

# 'Tool Man' asked to help change lifer law

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

The organization trying to change Michigan's mandatory drug laws is seeking help from television star Tim Allen, a former Birmingham resident who once faced the possibility of life in prison with no chance of parole.

Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) has asked Allen, known as "Tim the Tool Man" on the sitcom "Home Improvement," to help pressure the state legislature to change the law.

"I hope to explore with Tim how he could be helpful in trying to bring about a more rational approach to Michigan's mandatory sentencing laws," Birmingham attorney Martin I. Reisig wrote in a letter dated Oct. 16.

The letter was sent to Allen's mother, Birmingham resident Martha Bones, along with a request to relay the proposal to her famous son.

"I sent the request to him," said Bones, who agrees the law should be changed. "It's up to him to respond. But he's awfully busy," she said in a telephone interview.

Allen became something of an authority on the law in October 1978 when — with the help of his defense attorney — he cooperated with authorities who agreed to charge him under federal rather than state laws. His testimony to a federal grand jury led to a number of indictments.

Allen was arrested while trying to sell more than a pound and a half of cocaine to an undercover police officer. Under the toughest-in-the-nation state

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*Martin I. Reisig  
—Birmingham attorney*

drugs laws enacted a month earlier, he would have faced a mandatory sentence of life in prison with no parole.

In federal prison, Allen nurtured the sense of humor he demonstrated at Seaholm High School and practiced his comedy routines before captive audiences. After release, Allen was on the comedy club circuit before graduating to television and motion pictures.

"Tim Allen is a perfect example of how somebody can turn his or her life around," said Reisig, who was a U.S. attorney before

going into private practice.

As somebody who made a mistake, Allen could have spent the rest of his life in prison, the attorney said. But when given a second chance, he became a productive citizen.

"I'd be just as anxious to have Allen's help if he weren't a television star," said Reisig, adding that if he were a doctor, lawyer or Realtor, Allen would be an example of somebody who had a problem, but turned his life around.

Julie Stewart, president of the Washington-based FAMM, said

Allen's assistance would be invaluable in the organization's fight to change mandatory sentencing laws. FAMM's 33,000 members (including about 2,000 in Michigan) advocate replacing mandatory sentencing laws with guidelines that allow judges some discretion.

"Tim Allen would help policy makers see how unnecessary and heinous these mandatory sentences are," said Stewart, who helped organize FAMM in 1991.

Neither Reisig nor Stewart is particularly disappointed the comedian has not yet committed to their cause. "We know he's busy," said the Birmingham attorney.

Under ideal conditions, FAMM would like Allen to join its members as they lobby the legislature to change the law. "If he could

## Birmingham attorney long opposed state drug law

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

Birmingham attorney Martin I. Reisig has been working to change Michigan's mandatory drug laws for more than 12 years.

He believes the state's so-called "650 lifer law" (mandating life in prison with no parole) for someone dealing 650 grams or more of heroine or cocaine) should be changed to allow judges sentencing discretion.

Since the drug-lifer law was enacted in 1978, more than 230 people (including 68 from Oak-

land County) have been sentenced to mandatory life in prison, according to Department of Corrections records.

Reisig and Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) want the law changed so judges can impose a lesser sentence when appropriate. They want judges to be able to give defendants a second chance at life — like the second chance television comedian Tim Allen received when he was prosecuted under federal law rather than state law.

In 1984, Reisig was appointed

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to defend Douglas Reidt, a Canadian citizen involved in dealing about 1.4 pounds of cocaine. Under the 650 lifer law, the judge had no choice but to sentence Reidt to mandatory life in prison, according to Reisig, even though the 29-year-old had no prior record and was not a major player in the drug transaction.

Reidt was featured prominently in the letter Reisig sent to Tim Allen in October seeking the

comedian's help as FAMM lobbies to change the law.

"I am only asking that the punishment fit the crime and be proportionate to the defendant's role in the crime," the attorney wrote in his letter to Allen.

Reisig said he wants Reidt, and others sentenced under the state's drug lifer law, to have the same option available to them as Allen did under federal laws.

"Doug did not have the option Tim (Allen) had," the attorney said.

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