

October 22, 2002

Mr. Brian E. Beatty
Secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety
4701 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, N.C. 27699-4701

Dear Brian,

During my years of public service, I have often spoken of my concerns regarding needed reform in our justice system, including the need for increased accessibility to justice for our less fortunate, the need for increased funding to improve court efficiency and service, and the need for increased professionalism in our court operations. An additional growing concern, which partly results from those concerns previously listed, is the number of exonerations of the innocent from our nation's and state's prisons. These exonerations challenge us to further review our criminal justice system for potential changes which can minimize future convictions of the innocent, without jeopardizing the conviction of the guilty, and establish a mechanism for objective review of credible innocence claims.

To this end, I invite you to join me in a round table discussion regarding the establishment of an Innocence Commission to review innocence issues relevant to the State of North Carolina on Friday, November 22nd, from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the home of Chris Mumma, who currently works with the N.C. Center on Actual Innocence and has offered to host our lunch. A list of the invitees to the initial round table discussion is attached. It is my hope that after our meeting each of you will be willing to assign a delegate from your organization to serve on a working Commission to outline innocence issues relevant to the State of North Carolina, review and evaluate work already being done in other states on the issue, outline recommendations for changes in this state, and present those recommendations to a forum of representatives of our justice system, including police, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges. Without representation from each arm of the justice system, during the proposal, acceptance and implementation stages, we will lose the benefits of the great wealth of experience each arm has to offer and the ability to successfully implement change.

Our joint efforts can have a strong positive impact on North Carolina's justice system and our citizen's faith in it. Please RSVP to my office at 733-3711, by November 8th, regarding your attendance at the round table discussion on November 22nd. I hope you each will personally be able to attend this initial meeting.

With kindest personal regards, I am

Sincerely,

I. Beverly Lake, Jr.
Chief Justice

Invitees

Mr. Brian E. Beatty
Secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety
4701 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, N.C. 27699-4701

Mr. Steve Bizzell
Johnston County Sheriff's Office
P.O. Box 1809
Smithfield, N.C. 27577

Mr. Robert Brown, Jr.
Durham Public Defender's Office
5th Floor, Judicial Building
P.O. Box 25291
Durham, N.C. 27702

Professor James Coleman
Duke University Law School
P.O. Box 90360
Durham, N.C. 27708-0360

The Honorable Attorney General Roy Cooper
N.C. Department of Justice
P.O. Box 629
Raleigh, N.C. 27602-0629

Mr. Malcolm R. Hunter, Jr.
Executive Director, Office of Indigent Defense Services
123 W. Main Street
Suite 700
Durham, N.C. 27701

Chief Justice I. Beverly Lake
N.C. Supreme Court
Justice Building
2 East Morgan St.
P.O. Box 1841
Raleigh, N.C. 27602

Ms. Chris Mumma
The N.C. Center on Actual Innocence
P.O. Box 52446
Shannon Plaza Station
Durham, N.C. 27717-2446

Professor Theresa Newman
Duke University Law School
P.O. Box 90362
Durham, N.C. 27708-0360

Justice Robert Orr
N.C. Supreme Court
Justice Building
2 East Morgan St.
P.O. Box 1841
Raleigh, N.C. 27602

Professor Richard Rosen
UNC School of Law
100 Ridge Road
CB #3380
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599-3380

Mr. Thomas W. Ross
Executive Director, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
101 Reynolda Village
Winston-Salem, N.C.
27106-5199

Mr. Daryl Stephens
Chief of Police, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department
601 East Trade Street
Charlotte, N.C. 28202

The Honorable Donald Stephens
Wake County Senior Resident Judge
P.O. Box 351
Raleigh, N.C. 27602-0351

Mr. Pete Weitzel
N.C. Center on Actual Innocence
P.O. Box 52446
Shannon Plaza Station
Durham, N.C. 27717-2446

The Honorable C. Colon Willoughby, Jr.
Wake County District Attorney
P.O. Box 31
Raleigh, N.C. 27602-0031