

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 25, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We urge you to pardon veteran, civil rights leader, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Desmond Meade for his 1985 court-martial conviction and reverse his dishonorable discharge.

Mr. Meade has unequivocally atoned for the 30-year-old offense he committed during his Army service. Moreover, he has transcended his past to become a civil rights leader and a champion for millions of formerly incarcerated people. We wholeheartedly believe that Mr. Meade deserves a second chance.

As an Army servicemember stationed in Hawaii in 1985, Mr. Meade was introduced to drugs and was induced into uncharacteristic behavior to support his habit. As a result, he was imprisoned for three years for grand larceny and dishonorably discharged. After his release, he struggled with substance use disorder and became homeless. Hitting rock bottom, he frequently contemplated suicide. Thankfully, he managed to turn his life around.

Mr. Meade earned undergraduate degrees from Miami Dade College and a Juris Doctorate from Florida International University. Yet, despite this turnaround, he faced barriers to securing his law license, employment, housing, voting access, and more because of his prior convictions. Thus, Mr. Meade committed his life to restoring the rights of formerly incarcerated people.

As the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRRC) leader, Mr. Meade joined forces with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and others to spearhead a landmark constitutional amendment campaign to restore voting rights for more than one million Floridians with a felony conviction: Amendment 4. The herculean effort repealed Florida's 150-year-old Jim Crow-era law that banned anyone with a felony conviction from voting. It is the most significant expansion of voting rights in the United States in over 50 years. Moreover, Mr. Meade has joined forces with community leaders, CEOs, legislators, entertainers, athletes, entrepreneurs, and celebrities to fight for the re-enfranchisement of millions of returning citizens nationwide. For example, he recently met with Nebraska legislators to advocate for legislation repealing a two-year waiting period, and he worked with groups in Minnesota that recently passed legislation to expand voting rights. Yet, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis refused to restore Mr. Meade's civil rights multiple times due to his court-martial conviction and dishonorable discharge until overwhelming public support compelled the Governor to do so.

Mr. Meade's life is a testament to the power of a second chance. His service as a civil rights leader has not gone unnoticed. Time magazine named him one of the 100 Most Influential People in 2019. The University of Florida's Bob Graham Center for Public Service selected him as the 2019 Floridian of the Year. In 2021, Mr. Meade was named a McArthur "genius grant" winner for his work on re-enfranchisement. In February 2023, Quaker Peace and Social Witness and the American Friends Service Committee nominated Desmond Meade and the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition for a Nobel Peace Prize.

In his commencement address to Duke University students, Grammy-winning artist John Legend said, "Duke Class of 2021: I wish you live with Desmond's kind of love: Love for our neighbors—and for people who feel like they're a world apart. Love for justice—defined by a spirit of mutuality and community."

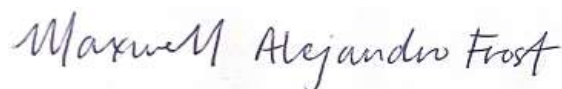
Thank you for your attention and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



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Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress



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Maxwell Alejandro Frost  
Member of Congress