

# During Prison Covid Lockdown Florida Inmate Writes Criminal Justice Reform Bill

SORRENTO, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, August 31, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- After almost 25 years in prison, Florida inmate Douglas Gilding was fed up with the gridlock in Tallahassee over criminal justice reform. So, being a trained paralegal who also teaches G.E.D. classes for other inmates and trains service dogs for disabled veterans in a prison VetDog program,

Douglas decided to write a bill himself. In particular, he had been watching as other states changed or eliminated their felony-murder laws, but no reform bills were getting any traction in the Florida legislature.



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You may choose to look the other way but you can never again say you did not know”  
*William Wilberforce*

Most people are unaware that someone can be sentenced to life-without-parole for a murder that somebody else committed. Florida felony-murder statutes allow a person to be held liable for a murder committed by their co-defendant during the commission of a felony, even if that person was not present when it occurred.

For example, in his 2007 New York Times article "Serving Life For Providing Car To Killers", Adam Liptak tells the story of 20-year-old Ryan Holle. He was partying at his apartment with friends one night, when they decided it would be a good idea to rob a drug dealer down the road. Other than that discussion, Ryan's only role in the robbery was to loan the friends his car. Ryan then went to bed, drunk.

However, the friends went on to rob the dealer; and ended up beating a woman to death with the butt of a shotgun. A terrible tragedy, yes.... but did Ryan Holle deserve to spend life in prison for the murder committed by his co-defendants while he was home in bed sleeping? Under Florida's harsh felony-murder law, that is EXACTLY what happened!

The United States is the only developed nation in the world that still has these draconian felony-murder laws on the books. In addition, a study by the American Bar Association found that a

disproportionate number of defendants prosecuted under the felony-murder law are people of color. This absurdity was pointed out by former Florida Governor (now U.S. Senator) Rick Scott when, in 2015, he commuted Ryan Holle's sentence. After granting clemency, former governor Scott said that although Holle had some culpability, he certainly did not deserve the same life sentence his co-defendants received; and that "the purpose of commutations is to undo such obviously inequitable results."

After reading about Ryan Holle's commutation in the prison law library, Douglas Gilding realized that his own case was very similar: Douglas had been given a life-without-parole sentence under the felony-murder statute for what amounted to a ten-minute conversation in a car. Not for actually COMMITTING a crime, but just TALKING about it.... and he too was home in bed sleeping when the crime occurred.

It seemed to Douglas that the reform bills currently being introduced were too ambitious for Florida's conservative legislature, and were seeking to completely eliminate the felony-murder law. He realized this approach would never fly in Florida. So he set out to write a more conservative bill that merely amended the felony-murder statute, without deleting any of its provisions.

Ryan Holle's case was the inspiration for this bill, so after having his lawyer get Ryan's approval, Douglas titled the bill "Ryan Holle Reform Act". He wrote the first draft from his cell while the prison was on covid lockdown. The bill simply caps the amount of time in prison a person can get to 15 years.... IF they were not the actual killer, or were not a major participant that helped kill someone.

This very focused amendment would not release ANY killers to the streets, or even anyone who helped kill someone. But as simple as it sounds, this 17 page bill faces massive headwinds from prosecutorial and law enforcement groups, who view the felony-murder law as an important tool; and misunderstand what this bill would do. Public awareness and support is key to getting this piece of legislation passed.

If you would like to read the RYAN HOLLE REFORM ACT, or watch recorded interviews with both Douglas Gilding and Ryan Holle, please go to: [www.WeHEARTFlorida.org](http://www.WeHEARTFlorida.org). Also, please share this press release with others.

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#PassRyanHolleReformAct

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