

Senate Judiciary Committee

Proponent Testimony

Senate bill 182

Jill M. Becker

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Dear Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Cecil Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

My name is Jill M Becker and I am a resident of Greene County. Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on Senate Bill 182. I am a retired college professor and mother. I am also a member of the Greene County Coalition for Compassionate Justice.

I have a son, now 30 years old, who has gotten into trouble with the law twice. He suffers from untreated depression and extreme anxiety, as well as organizational difficulties. During his 20's, he was unhoused, getting and losing jobs. He connected with a woman who also had mental health issues, and in a moment of suspecting her of cheating on him, he grabbed her phone and took off, putting it into the hollow trunk of a dead tree. She called the police and said that a homeless person had robbed her. He was taken into custody with \$10,000 bail, a cost our family could not afford. The phone was easily located and given to the police. Although the phone wasn't worth a lot of money, but because he had taken it from her physically, he was charged with robbery, a violent felony. **If he had not been incarcerated**, it would have been easy to document that the woman was mentally ill herself and that he had been involved with her for six months. It would have been logical to look at this as a domestic dispute rather than a robbery. This research was not done while my son was locked up. The only plea that he was offered was a violent felony and six months in jail with five years of probation. He was told that the chances of having a better outcome by going to court were about 2%. He pled guilty.

Two years later, after doing better and living in an apartment, he again lost a job. A condition of his probation was that he not be homeless. Someone approached my son offering money if he would drive to take them to pick up and transport a supply of marijuana. While driving and looking at a phone for directions, my son swerved onto the shoulder and was stopped by police, who suspected drunken driving. The police were suspicious as my son was nervous when they questioned him. They called dogs and found that there was marijuana in the car. Both men were arrested and held. Thankfully my son was released a week later with no bail charge and given a court date.

This case got delayed repeatedly for 18 months, due largely to Covid. During this time, he found work and developed new skills in roofing and construction. He met a wonderful woman with 3 children and is now a loving, responsible husband and stepdad. His charge has been lowered to a misdemeanor, to which he has pled guilty. He is still awaiting sentencing and I am hoping that the judge will take his new developments into consideration in sentencing.

The amount of loss that people suffer by being incarcerated pretrial is evident in almost every case—from losing jobs and homes, traumatizing (and perhaps losing) children, and hurting immediate and extended families emotionally and financially.

My experience showed how important it was that my son was not locked up while waiting for his court date. During this time, he found a good partner, became a father and developed job skills. **None of these things would have happened if he had been locked up pre-trial.**

Ending incarceration for lack of cash bail money would stem the damage done to people and their families as they await trial in jail. It would allow opportunities for growth. These things do happen naturally with maturity, life experience and, most importantly, loving personal connections.

Reforming our bail system is smart economically for our state. Money saved with this change could be used to support programs for mental health, education and substance abuse treatment.

I ask that you support this important legislation, Senate Bill 182, because it is just and fair.