

Request for Letters of Support

Hello All

My name is Sherry Edmunds-Flett. I am reaching out for letters of support for a dear friend of my late husband Glen Flett and myself. Our friend is named Clarence aka Chico Stevens. I am applying to have Chico released from prison on day parole and live with me in my home on what is known as a private home placement.

My Academic Background

For those people who do not know me, I received my MA in African Studies from UCLA. My thesis was on the history of slavery in the Kingston, Ontario and Bay of Quinte Region. I am a doctoral candidate in history at Simon Fraser University. My PhD thesis which I have finally completed and am just revising is on the history of African Canadian women in British Columbia from 1858-1938.

Background on my Work in the Criminal Justice System

I am the executive director of L.I.N.C. (Long-term Inmates Now in the Community) a non profit registered charity that I founded in 1992 with my recently deceased husband Glen Flett. Glen was serving a life sentence. He was on full parole in the community at the time of his passing. I had met Glen when I was 20 years in Millhaven Institution where he was the social convenor of B.I.F.A. (Black Inmates and Friends Association) and I was the social convenor of the Queen's University West Indian Club. We had been introduced to each other by the B.I.F.A. president Roni Grant. A lifer too, Roni was African Canadian. In 1987, Glen and I married in William head Institution, a federal prison located on Vancouver Island. We remained married until Glen's death in October 2019 from lung cancer. Glen and I had formed L.I.N.C. (www.lincsociety.bc.ca) after our friend Roni had committed suicide in 1991. L.I.N.C. works with all people impacted by the criminal justice system. It holds contracts with the Correctional Service of Canada to work with people reintegrating back into the community and help those individuals getting out of prison find employment in the Central Fraser Valley. We also manage an award winning agricultural social enterprise called Emma's Acres where offenders, victim/survivors and members of the wider community grow non spray non gmo produce. Our farm was featured on the CBC National.

Chico Stevens

I have a friend named Clarence Stevens. His nickname is Chico. Chico was good friends with my husband and did a lot of time with Glen at various prisons out here in British Columbia. Born in New Brunswick, Chico has spent 60 of his 65 years under some form of custody beginning with the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children where he went at the age of five and did 2 years, foster homes and the Kingsclear Training School in NB. The years of physical, sexual and emotional abuse he suffered at the Home, in foster care and at Kingsclear made Chico a ticking time bomb as he puts it. It all culminated with Chico receiving a life 25 sentence in his early 20s for killing his girlfriend and leaving her husband for dead.

Chico credits the programming he took inside during the years since his incarceration on the life sentence for changing his thinking. He has been out on parole at various times in his sentence but is currently in custody through no fault of his own. (Chico had received compensation for the abuse he suffered at the Home and Kingsclear. He told his parole officer that he wanted to buy a boat so he could fish and have a dog. This was interpreted as a possibility for escape.)

Our Plan and My Ask of the Group

It came to me that the best thing I could do for our friend is to give him a home. Chico has never had a home since he was taken away to the Home. There is two steps to the process. I am requesting that the Correctional Service of Canada do the equivalent of a Gladue decision for Chico as an African Canadian who suffered from systemic racism. A Gladue decision is what is done for Aboriginal offenders who went to residential school etc. The institutional discrimination that was experienced is documented in their files. I believe that the CSC should do this for Chico as an African Canadian. (I have applied on Chico's behalf with his permission to get his files from the Home for Coloured Children and Kingsclear training school.)

How I propose to get our friend home to me is through what is called an ethnocultural private home placement. This is where Chico would be granted a day parole to live with me based on my experience working with people in prison, our community plan for him which would include culturally appropriate services that are not currently found in prison and my own cultural competencies. There have not been any cases that I know of in the Pacific Region nor that I have found across the country yet for an ethnocultural placement for a person doing time who is African Canadian. Chico will be the test case. (I think personally that this is the way to go

while people sort through planning and creating societies and applying to have halfway houses for people of African descent who are in custody which will take years to establish.)

I will receive no compensation for having Chico live with me just the knowledge of doing the right thing for the little boy who was hauled off by the cops at five years of age and the grown man who is my dear friend of over 30 years.

As well, Chico is immune compromised as he has had cancer and is diabetic. With the pandemic, Chico is in a high risk situation being double bunked in a medium security prison with no capacity for social distancing.

What I need are letters supporting the idea of 1) a Gladue decision for Chico so the systemic racism/abuse he suffered is fully documented; 2) a private home placement for him where he finally has a home for the first time in his life 3) letters that can attest to my abilities to work with people getting out of prison and 4) provide or find people who can provide culturally appropriate services and supports for Chico on the outside which are not being offered inside prison at this time.

These letters will help show the CSC and the Parole Board of Canada that there is community support which would go a long way to helping us.

Letters can be sent to me at my email address seflett@telus.net.

Thanks sincerely for your consideration

Sherry