

**Cellblocks to Mountaintops**  
**Video Episode 01: The Hearing**  
**Transcript**

**Parole Board Chairperson:** Alright, are we ready?

Good morning everyone. This is a hearing for the board to establish a prison term in your case.

**TEXT CARD:**

Sterling Cunio is currently serving the 24<sup>th</sup> year  
of a lifetime prison sentence imposed when he was 16 years old.

The U. S. Supreme Court has since ruled that life sentences  
without the possibility of parole are unconstitutional for  
juvenile offenders.

The Oregon board of parole has agreed to conduct a remote  
hearing to reconsider the length of Sterling's prison sentence.

**Chloe Williams**

**Member of Sterling's Legal Team**

We would like to start with Sterling giving a personal statement, and then I'll go into direct questioning.

**Sterling Cunio:** I just wanted to begin by intentionally acknowledging that the ultimate reason we are here today is because                      and                      are not.

**TEXT CARD:**

The victims' families requested that the names and images  
of their loved ones not be used.

**Ryan O'Connor**

**Sterling's Lawyer**

I've been Sterling's attorney since 2012, and this is the closest Sterling's been to actually getting out of prison.

**Chloe Williams:** Can you talk about in 2008, you began to publicly denounce the code of the streets.

**Sterling Cunio:** When I first decided that I was going to change, I made a vow of authenticity in committed to becoming better. We started a restorative justice program to transform prison culture and reduce harm. I spent at least a good decade thinking about how to be a better person that could somehow live in a way that could never balance what I've done, but offers a testimony of understanding and of regret.

**Ryan O'Connor:** And when someone is as eloquent as Sterling, there can be an instinct on the side of prosecutors and even sometimes the board to think that's superficial and fake and evidence of a psychopath. It must be an act. And I think it helps when you build up the credibility with the overwhelming support by ... everyone. Everyone who knows him.

**Parole Board Chairperson:** You know, I have to tell you that in my time at the Board, I've never had a hearing that had this number of support persons. And I'm just curious to get your opinion as to why you think they're all here for you.

**Sterling Cunio:** I was overwhelmed. I seen the letters. I was reading some of their letters and they moved me to tears. I believe it's evidence that if you're authentic, you live according to your principles, you honor your commitments.... People embrace that.

**TEXT CARD:**

Members of both victims' families also testify during the hearing.  
All oppose any change to Sterling's sentence.

**Ryan Joslin  
Prosecuting Attorney**

Mr. Cunio is an award-winning writer, a storyteller, a playwright, a persuasive speaker. He's convinced many people, perhaps even some members of this board that he is a reformed man. The victims in this case are the best judge whether true occurred and they are not convinced.

**Ryan O'Connor:** As Dr. Zorich said in her updated psychological evaluation, by all measures, he is rehabilitated. There's no credible risk of him re-offending. It's difficult to imagine a better example of a juvenile offender who's become rehabilitated. There has been a sea change in juvenile sentencing, and that's grounded in scientific advancements in juvenile brain development. And so I'm asking the board to follow the science and the law and set a projected release date as soon as possible. Thank you.

