

Evers Grants Eighteen Pardons

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin
Thursday, 16 July 2020 09:51 -



Each of these people earned a pardon by serving their sentence and making positive contributions to society.

MADISON – Gov. Tony Evers granted pardons this week to eighteen individuals. The Governor’s Pardon Advisory Board heard from applicants virtually on June 23, 2020. Applicants who the Board recommended for pardon were forwarded to Gov. Evers for final consideration.



“A pardon won’t fix the challenges facing our criminal justice system, but it can have a tremendous impact on a person’s life,” said Gov. Evers. “Each of these people earned a pardon by serving their sentence and making positive contributions to society.”

Gov. Evers granted pardons to the following people:

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- James Herson, now 59 years old, was struggling with addiction when he assisted another individual in burglarizing a home 20 years ago in exchange for the proceeds and drugs. He now works with the Milwaukee Rescue Mission, the same organization he credits with helping him recover from his drug addiction. Mr. Herson lives in West Allis.

- Steven Johnson, now 58 years old, was 23 when he caused a tragic car accident in which his best friend was killed. He was a pallbearer in his friend's funeral, and he has garnered the forgiveness of the victim's mother, who supports a pardon. He has been diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor and has asked for this pardon before dying. Mr. Johnson lives in Marshfield.

- Taranda Westmoreland, now 45 years old, made several unauthorized charges on a credit card when she was 26. She has since obtained a master's degree and now works to serve others in need, including minors, folks with special needs, and persons experiencing homelessness. Ms. Westmoreland lives in Milwaukee.

- Barry Plotnick, now 65 years old, was 21 years old and struggling with addiction when he and his friend broke into a drug store and stole several bottles of valium. After completing his sentence, he went on to become a successful small business owner in the produce industry and is married to his wife of 20 years with children and grandchildren. Mr. Plotnick now lives in the State of Georgia.

- Loretta Childs was 22 years old when she knowingly wrote bad checks to obtain some items for resale. She quickly took responsibility, is now 38 years old, and has maintained employment while raising her children. Ms. Childs lives in Milwaukee.

- Matthew Raasch, now 41 years old, was struggling with drug addiction when he cashed fraudulent checks to support his addiction. He now volunteers and works with Waukesha County inmates and drug and alcohol treatment courts as a mentor to those struggling with addiction. Mr. Raasch lives in Waukesha.

- Elandis Peete was 18 when he sold cocaine to an undercover police officer. Now in his forties, he opened his own trucking business, mentoring and hiring formerly incarcerated folks to help them become productive members of the community. Mr. Peete lives in Wauwatosa.

- Shelesia Parham, now 51 years old, was 23 when she forged her mother's name on multiple withdrawal slips for her mother's account. Her relationship with her mother is mended and she fully supports a pardon. She has become an owner of multiple newspapers in Racine and previously hosted a weekly gospel hour on local radio. Ms. Parham lives in Racine.

- Kerry Brunner, now 59 years old, was in his early twenties when he was convicted of several offenses connected to a drug addiction, including delivery of cocaine and cashing a stolen check. He is married with children and grandchildren, has been a small business owner, and is currently working in his local school district as a custodian. Mr. Brunner now lives in the State of Missouri.

- Keith Butler, now 40 years old, was 23 and homeless when he was caught selling drugs to undercover police officers. He now is a devoted father who volunteers in his community, including previously as an assistant coach with the Green Bay Packer Pee Wee League Neighborhood Youth Sports Organization. Mr. Butler lives in Milwaukee.

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- Markeese Walker, now 40 years old, was 22 when he was convicted of fleeing an officer. He has since become an active community member and volunteer, who received adamant support from many, including a former Milwaukee law enforcement officer. Mr. Walker lives in Milwaukee.

- Andrew Ophoven was arrested by three plain-clothed detectives for selling marijuana 20 years ago. He has since gone to school for culinary arts and hospitality management. Mr. Ophoven hopes someday he will be able to own his own restaurant. Mr. Ophoven lives in Waukesha.

- Michael Andersen, now 40 years old, sold marijuana and shoplifted 20 years ago. He now has a daughter and has obtained associate degrees in marketing and business. Mr. Andersen lives in West Allis.

- Yusef Moore, now 49 years old, was convicted of several offenses relating to his addiction to drugs in his early thirties. He has taken remarkable steps including obtaining a master's degree from Loyola University of Chicago, helping others struggling with addiction by becoming a substance abuse residential counselor, and working with persons experiencing homelessness. He received support from the Court in his application for pardon, works the 12-steps, and is an active member of his faith community. Mr. Moore lives in Greenfield.

- Terry Howell-Dixon is 65 years old and nearly 30 years ago failed to report an increase in income which resulted in an over-grant of public assistance and food stamps. She has maintained steady employment, is a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, and is heavily involved with her faith community. Ms. Howell-Dixon lives in Milwaukee.

- LaFondra Thomas was 19 when she committed a series of check forgeries. She since obtained her HSED and worked for the same company, AT&T, for 21 years. Ms. Thomas now lives in the State of Texas.

- Sonny Valeriano, now 34 years old, was 20 years old and struggling with a death in the family when he decided to sell marijuana for some quick cash. He began his pursuit of higher education while still in confinement and has since pursued multiple degrees to become a massage therapist. Mr. Valeriano lives in Milwaukee.

- Richard Baker, now 39 years old, made a series of mistakes as a young man that resulted in several convictions including bail jumping, obstructing an officer, and escape. He credits his turn to religion as the reason for his reform. He has since obtained his HSED and works as a hunting and fishing guide in Minnesota, where he resides.

The Wisconsin Constitution grants the governor the power to pardon individuals convicted of a crime. A pardon is an official act of forgiveness that restores some of the rights that are lost when someone is convicted of a felony, including the right to serve on a jury, hold public office, and hold certain professional licenses. A pardon does not result in an expungement.

Under Executive Order #30, individuals convicted of a Wisconsin felony may apply for a

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pardon if they completed their sentence at least five years ago and have not committed any new crimes. Individuals currently required to register on the sex offender registry are ineligible for a pardon.

The pardon application and instructions for applying are located on the Governor's website: www.evers.wi.gov/Pages/pardon-information.aspx.

The Governor's Pardon Advisory Board will continue to meet virtually monthly and will be reconvening again on July 21, 2020 and will air on wiseye.org/live.