

Captioning Transcript of Committee on Equity and Inclusion - September 15, 2022

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Peace, welcome to the Committee on Equity and Inclusion. Today is Thursday, September 15th, 2022 the time is currently 4:24 PM. I'm the chairman, Jecorey Arthur, we also have vice chair Anthony Piagentini with committee members Nicole George, Markus Winkler, Barbara Shanklin, Cassie Chambers Armstrong and Kevin Kramer will also joined by special guests Council President David James. This meeting is made held KRS 61.806 and counsel rule 5A, we have 1 resolution on our agenda today. Item R-128-22 a resolution relating to the voting of incarcerated individuals at Louisville Metro Department of corrections and in Kentucky. May have a motion?

"Piagentini, Anthony"

Motion

"Chambers Armstrong, Cassie"

Seconded.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Motion by Piagentini, seconded by Chambers Armstrong. Thank you so much, so as many people know on December, 12th 2019, governor Andy Bashir signed an executive order re-storing the right to vote for some of our fellow Kentuckians convicted of crimes who served their time and this is help restore rights for over 178,000 Kentuckians but a lot of people still don't know about this. In fact. As of Tuesday, September 13th, some individuals in our local jail about 14,000 folks are there overwhelmingly majority of them are there Pre trial and I'm willing to bet as we talk with some of our experts and people who have direct experience today so many people still do not know about this. not know about this Our resolution today is not just legislation, but also education for the public and education that I hope leads us to liberation. Our resolution is, is the support of voting rights, restoration services, voter, registration services and identification clinics that help people who are currently incarcerated. which is a majority of the people in our jail, who are their free trial. There are a lot of benefits to making sure people have access to voting, but especially people who are disenfranchised and to learn more about those benefits we have several guests here today that we'll be talking with. As you speak, please introduce yourself and your organization for the record and after we hear from each of our guests, we'll have some discussion with committee

members. So, I'm gonna pick on brother Savvy, or maybe Elizabeth first, to come up again just say your name and your organization and then we'll get into the discussion. Thank you for being here.

"Sawyer, Elizabeth"

Hi, I'm Elizabeth. Sawyer. I'm with an organization called Hood to the Holler and our mission is to ensure that all Kentuckians have access to every aspect of civic life. And I think as elected officials, you all can agree that voting is the most sacred of those civil rights that we have but there are barriers to accessing that and we've made progress in Kentucky we now for 3 days of what's called no excuse absentee voting and that's great but we are still denying this basic civil right to folks who are currently incarcerated in our jail but who have who still maintain their civil right to vote as councilman Arthur said, you know, many folks are Pretrial, being held in jail, simply because they do not have the money to post veil and get out and we are denying them this basic civil right to vote based on an income, that they cannot provide. So, um, so we are here today in support of this resolution I want to just fully support that this resolution really addresses some of the more systematic things that keep people from voting so, not just allowing a voting location where people could drop off there again no excuse absentee ballots at the jail if they happen to be incarcerated on that day, but also address issues like, ID, access and education around voter restoration, which again literally hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians have just not been informed that they have this right, we're out here every single day, in neighborhoods across this county, and talking to folks saying, just registering people to vote, and the number of people who say to us, oh, well, I can't vote 30 years ago I was incarcerated and so I don't have the right to vote and there's a very simple website they put in their name and their birth date and we've encountered people again out in the community on the street who scan the code, look up on their phone and have registered to vote right there, had no idea that because of things that happened to them decades ago, that they have this basic, right. They're out at community events, they want to be engaged in civic life and in voting, and just assume that they don't have that right and I think that the Council would be right to help us engage all citizens who have the right to vote in Kentucky to fully extend that right so with that, I'm going to pass it over to Shameka Parrish-Wright.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Thank you so much, just as a reminder name and organization for the record please.

"Parrish-Wright, Shameka"

Good afternoon, I am Shameka Parrish-Wright I am the director of Vocal Kentucky and our mission is to work with people who are impacted by incarceration by HIV by harm reduction by the war on drugs, and definitely by poverty. And so everything that Elizabeth said, I want to second, that vocal is in full support and it actually feels good to be here on something that should be a no brainer but, personally, it is important as the work that I've done around this city and around our state around voter education people don't know their rights, and people who are incarcerated pretrial, whether it's 30 days or 60 days, should be able to vote and they don't understand that they can and so that that same experience Elizabeth has experienced with people not knowing if they have their rights many people who are incarcerated right now today don't know if they have the right to vote. A group of us and over 47 organizations ever since covid happened, we were meeting weekly to talk about ways that we can improve and have people come out of jail and prisons and go right back into their communities and IDs was 1 of those big issues, you cannot access wraparound services without IDs and no one can verify you better than the jail we have everything about you and it's undeniable that they know you are who you are and so we definitely want to support that and I know that Dr. Leyderman let them and it's going to share some changes that are coming away that way when it comes to registration it is important and I know that my brother Savvy Shabazz is going to share with you. We've already had a little bit of progress with getting people registered. We want you all to just do this and show our city show our community and show the people impacted that you believe in them coming out and the citizens they deserve to be, and that's how all you got here was through voting. This is a nonpartisan issue. This is about making sure everyone in our community can participate in democracy. And I have definitely seen people held in jail on low bills from 25 dollars to 100 dollars and they're simply held there because they don't have the money 10 days later, they may get out, 2 months later, they may get out, but think how empowering it is to know that even while they're in jail, they're able to participate in the decisions that are being are being made and electing better leadership and leadership that will listen to every Louisvillian, every Kentuckian. So I think this feels good to be here. This is a good issue. This is a good way to be a part of democracy and thanks for the opportunity to share that.

"Shabazz, Savvy"

Thank you so much, afternoon everybody I am Savvy Shabazz. I am the founder of Life Coach Each One Teach One Reentry Fellowship and acting president of All of Us In Kentucky. I totally agree with everything that they spoke about before me. We've been doing a lot of work across the crowd, not only across the city, but across the state and across the nation as well, when it comes to voting rights and restoration, we've had the opportunity to travel to several different counties McCracken County, Christian County, Jefferson County of course, finding out who individuals are and making sure that they are registered to vote, people do not know the information. My interest came from about 5 years ago, attended a national conference and it brought the idea of, people are incarcerated. and they can't vote, right? People are in Pretrial work for us to make them for 2 and a half years with the bill project. I personally bonded people out for 25 dollars. Probably the lowest was 12 dollars and 50 cent. If this person is incarcerated after or during October 11th, they can't vote, right? So how can we fix that? They haven't been convicted. They haven't lost the right to vote, why couldn't they vote? Right? So, a couple of things, what does it look like? People who vote are more engaged in communities, we know that, me personally, I'm formally incarcerated. My voting rights was taken away in 2002. I just voted this past February, all right, that's 20 years, right? For non violent offenses. This is what's happening in our communities. I'm here today to let, you know, that it makes sure it's staff even we went in last week I think it was the 6th or 7th, we registered 10 people to vote one of them was even a staff, a local metro detention center, right? So it involves the staff too so they want to get involved right? Increases public safety as well. People are wanting to be a part of their families people who want to be a part of their communities and that's part of it, it creates partnerships in local jobs. We have a partnership now, we have new staff in the jail so we have a partnership, the arms have been open. We're looking to go inside and facilitate our programs and get people prepared to come home. One of the big things when you do come home, and me being directly impacted the first thing you're asked to do is find a job. The first, 2 things that people ask for when you a platform is two forms of ID. So, how are we going to continue to send people home without those 2 things to assist themselves? Right? Because if you don't have it, we got recidivism now. So, now you've got to return back into the system again, because of 2 forms of ID and unfortunately they don't release you with those type of things. The only release you with the type of funding that you need to go and purchase

that, which I think is 20 or 25 dollars right? It engages the staff to Louisville metro detention center to also get involved in the things that's going on in the community because we're bringing the community inside. I want to ask yourselves a question, like, what do you want your neighbor to look like when they return home to your neighborhood? Me myself directly impacted, I return home to district six, I've been there 2 years now. So, I had to return home to that neighborhood. What is the demographic look like? We're looking for eligible residents that are incarcerated in metro corrections that meet the criteria to vote, residents that have been charged with an offense, but not convicted. These are people that are eligible vote. Residents, already detained, but Can the forecast bill, so we go back to the cash bill, individuals that are eligible, but on home incarceration this is a big issue, right? Because when you're at home incarceration, you have to get back on the docket just to get an excuse to go do whatever you may need. Right? So, the individual is faced with getting not only on the docket, but then we have to set a court date, but the intent was to come back and ask, can they go vote. Like, it's ridiculous. So we're asking for your assistance to look at this resolution and assistance we got an opportunity here in Louisville, not only to make a difference in this in this county, in the state, but across the nation too, and we can be the example that we need we need your assistance. This can be the model for what it looks like across the nation and across the state, and we need your assistance to do just that. Thank you.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Thank you. And We have someone from corrections here to speak to this as well. Thank you so much for being here.

"Leyderman, Mariya"

My name's Maria and I'm the executive chief psychologist for Louisville Metro. So I just 1st off want to say, thank you for the opportunity to be here and to be involved in this process. I think, as Savvy mentioned, you know, historically, we have not necessarily had a partnership and that is something that is critical, a jail is a central component to our community and I view the jail as a point of intervention where we need to work with people to help equip them with accessible services, and one of those is obviously the ability to reenter and be functioning in our society in a successful way. And for all of us, we know that voting is a basic right for people and also that's part of, you know, our intrinsic motivation to want to be engaged in a part of a community and so, I think the jail obviously plays a key role in this that we have individuals that are members of

our community that have been disenfranchised and have not had equitable opportunities and access to certain things and I view the jail as a place that not only has the responsibility to keep people safe while they're there, but set them up with opportunities and make them successful for return to society. And so, or, for a jail, I think it's incredibly important that I think we sometimes operate under this assumption, that, you know, people go to a jail and they reenter. What is it that we are doing for people while they are in the jail and myself and the administration take this very seriously that, you know, we don't want this fluffy idea of, you know, reentry, rehabilitation we want to have actual services that set people up for success and two of those are, you know, as we've mentioned, you have to have an ID if you don't have an ID, you really can't do anything whether that be transportation housing access to mental health services literally, everything is anchored in having in identification, and being able to engage with our society through voting and being a part of our community. So I second, you know, everything that we've already heard I am greatly appreciative that we have the opportunity to participate in this and truly honored that Metro can be out of a champion of this, in a conversation with the state today there's only one jail and that jail's connected to the state. That does any type of ID services so would be our first jail in the state of Kentucky to really champion this and I think it would just be very telling of our city and our efforts to come together and really identify the needs of our community and actually set them up with things that they need. So, I appreciate you putting this together there and, you know, just want to reiterate Metro is fully in support of this.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

All right, we'll have some discussion with committee members again, thank you all for being here. A question while you're already up here. I'm just curious, I know you've personally went around in the jail, you've helped educate people about voter rights being restored, you've helped register people. What else has the jail done in the past, as far as education around restoration and registration?

"Leyderman, Mariya"

So, in the past, it's honestly been fairly limited, our staff has been able to assist with kind of more the technicality piece of getting voter registration mailed out and having people change their mailing address to the jail, but again, there has been little to no direct involvement and I think just, as you said, a key component is education. I think oftentimes people

end up in the justice system because of a lack of education or lack of opportunities, so this is really an opportunity to not just, you know, offer those services, but equip people with tools and knowledge that they can then be their own advocates and have agency as well.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Thank you and then question for Savvy and then we'll open it up to other committee members to address anyone and any of our guests feel free to jump up and respond. But I'm curious, and your expertise in your experience, as you're working with people. What are some barriers that you're hearing from folks as far as you know, voting, but also getting involved in government because, as you read this executive order, it not only restores voting rights but it also restores the right to run for public office. What are some barriers that people might have with local government?

"Shabazz, Savvy"

Definitely education not knowing exactly what a council person does. Not knowing what your city commission does. Those are some of the definite barriers that we want to be able to explain. We say voter engagement and education, we want to be able to break down the entire legislation and explain to individuals, this is who Jecorey Arthur is, this is what he does, this is who Andy Beshear this is what he does. This is what a state representative who is your state representative, a lot of people don't know that information. So I think it's, we're really looking at voter engagement in education, when it comes to that people, just don't know the information.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Thank you. Vice Chair Piagentini.

"Piagentini, Anthony"

Thank you Mr. Chair. So totally in support of any effort to ensure that people that have not lost their voting rights and that includes anybody Pretrial incarceration has the ability to vote, period. I like the effort on getting access to IDs. I think there's a lot of merit in that, particularly when people are transitioning out of, from any kind of custody situation, getting access to services that Medicaid, for example, right, it's critical things one of the most critical is to have an identification available. So generally in support, I would like to make some very, extremely nitpicky comments and please take them that way. We can talk more about them later but let me make a few comments about maybe a few changes I may recommend down

the road here related to the wording of the resolution, and then I would like to make an ask that we have the clerk's office, the county clerk, or may be bringing somebody from the secretary of state's office, I'm glad to help with that you know, I would like some of the election officials, the election experts here to talk about not only the law make sure we're, you know, we all understand what the law is around this, but also I want to and in that conversation, we need corrections to come back, I want to talk about the logistics of this, right cause this is just a resolution just to be clear to everybody from a legal point of view, this is a resolution, it's a statement of intent, but I don't like to just do statements of intent that don't go anywhere. Right? So, I would like to talk through some of logistics of what's the best way to execute on this? You know, and I would use the military as a perfect example. The military is constantly dealing with large groups of people that move and then vote. Right? And they have whole processes, put in place to educate military members when they come close to registration deadlines, when every time they move what they need to do, and then voting, right and, um, so I think we can learn from some of, from the clerk's office then their expertise related to this, and making recommendations with corrections on how to do this, right so, yeah, Mr. Chairman, I'll work with you to get, Bobby Host calls office and the secretary of state's office maybe, you know, just the election experts in here at the next meeting here, my nitpicky, very nitpicky things. The very first, whereas clause, 750,000 people most of trial I would like to say that it doesn't mean that all of them still have their voting rights. If they have been if they have been arrested if they've already been released on a felony, haven't had the voting rights restored, and they've been, uh, arrested and they're on Pretrial, you know, but that's a sort of nit-picky distinction. I do want to mention that I am going to take exception to 1 whereas clause and that is, it's how do I tell you how where this page top of page 3, thank God, this page numbered. It reads in Kentucky registered votes, required to produce identification, whether the voter is casting an absentee ballot or voting in person, which creates an additional barrier to voting, especially for disenfranchised individuals who may not have access to computer, credit card, birth certificate. I get what you're saying there, but it also, and the secretary of state, the next one talks about the average cost of government ID is 40 dollars a coding of voting rights advocates first of all there is a free voter identification process in the state of Kentucky this is part of the secretary of state, and this was supported by governance Schumer by the way, there was a very comprehensive bipartisan law that came out from both the

secretary of state and the governor in the past 2 years that not only that expanded access to voting significantly, but also tightened up, any accusations about fraud and, and I will say, I'm a huge fan of the secretary of state. He has taken on many people across the commonwealth, well, many people, it's actually a very small group that are making absurd claims about, uh, fraud amongst our election system that he himself has tackled in and eliminating, and part of that was having some sort of identification again, with that said, that comes back to making sure that people that are in Pretrial incarceration, if they were, arrested, didn't have their identification with them, and they gotta get it right or, you know, again, if they don't have any, for whatever reason, making sure they know how to get through the process. So I think there are ways to do it I just want to point out that I know some of said that this is a barrier voter access it is, it is also, a key aspect of ensuring that elections have integrity, and that we prevent voter fraud. Right? And again, it is true that the average cost of government is 40 dollars, but the state of Kentucky has a free at the minimum to ensure that somebody can vote as a free voter identification process. So, with that said, Mr. Chair I will think about if I want to recommended amendment next time, but and I'll work with you on getting the clerk's office here. Thank you for your time.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Thank you, I'm happy to work with you and any partners. I like to pass the mic real quick to assistant county attorney, Natalie Johnson, just to speak about some of those partners you had spoken with, and the express support. So, could you just elaborate on that real quick?

"Johnson, Natalie"

Sure, Natalie Johnson with a Jefferson County Attorney's office. I did reach out to the board of elections regarding this resolution. They are supportive of the sentiment of the resolution, and they want to do whatever they can to assist with voter access from incarcerated individuals because of the complexities when it comes to voter law, they just needed more time to really look at what could be done, I mean, there, security issues, and, you know, all different kinds of variables, but they are supportive of the sentiment of the resolution.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Thank you, President James.

"James, David"

Thank you Mr. Chair, first I want to say to the sponsor, Chair Arthur I think you did a fantastic job doing this. I'm proud of you for doing this man, but number two I just wanted to say I think it's well, overdue, don't know why we didn't think about this earlier and, like, we added a sponsor please.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Absolutely, thank you so much. Committee member Winkler.

"Winkler, Marcus"

Thank you Chair Arthur. I really just wanted to, chime in for just a second, on the comment about recidivism and employment post release and just sort of underscore some of the data that we found. You know, we, this council has funded the another way program with goodwill where we go out and offer day work to people who are have visible need on the street and are panhandling and I don't have the most up to date numbers, but when we got the pilot results, we had helped, 300 in need individuals I think, just shy of 200 of those 300, had criminal histories and had challenges getting back into the workforce. So, I think anything that think anything that helps with those individuals getting back into the workforce, whether it's access to an ID, you know, encouraging more second chance employers I think is good policy and so I just wanted to comment on those, the comments that were made earlier regardless.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Thank you, committee member Chambers Armstrong.

"Chambers Armstrong, Cassie"

Thank you Mr. Chair and thank you for your work on this. I think this is incredible. I just want to take a second to point out some things about state law that I think in my mind are a part of this story and some places that our state is behind. So I want to point out the reason that Governor Bashear had to issue an executive order restoring the rights of people who had been convicted of felonies is because our state is one of only 3 States in America that permanently disenfranchised people who are convicted of felonies of their right to vote and so I think a lot of us are operating from the assumption that this is the norm, and I just want to say, it doesn't have to be. There are lots of states that don't do this, and the fact that we are a state that does do this creates all kinds of problems there are 8, the tool we have to actually permanently get rid of a conviction on someone's record executive orders, restoring voting rights are great, but once the conviction is there, there

are so many other consequences that come with it, the inability to apply for an occupational license in, like, 50 different types of fields, decreased in lifetime earnings all kinds of barriers to employment into housing and to government social programs. The tool we have that lets folks get rid of a conviction once it's on the record is expungement and although our general assembly has made steps forward by allowing us to have expungements for certain types of felonies and misdemeanors, they still charge in some cases it's still expensive and it's still not automatic it's still something that folks have to go out and go through a legal process to get and that again is not something that it doesn't have to be that way. There are states that have automatic processes to automatically expunge convictions to restore folks rights and I would say, given what we're talking about all of these challenges just to reentry, why are we not looking at changing our state law to make these processes easier and to lower the barriers to accessing them? So with that, I just wanted to point out that we are sort of hamstrung by some state laws that are part of this problem. I think this resolution is a wonderful idea Councilman Arthur, amazing work. With your agreement, I would also like to be added as a CO sponsor.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Absolutely, thank you so much. Committee member George.

"George, Nicole"

Thank you Chair. Just wanted to back up a little bit. If I heard correctly, I heard that we would be like, we would be the only city and that we would be kind of the champion for all of Kentucky. I'm interested to know what are other like, what are model cities? Like, where do we see cities implementing certain jails, implementing this with you know, strong fidelity and that we can look to as a, as a model?

"Arthur, Jecorey"

You stole my question. Anyone can speak to that. Thank you.

"Sawyer, Elizabeth"

So I know that, Cook county jails and Chicago allow this, I believe, at 8 of their jail locations and, I know the entire state of Colorado allows this, so, there are certainly models, and there are also models for new legislation, I mean, this is a national movement to, you know, have access to this voting. Right? So, yes, there are definitely places that are doing that and model legislation that's out there for expanding it. Thanks.

"George, Nicole"

Well, I certainly look forward to learning more about the specifics and I will not ask the CO sponsor since I didn't do any of the work on it, but I certainly come in the work and I look forward to supporting.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Thank you is plenty of room if you want to jump on. Anyway, I have a question for Shameka, I was going to ask about what we're seeing elsewhere. Could you talk to us about what you think the metro government could and should be doing to help educate people about having their voter rights back?

"Parrish-Wright, Shameka"

I think the conversation that was had about a councilman about the councilwoman about expungement is really true and I know that Dr. Leyderman and the new director Collins are open to new programs and ideas to educate and make sure that people who are incarcerated are civically engaged. We, and myself and Savvy Shabazz have been always working with groups and entities on language working on the language on defining what terms in the way that we speak about people that are incarcerated so they can come out with people centered, mind frames to be able to engage. And I'm so thankful for you mentioning about people who were firmly incarcerated becoming leaders, I've just left a self conference in New Orleans where half of the people there were formally incarcerated got out, run for office or on city councils, have been appointed to boards and commissions and so, I think educating people about that one of the things we talked about in organizing with all the protest movements, is that we want folks to be who are directly impacted to be on boards and commissions and make appointments to those things and so that education could be happening too. Again all of this is nonpartisan, there's ways that nonprofits can do this and do this effectively and abide by all the legalities, so we always want to make sure we're above, and above that, I think we haven't had a chance to be proactive, the late representative and so many other folks and myself, back when I worked for Kentucky for the commonwealth, have been working on restoration of voting rights for most of the people and even with what Governor Bashear did, there's still a great deal of people who are disenfranchised and so there is more education around that, and it does make a difference in someone's life when they learn about civics and can be civically engaged, when they get out they're better characters for their community, their leaders and mentors. So, with the with the help of the administration, with

the jail with this council supporting that giving us insights on what you see, and what it takes to be a successful council member with board trainings and those things can happen while somebody is incarcerated. So, we are here everybody that is with me in this audience are willing to be at the table to help get folks educated and to be a part of that training and education. I hope I answered that.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

Absolutely, thank you so much and also just add, you know, thank you all for the shout outs for the love for the support, but this was done with community, you know, this resolution is really stemmed from conversations, just having with some of our guests and some of our partners Savvy, we were talking about what we can do at the jail so thank you for the work that you do every single day, paid and unpaid, and we are with you. I will go ahead and entertain a motion since we want to bring in some of the government agencies to talk about the logistics

"Piagentini, Anthony"

Motion table.

"Chambers Armstrong, Cassie"

Second.

"Arthur, Jecorey"

All in favor say aye. Any opposed? Thank you so much. Before we dismiss, I just want to say to the public, we have a little less than a month to register to vote, the deadline is Tuesday, October 11st, 4:00 PM. You can learn more about registration signing up to work, oppose, getting a sample ballot and a lot more at govoteky.com. No more business, so without objection, we stand adjourned thank you all for your service.