

Support of S.B. No. 475 - An Act Concerning Nonviolent Offenders

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Good morning, my name is Tanzania Cooper. I am a mother, a homeowner, and registered voter. For the past several years through my professional and volunteer services I have had the opportunity to work with thousands of families from North Florida, New Jersey and now here in Connecticut. And far too often those families shared some common demographic features – they were poor, black, uninsured, unemployed and ex-offenders. Now it would take much longer than three minutes for me to state my opinion about these disturbing statistics so for today I'll just pick one. Incarceration.

As a direct care community worker, program director, community organizer and resident I have had seen, heard and experienced a particular story, played out daily-- same scenario only different players. Usually when we speak of incarceration, its inequalities and the effect on the community, we often start with the African American male. No disrespect to my brothers (stay strong) but today I am here to tell you about the sisters. On any given day this is Tasha's story.

I get a phone call from the church, the school or community resource, someone wants to know if I can assist Tasha's mother. Tasha got picked up for shoplifting and when the officer was making the arrest, weed was found in her pocket. This is not Tasha's first arrest, or her second but she does work and is the caretaker for her three school-age children. Tasha's still going to jail.

Tasha's mother is ill and has difficulty taking care of herself. But she wants to keep the kids together. Tasha's mother needs support services if she is going to be able to care for her grandchildren. So she has to make the choice -- try to silently struggle and care for the youths or get involved with the system, be it DCF or Dept. of Social Services. She needs the help and elects to access services. Now there are case workers, social workers, elderly services, and judges involved. And with each involved agency comes a new tab. Not to mention the school support the children need as a result of the household disruption. Another agency another fist-full of money.

Now imagine if Tasha, the working taxpaying mother was able to remain in the community. Not unpunished, not without restrictions or restorative justice mandates. But not burdening the already distressed taxpayers, programs and services.

I am a firm believing that crime doesn't pay. But how much should it cost. With the passage of S.B. No. 475., properly assessed persons arrested or convicted of nonviolent crimes can be considered for home confinement with GPS monitoring in lieu of costly incarceration. We all know that Tasha's story is told over and over again without fail and the state's budget is busting at the seam. I believe that S.B. 475 is a cost effective remedy to this pervasive problem and it may even restore a family or two along the way.