

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**St. Louis, MO--** As Toni Morrison once said, “the function of freedom is to free someone else.” John Cusack, Danny Glover, Dave Eggers, Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor, Wallace Shawn, John Carlos, Gbenga Akinnagbe, Marc Lamont Hill, Charlene Caruthers, V (formerly Eve Ensler), Yusef Salaam, Exonerated 5 (formerly Central Park 5), Michael Bennett, Etan Thomas, Dave Zirin, and over 500 other actors, authors, athletes, advocates, professors and other influential voices are dedicating themselves to that statement by joining the family of Billie Allen and the Free Billie Allen Campaign as they call on any controlling authority to grant Mr. Allen a re-trial. Mr. Allen was convicted of the armed robbery and murder of security guard, Richard Heflin, that took place in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 17, 1997. Despite a lack of physical, forensic, or documentary evidence linking him to the case, Mr. Allen was tried, convicted and sentenced to death. He has been on federal death row for 23 years.

As the petition states, and the evidence shows, Billie Allen’s trial attorney and the courts severely failed him in their neglect to present and consider all the relevant evidence. This includes multiple pieces of exculpatory evidence that were never considered at Mr. Allen’s trial, including negative DNA results, negative gasoline results, and other forensic evidence pointing to Mr. Allen’s innocence. The trial attorney also failed to challenge false and misleading witness testimony, call upon any witnesses on Mr. Allen’s behalf, including a security guard who would tell the FBI that he saw Mr. Allen at a shopping mall miles away from the crime scene, and another witness who would state that they had seen someone other than Mr. Allen fleeing from the crime scene.

Billie's lawyer Eric Montroy says, “Billie Allen’s court case has been beset by injustice. He has professed his innocence and sought DNA testing for many years, and the government is in possession of DNA evidence that could be instrumental in proving his innocence. Yet the government has fought off every effort to test the DNA. No person should face execution where such important questions are within easy reach, yet remain unanswered.”

This petition comes at a moment where federal executions have resumed after a 17-year hiatus. In a short span of 10 weeks from July to September, seven men have been executed, with three more scheduled for November and December. Mr. Allen, who has exhausted his appeals process, “is more vulnerable to wrongful execution than ever before,” as stated on the petition, highlighting that this is a matter of urgency, and that there is significant evidence of Mr. Allen’s innocence that was never seen by a court.

“This petition is more than a quest for signatures. I am asking that you not only read the facts of my brother’s case but also join me and my family in making sure that my one-and-only brother isn’t wrongfully executed for a crime he did not commit,” says Yvette Allen, sister of Mr. Allen, calling her brother’s case “as perilous as it is urgent.”

Marc Lamont Hill says, "Given the history of racism, misconduct, and human error within the American criminal justice system, the death penalty is never the proper punishment. But the case of Billie Allen is a concrete example of someone sentenced to death despite reasonable doubt, procedural errors, and exculpatory evidence. We must immediately close the door to the death chamber for Billie Allen, work toward getting him a new trial and, more importantly, getting him where he ultimately belongs: home."

The petition is being delivered today to Representative Ayanna Pressley, who introduced legislation to ban the federal death penalty in July. The Free Billie Allen Campaign and Mr. Allen’s family ask Rep. Pressley to call on all controlling authorities to grant Mr. Allen a re-trial so that his full evidence can be considered before an irreversible punishment of death is administered.

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