign that Ohio's criminal justice system is broken. Many juvenile offenders I've met understand as well as I that the crimes we committed were wrong and harmful to many people. We've taken responsibility for our crimes, and taken steps to rehabilitate ourselves by participating in rehabilitative and educational programs. The Ohio Parole Board, however, ignores our positive strides and continues to punish us as if we're career criminals who've been in and out of prison all of our lives. Unlike states such as Michigan, California, and Florida that have reformed their laws for punishing juvenile offenders, Ohio's criminal justice system has not reformed the state's laws governing juvenile offenders.

My objective now is to generate overdue public attention to the unmerciful and harsh treatment of Ohio's juvenile offenders who have been in prison for decades. My hope is that citizens will press for reforming Ohio's laws regarding the punishment of juvenile offenders.

In closing, I want to ask humbly for all concerned citizens who read this to work for these reforms and give us the freedom to live in society as adults with a fresh start at life.

*Editor's note: Percy Jones is seeking to network with any individuals, attorneys, or organizations interested in undoing the inhumane practice of incarcerating child offenders for the duration of their lives. You can contact Percy at the following address:*

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You can also contact Percy by way of email through [Jpay.com](mailto:Jpay.com).

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**Jason Goudlock** is a progressive writer embedded in the struggle against the repressive United States prison industrial complex. He would like to be contacted by (or recommended) a civil attorney willing to represent clients on a pro bono basis. Anyone wishing to assist him in this matter, or offer support of any kind, may contact him at the following:

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Learn more about Jason Goudlock and his struggle for freedom at [freejasongoudlock.org](http://freejasongoudlock.org).