

JLWOP Client's Sentence Reduced

Wednesday, November 14, 2018

Cozen O'Connor attorneys Peter Rossi and Stacie Evans successfully persuaded Judge McDermott to reduce Clarence Adams's sentence of life without parole to 23.5 years to life, making him eligible for parole in six years. Adams was convicted and sentenced for a crime he committed when he was 17. This sentence violates the Supreme Court's *Miller* decision, which holds that statutes mandating life without parole sentences for certain juvenile offenders are unconstitutional, and that, instead, the court must consider factors designed to reflect "a juvenile's 'lessened culpability' and greater 'capacity for change.'" The current sentence is about 10 years less than the minimum that would apply if Adams had been convicted now.

During the more than two years Rossi and Evans worked on Adams's case, they partnered with a mitigation expert to develop a picture of Adams's childhood and to demonstrate the ways in which he had changed in prison. Using information from the long history of this case and additional interviews with Adams and his family members, Rossi and Evans showed that Adams's parents were abusive and addicted to crack, as were most of his extended family members. Adams and his brothers were left to raise themselves in the projects, shelters, foster homes, and, sometimes, on subways and buses when they had nowhere else to stay warm. They stole their food from grocery stores.

Because he had nowhere else to turn, the neighborhood gang became Adams's "family." When Percy Brown, a 19-year-old fellow gang member and "a big deal in the neighborhood" was killed by a rival gang, the neighborhood talked about the need to avenge his death. Adams took that on, and the murder and related offenses that formed the basis for his life sentence was the result.

Rossi and Evans also presented evidence that Adams has changed in his 17 years in prison. Illiterate when he entered, Adams learned to read and write with the help of other inmates. He earned his GED, and was awarded the Perseverance Award at his graduation ceremony. With encouragement from his long-time girlfriend and mother of one of his children, Adams became involved in the Muslim religion and even learned to read Arabic. He also worked hard to develop and maintain a close relationship with his two daughters.