The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was founded in 1957 by Dr. Martin Luther King, Rev. C.K. Steele, Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, Rev. Joseph Lowery and others to redeem the soul of America. The organization was the heartbeat and soul of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and continues to today as one of the few national organizations that use broad based nonviolent direct action to address issues of racism and equality. Our organization has over 75 chapters across the country and internationally, with a membership base of more than 10,000 people and reach more than a million people annually through our network and our quarterly publication the SCLC Magazine.

We would like to thank you for the Proclamations honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. nationally in January 2018 and in March 2018. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 and our nation honors the legacy of the slain civil rights icon, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King believed in freedom, justice and equality for all. Of course, as a Pastor, Dr. King also believed in Biblical principles of feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, visiting those who are in jails and prisons; and forgiveness. In fact, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested over 39 times for fighting against unjust laws of segregation, denial of voter rights, denial of civil rights, police brutality and public corruption by elected officials.
According to a Daily Press article on January 14, 2017:

*Former Newport News Del. Phil Hamilton, who is serving a 9 1/2 year federal sentence in New Jersey, was beaten in his sleep by unknown assailants early in the morning of Christmas Eve day, according to family and friends who've been in contact with him by mail.*

Hamilton, 64, has been held away from other inmates at the minimum security camp ever since, without his normal access to email, a telephone or religious services, according to his daughter, Meredith Archer. Archer said he was beaten with a padlock in a sock around 2:45 a.m. Dec. 24, 2016. The family's only contact has been through the mail, Archer said, with the exception of a single phone call. The last letter received arrived Thursday, she said, and was dated Jan. 8. Hamilton, once a powerful member of the House of Delegates, was found guilty in 2011 of bribery and extortion charges.

Considering that Phil Hamilton was in a fight to save his professional and personal life since 2011, SCLC felt it best to allow his legal representatives to advocate on his behalf and monitor the developing situation to ensure that justice was served.

The SCLC believes in compassion.

The SCLC's position remained that Mr. Hamilton was entitled to have his day in court to face the charges before him rather than be convicted in the court of public opinion. Ultimately that day came, and as you are quite aware, Mr. Hamilton accepted personal responsibility and was ordered to serve a 9 1/2 year prison term.

We are writing to you to request that Mr. Hamilton is released from prison by receiving a Presidential commute of his sentence. We appeal to you for clemency. Perhaps, during the interim period of awaiting your decision, Phillip Hamilton can complete the remainder of his sentence, first in a transitional half way house, and upon successful completion; re-entry back into society on some form of parole. SCLC has not contacted Mr. Hamilton or his representatives during this period nor sought to engage him in any community service or public relations projects.

However, because of recent media reports highlighting your Presidential actions taken to obtain the immediate release of Alice Marie Johnson, the 63-year-old inmate who had served more than 21 years for nonviolent charges related to drug possession and money-laundering; we are compelled to write this letter of support for Phillip Hamilton. We are therefore encouraging you to consider the immediate release of Phillip Hamilton from the federal prison, that includes maximum security treatment and also at times prison isolation and allow this man the opportunity to redeem himself, provide a living for his family, and move towards rebuilding his life.

SCLC was born out of the church and as such there will continue to be times in history when our position shall be unpopular simply because our belief in Christianity demands that we do pass judgment on an individual's ability to seek out God and be reborn and baptized in the Holy Spirit. We are prepared to take that criticism. The Bible itself is
fortified with examples of men and women who have turned their lives over to God and undergone miraculous transformations. This concept is so deeply rooted into the consciousness of SCLC that our declared mission is to “Redeem the Soul of America.”

Let us state unequivocally that SCLC is outraged by public corruption and bribery, and we will continue to expose and pursue criminal prosecution of those individuals, both elected officials and private citizens who engage in these activities. There is no excuse for such behavior and certainly an individual should be held to pay for such an atrocity.

Yet, the tragic truth is that our criminal justice system often times fails to truly recognize the value of human life.

Indeed, recently, Anthony Burfoot, the City of Norfolk Treasurer; former Vice Mayor and City Council Member was convicted of actually receiving over $400,000 in bribes. Contrarily, Phil Hamilton never received $40,000, but sought to receive $40,000, and was convicted. But we have yet to see the outcry from the community for the unequal terms and conditions as it pertains to Mr. Hamilton. There is something fundamentally wrong with a society that places more value on the life of one individual, versus another human life.

So the question we have is what purpose would the continued incarceration of Phillip Hamilton serve? There was much public concern over Mr. Hamilton's lack of contrition and arrogance, but the past five years have shown only a humbled individual who has worked to turn his life around and take responsibility as a man for his actions.

Apparently Mr. Hamilton truly understands that he let down his community, family and former colleagues. He has made no public statements about his release or for that matter the saga that he has undergone. According to reports, his representatives have approached the U. S. Bureau of Prisons. There is no doubt that many will argue that he is simply doing these things to simply get released, but who among us has the right to determine when a person is truly remorseful?

Fortunately for Mr. Hamilton, although he faces the same uphill battle for other convicted felons who have to demonstrate to society that they can be rehabilitated, he has a unique set of skills that makes him a marketable talent. However, we are all cognizant of the fact that those skills will diminish over time, and the failure to release Hamilton when he has been subjected to violence and assaulted during his criminal sentence serves only to limit his ability to make a living during an already closing window of time. Would it not serve the U. S. Bureau of Prisons and the community if Hamilton were allowed to reenter society and spend his time speaking to young people not only about the atrocity of public corruption, but how bad choices can ruin the lives of good people?

The idea that Phillip Hamilton should not be allowed to return to society on the grounds that he should not be offered as a role model, demonstrates a clear example of how society as a whole has abandoned its personal responsibility to teach young people the difference between right and wrong. Although their behavior undergo strict scrutiny, they should not be subject to “double jeopardy” by having their livelihood taken away from
them even after they commit a crime and repay their debt to society.

There is no doubt that Phillip Hamilton will forever have to answer for his crimes against violating the trust of the public, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. The path to redemption is paved with thorns and turns, but ultimately the scripture teaches us that only God may forgive us of our sins. No man has the moral authority to assert that another man is not truly remorseful but rather we must allow that individual to be absolved of his sins by God.

We believe that both the U. S. Department of Justice and the U. S. Bureau of Prisons can help America move beyond this idea that a convicted felon's record should serve as an albatross to his or her ability to become productive members of society. Phillip Hamilton has paid his debt to society and he should be allowed to move on with his life and return back to society.

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated that** “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is committed to non-violent action to achieve social, economic, and political justice. Believing in the oneness of human family and efficacy of love in human relations, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference holds that authentic love demands justice as a moral imperative. The SCLC, a non-sectarian, interfaith, advocacy movement, was founded and organized in 1957 by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Andrew Shannon, SCLC State Vice President and Chapter President at (757) 877-0792.

Thank you for your assistance and consideration.

With kindest regards.

Sincerely,

**Andrew Shannon**

Andrew Shannon, SCLC State Vice President and Chapter President
Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)