

Senate Judiciary Committee
Proponent Testimony
Senate Bill 182
Written Testimony Only

Dr. Zaria Davis

6/10/2021

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

My name is Dr. Zaria Davis and I am a resident of Cincinnati. Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on Senate Bill 182.

I am a Senior Associate with the Pretrial Justice Institute. I am a mentor, educator, and advocate nationally. I serve as a coach and consultant for nonprofits and corporations servicing directly impacted communities through New Direction Coaching & Consulting, LLC and work with women in reentry through Filling The Gap Reentry Services, addressing many of the voids of services for formerly incarcerated women. I strongly support Senate Bill 182..

As someone who has been directly impacted by the criminal legal system and having been in three jails in that time, I witnessed the injustice related to the cash bail system. While in one particular jail, I was with a woman who didn't have \$50 to get out. She was there prior to my arrival, was there the months I was inside, and was still there once I left. The court obviously did not think she was a threat to the community because they set the bond amount at fifty dollars but her inability to pay kept her incarcerated for months and she had not been convicted. In that same jail, there was a woman who left her three children, including an infant with a friend. She assumed the judge would release her on OR due to the fact that she turned herself in after a fight with her older child's father's girlfriend. She was wrong. The judge initially held her without bond, then eventually set an amount that was too high for her or friends due to her being unemployed. After weeks of the friend keeping the children and not having the actual resources to do so, the friend sold the infant for cash to an unknown man. I still recall the cries that came out of our day room when she found out. The judge eventually lowered the bond after the community stepped in to advocate for her release. She then had to not only fight her case but also work to locate her now missing child. I still pray for that woman and child by name daily because I don't know if the child was ever found. These life experiences while in jail, motivate me in my current role working with community groups and advocates throughout the state of Ohio.

As Senior Associate with PJI, I have had the opportunity to work with various jurisdictions throughout the state to address their specific pretrial issues and concerns. They extend from conditions of release, to pretrial detention issues, to lack of resources for those with mental health and substance use issues. Pretrial release allows a person to remain in their community, parent their children, maintain employment and address their case. People should not be held solely on their inability to pay to get out due to an amount that neither they nor their family can afford on their own. We should not have to rely on outside loans which often put families in even more financial distress to get them out. Studies have shown that after people are detained pretrial, they are less likely to be formally employed for years afterward. The money saved from detaining people could go back into those same communities to address some of the barriers that often land people in jail in the first place, by funding substance abuse, mental health and employment services, to name a few.

Our current system doesn't truly look at public safety although we hear it used all the time. Safety has nothing to do with wealth, yet wealth determines who is released. The truth is that you can have high rates of release and safety. In Washington, DC, over 90% of people are released pretrial, and 99% of those people do not commit violent crimes. In New Jersey, pretrial reforms decreased the number of people held in jail, and the violent crime rate decreased by 16%. This is not surprising; jail is a traumatizing experience that harms and disrupts lives. It is important that if someone needs to be detained due to safety that it is actually determined in the courts and documented and it should be a rare event.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote yes on this critically important bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Zaria Davis