

2009 SPECIAL SESSION I

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HOUSE BILL NO. 5009

Offered August 19, 2009

A BILL for the relief of Arthur Lee Whitfield.

Patrons—Alexander, Barlow, Bouchard, Englin, Herring, Howell, A.T., Iaquinto, Lewis, Mathieson, Miller, P.J., Morrissey, O'Bannon, Plum, Sickles, Spruill, Tata and Ward; Senator: Miller, Y.B.

Referred to Committee on Appropriations

Whereas, on January 19, 1982, Arthur Lee Whitfield (Mr. Whitfield) was convicted of rape, sodomy and robbery in the Circuit Court for the City of Norfolk and sentenced to serve 45 years;

Whereas, on June 18, 1982, Mr. Whitfield pled guilty to a second rape indictment because of the recent rape conviction and on the advice of legal counsel; and

Whereas, pursuant to the plea agreement, Mr. Whitfield was sentenced to serve 18 years for the second conviction; and

Whereas, Mr. Whitfield filed a Petition for Appeal with the Virginia Supreme Court for the first conviction and on August 8, 1983, the Virginia Supreme Court entered an Order refusing the Petition; and

Whereas, Mr. Whitfield did not subsequently file any state or federal habeas corpus petitions in either case; and

Whereas, on October 31, 2003, Mr. Whitfield filed a motion requesting post-trial DNA testing; and

Whereas, on June 28, 2004, the Circuit Court for the City of Norfolk ordered that DNA testing be conducted of certain items included in the two files that were still in the custody of the Virginia Division of Forensic Science; and

Whereas, The Virginia Division of Forensic Science submitted seven Certificates of Analysis exonerating Mr. Whitfield of the crimes for which he was convicted and sentenced; and

Whereas, based on the results of these tests, on August 23, 2004, the Commonwealth's Attorney for the City of Norfolk sent a letter by fax to the Virginia Parole Board requesting Mr. Whitfield's immediate release stating, in pertinent part "My careful analysis of these [DNA] results and the evidence from the trial of this matter convinces me beyond any question that these results exonerate Mr. Whitfield from involvement in these offenses"; and

Whereas, on the same day of the request the Virginia Parole Board granted Mr. Whitfield discretionary parole and he was released; and

Whereas, Mr. Whitfield subsequently filed Petitions for Writs of Actual Innocence in both cases with the Virginia Supreme Court; and

Whereas, on October 21, 2005, the Virginia Supreme Court dismissed the Petitions for Writs of Actual Innocence citing that the Court did not have the statutory authority to consider the petitions due to Mr. Whitfield no longer being incarcerated and having been placed on parole status; and

Whereas, Mr. Whitfield petitioned the Governor for a grant of Executive Clemency on the principal ground that the DNA testing demonstrated that Mr. Whitfield could not have committed the crimes for which he was convicted on January 19, 1982 and June 18, 1982; and

Whereas, on April 3, 2009, the Governor granted Mr. Whitfield an Absolute Pardon; and

Whereas, Mr. Whitfield has always maintained his innocence and entered a plea of guilty in the second case only after having been convicted by a jury of the first set of charges and on advice of counsel; and

Whereas, Arthur Lee Whitfield has suffered severe physical, emotional, and psychological damage as a result of this wrongful incarceration, is currently suffering from a terminal illness, and has no other means to obtain adequate relief except by action of this body; now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

§ 1. That there is hereby appropriated from the general fund of the state treasury a compensation award in the amount of \$750,000 for the relief of Arthur Lee Whitfield (Mr. Whitfield) upon execution of a release by Mr. Whitfield from any present or future claims he may have against the Commonwealth or any agency, instrumentality, officer, employee, or political subdivision thereof and any legal counsel appointed pursuant to § 19.2-159 of the Code of Virginia.

The entire amount of the award shall be paid by check issued by the State Treasurer on warrant of the Comptroller within seven business days after this act becomes law.

§ 2. That Arthur Lee Whitfield shall be entitled to receive career and technical training within the Virginia Community College System free of tuition charges, up to a maximum of \$10,000. The cost for the tuition benefit shall be paid by the community college at which the career or technical training is

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58 *provided. The tuition benefit provided by this section shall expire on December 15, 2014.*

59 *§ 3. That Arthur Lee Whitfield shall be ineligible to receive any unused portion of the tuition for*
60 *career and technical training provided pursuant to § 2 of this act within the Virginia Community*
61 *College System upon any subsequent conviction on or after August 15, 2009, by Mr. Whitfield of any*
62 *felony.*

63 **2. That an emergency exists and this act is in force from its passage.**