

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 9, 2016

Dear Colleague:

We write to call your attention to a recent case – a preventable tragedy – that belies the oft-repeated and incorrect notion that drug traffickers are non-violent criminals, and that cautions against efforts to let them out of federal prison early.

On January 5, 2016, Wendell Callahan brutally murdered his ex-girlfriend, Erveena Hammonds, and her two young daughters, Breya Hammonds, age 7, and Anaesia Green, age 10, in what *The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch* described as a “stabbing rampage.”¹ Callahan, a federal drug trafficking felon, had been released early from federal prison because the U.S. Sentencing Commission twice reduced his 12-year sentence by a total of more than four years. Callahan’s prior record included convictions for gun and drug crimes, and he had nearly killed his ex-girlfriend once before.

Alarming, the Senate is now considering sentence reduction legislation – S.2123, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 – that will make both *deeper* and *broader* reductions to sentences than those imposed by the Sentencing Commission. While the Commission retroactively reduced sentences for a defined class of drug felons – crack cocaine traffickers – S. 2123 would make *all* drug traffickers eligible for reduced sentences and possible early release, *regardless of the type of drug that they trafficked in and regardless of whether they have a history of other violent crimes*. Those felons eligible for early release include at least 8,091² currently in federal prison, according to preliminary estimates by the Sentencing Commission.

We want to make clear to you, our colleague, that drug trafficking can in no way be considered a “non-violent” crime. It is an industry built on an entire edifice of violence, stretching from the narco-terrorist organizations in South America to the drug deal enforcers that afflict too many U.S. communities. As noted by former DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart, “drug trafficking poses a serious threat to society because of the violence and the hazards that accompany it and the terrorist organizations that are often funded by it.” According to widely respected criminologist Iowa State University Professor Matt DeLisi,

¹ “Man charged with killing woman, 2 daughters had early prison release,” Theodore Decker, *The Columbus Dispatch*, Jan. 13, 2016, available at: <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2016/01/12/0112-3-stabbed-to-death-on-north-side.html>.

² U.S. Sentencing Commission Analysis, “Offenders Convicted of 21 § 851 and Eligible Under Sec. 101 of S. 2123 Projected to be in Prison on Nov. 1, 2015 by State,” “Offenders Eligible for Retroactive Application of FSA Under Sec. 106 of S. 2123 Projected to be in Prison on Nov. 1, 2015 by State.”

“a person sentenced for drug crimes is also likely to have property crimes, violent crimes, public order crimes, nuisance crimes, traffic violations, and assorted violations of the criminal justice system. Thus, [in] any discussion of drug offenders [it] should also be understood that they are next week very likely to be property offenders and potentially violent offenders.”

A recent Bureau of Justice Statistics study confirms this, finding that 77% of drug inmates re-offended within five years, with 25% committing other types of violent crimes.

Sadly, the heinous murders of Erveena Hammonds and her two little girls, Brea and Anaesia, the victims in the triple homicide by Wendell Callahan, is a harsh reminder of these facts. S.2123 would give convicted, violent drug traffickers the chance to be released early from federal prison.

We believe that the possible release of thousands of violent criminals is a risky and possibly devastating social experiment in criminal leniency. If this grand experiment goes awry, how many lives will be ruined? How many lives will be lost? How many families will be torn apart? How much of the anti-crime progress of the last generation will be wiped away for the next?

Those are the questions we must ask as we consider this bill. And if we ask them—honestly, soberly, and with full information—we believe there is only one conclusion: we should not grant early release to thousands of drug traffickers.

Sincerely,



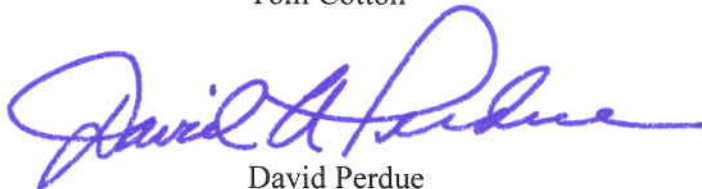
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Man charged with killing woman, 2 daughters had early prison release



By [Theodore Decker](#)

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The man charged with killing an ex-girlfriend and two of her children in a North Side stabbing rampage early on Tuesday likely would have been deep into a 12 1/2-year federal prison sentence if sentencing guidelines for convicted crack dealers had remained unchanged.

Wendell L. Callahan, 35, twice benefited from changes in federal sentencing guidelines, which reduced his sentence by a total of more than four years, from the 150 months he was first given in 2007, to 110 months in 2008 including time served, and 100 months in 2011.

Columbus police charged Callahan on Tuesday with three counts of murder in the deaths of ex-girlfriend Erveena Hammonds, 32, and her daughters, Brea Hammonds, 7, and Anaesia Green, 10.

Police said he went to Hammonds' apartment in the 900 block of Atlantic Avenue and killed all three people with a knife. He was still in the apartment when Hammonds' current boyfriend, Curtis C. Miller, arrived unexpectedly, police said.

Miller and Callahan fought, and both were stabbed in the ensuing struggle.

A wounded Callahan ran from the apartment building and was found in the Continent Village Apartments off Busch Boulevard by officers who responded to the 1:19 a.m. call about the stabbings, police said.

Miller, 38, was treated at a local hospital and released. Callahan remained hospitalized on Tuesday night.

His mother told *The Dispatch* that he was unconscious and hasn't talked with anyone about what occurred.

"They haven't heard his side of the story," said Elaine Beard, 54.



*Wendell Louis
Callahan*

Sgt. Rich Weiner, a spokesman for the Police Division, said police were withholding many details of the triple homicide to protect the case, but detectives alleged in court documents that statements from several witnesses are among the evidence that led to charges against Callahan.

"It was obvious this was a brutal attack," Weiner said. "We don't know if he was let in or forced his way in."

In a harrowing call to 911, neighbors implored police to hurry. One woman who was nearly incomprehensible in her grief eventually passed the phone to a man, who said, "There's children with their throats slit."

"The guy who did it ran away," he said in the call, just as the first officers arrived.

Hammonds and Callahan had a history going back more than 10 years. In a Columbus police report from 2006, taken while Callahan's federal case was pending, Hammonds said that he had beaten and choked her so severely that she thought he "would have killed her if (a) good Samaritan didn't pass by."

She said in the report that Callahan was her live-in boyfriend of about a year and "has been stressed because he is facing federal time."

The changes to his federal sentence came as part of retroactive attempts by the U.S. Sentencing Commission to rectify sentencing disparities between dealers who sold crack and those who dealt powdered cocaine.

In a 2011 motion for Callahan's last reduction, Callahan's attorney said federal prosecutors agreed that Callahan's good behavior in prison and other factors led both sides "to conclude that his early release did not present a danger to the safety of the public."

Federal prison records show that Callahan was released on Aug. 8, 2014. If the new federal guidelines hadn't gone through, he likely would have been in prison at least until late this year, even with time off for good behavior.

Hammonds' relatives were gathered at a home near Mock Park on Tuesday afternoon, but a man who identified himself as a brother said they were not ready to talk about the slayings.

Breya and Anaesia were students at Salem Elementary on the North Side. Anaesia was in the fifth grade and Breya was in the first grade, according to Columbus City Schools.

It was not clear whether Callahan and Hammonds had resumed their relationship after his release from federal prison, but Weiner said it had ended at some point prior to the attack.

Birth records show that Hammonds had four children; the girls who were killed, as well as an 8-year-old daughter and a 13-year-old son.

Neither Callahan nor Miller is the father of any of the four children, according to birth records. It is not clear where the surviving children were on Tuesday, but police said no other children had been in the apartment when Callahan showed up.

Prior to his U.S. District Court case, Callahan was convicted in connection with a nonfatal shooting in 1999 and another drug case. His mother, however, said the murder accusations were out of character.

"He wouldn't do that to her and her kids," she said.

At CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence, staff members expected the homicides to cause an uptick in calls to the local hotline.

"For victims who already are fearful, something like this just reinforces the amount of danger they're in," said Sue Villilo, the agency's executive director. "We know that after this, we'll see a spike in phone calls, both from victims and from those concerned about them."

The potential for severe injury and death is often underestimated, she said, even when the couple and their family and friends suspect that a relationship is abusive.

"People would say they couldn't imagine this, yet there are often signs," Villilo said.

For more information about domestic violence or for immediate assistance, call the CHOICES 24-hour crisis and information line at 614-224-HOME (4663).

Dispatch Reporters Jim Woods, Rita Price, and Earl Rinehart contributed to this story.

tdecker@dispatch.com

[@Theodore_Decker](#)