

**Cellblocks To Mountaintops**  
**Video 7A: The Decision**  
**Transcript**

**TEXT CARD:**

December 2, 2020

35 days after Sterling's parole board hearing.

**Cheryl Cunio**

**Sterling Cunio's wife:**

So the parole board said they would get back to us within 30 days with their decision. And it's been just a little over that. And we did find out today that the board said that he would have to do 13 more years. As of right now, his his current projected release date is September 2032. We had put so much, hope and energy into and optimism going into this hearing. There was.. that we really just believed that they would just end it.

**Aliza Kaplan**

**Professor, Lewis & Clark Law School**

**Director, Criminal Justice Reform Clinic:**

I'm just so furious I can't even get... I can't even get sad because I'm so mad. I and my clinic where in front of the board all the time, and I see who they think is worthy of rehabilitation and who has met that standard. There is no doubt in my mind, like 100% that Sterling meets that. If he was just convicted a few years different, he would have already proved his rehabilitation and he wouldn't be in prison anymore. You know, we spent six hours hearing, not just from Sterling and all these people who support him. Then we also heard from the victims in their most human and deep way. And in the end, the board fell back on like a math calculation. I just think it lacked in humanity.

**Ryan O'Connor**

**Sterling Cunio's Attorney:**

They made a decision that I think was largely a political decision. To reach this outcome using this rigid formula, this rigid legal formula.

**TEXT CARD:**

In recalculating Sterling's prison term, the board was required to use rules enacted prior to the advancements in brain science and constitutional law that recognize that youth are more likely to be rehabilitated. Not less.

As a result, several years were actually added to Sterling's sentence.

**Sterling Cunio:** I feel like my entire community was just completely disregarded. Will Durant, the philosopher who talked about those that experience great difficulty. Either become very bitter and hostile, or they become very genuine and authentic. Somehow my spirit is going to figure out a way to transcend this.

**Professor Aliza Kaplan:** He's in... I don't know whether. What do I call it? Legal limbo, legal quagmire. He's like one of a kind legally. Clemency is probably the best option. The problem with clemency is he's in line and in the group of these incredible people the clinic

has been representing, and he still has open legal avenues. The governor usually likes to weigh in when everything's done, so it still feels more risky than the other legal avenues.