

## Governor should ignore parole board, exonerate Lawrence McKinney

David Plazas\_, dplazas@tennessean.com 1:51 p.m. CDT October 3, 2016



(Photo: Lacy Atkins / The Tennessean)

Lawrence McKinney deserves compensation for having spent half his life in prison for a crime he did not commit.

The Tennessee Board of Parole committed a grave injustice on Sept. 27 by denying his request for exoneration.

Gov. Bill Haslam can make things right. He does not have to abide by the parole board's recommendation. He can and should grant McKinney's exoneration.

McKinney had been convicted for a 1978 rape and burglary in Memphis, but DNA evidence cleared the 60-year-old Wilson County resident 31 years after he was imprisoned. He was released in 2009 and his record has been expunged.

The parole board, however, chose to cast doubt on the validity of his exculpation and took into account a lengthy disciplinary record in prison in its denial. McKinney would have avoided facing these discipline issues had he not been wrongly locked away.

The most basic reason why Haslam should exonerate McKinney is that he is not guilty of the crime.

In addition, Haslam is well aware of the effects of trauma on a person's development and chances for success in life, given his leadership on adverse childhood experiences.

Finally, it sends a strong message about criminal justice, redemption and rehabilitation. The state is not always right, and when it is not, it should make amends.

McKinney can never get those three decades back of his life. That is why Tennessee must exonerate him and allow him to receive compensation, which is capped at \$1 million.

The money will not return those lost years or prepare him for a better future. However, it will allow him to get on as best he can.

Supporters like Immanuel Baptist Church Pastor John Hunn in Lebanon and state Rep. Mark Pody, R-Lebanon have been firmly on his side.

McKinney's attorneys David Raybin and Jack Lowery sent a scathing letter to Haslam about the parole board, writing that it had "... exhibited procedural irregularities unlike any we have seen in our decades of practice before virtually every tribunal in the state."

McKinney had previously applied for exoneration during Gov. Phil Bredesen's administration, but the parole board denied his request then and the governor never acted upon it.

Haslam has the power to fix this injustice and be on the right side of history.

*David Plazas wrote this editorial on behalf of The Tennessean Editorial Board. Call him at 615-259-8063, email him at [dplazas@tennessean.com](mailto:dplazas@tennessean.com) or tweet to him at [@davidplazas](https://twitter.com/davidplazas).*