

Resolution of the
Clergy of the County of Winnebago, Illinois
Supporting the SAFE-T Act and Pretrial Fairness Act and
Celebrating Its Implementation

WHEREAS, the clergy of the County of Winnebago, Illinois have a moral obligation to work for justice and righteousness, to tell the truth, and to hold our elected officials accountable to being good stewards of our resources; and

WHEREAS, our actions are rooted in our love for our neighbors and not motivated by any election cycle or political talking points and we were not asked to make this resolution by campaign operatives; and

WHEREAS, we have been rejoicing to see our state legislature taking seriously this long overdue criminal justice reform that centers the rights of those most impacted by injustice; and

WHEREAS, the first version of the Pretrial Fairness Act was actually introduced in February 2017 as the Equal Justice for All Act and three different subject matter hearings on ending money bond and enacting pretrial justice reforms were held in April 2019, February 2020, and October 2020 where experts, advocates, law enforcement, and legislators shared their perspectives; and

WHEREAS, when the bill was reintroduced in the 2020 legislative session as the Pretrial Fairness Act, the Illinois legislature held multiple working group meetings on the subject - all of this a year before the bill was voted on and passed, and to pretend that this important topic somehow surprised the legislature is both ridiculous and false; and

WHEREAS, the people who worked on this bill and advocated for it also live in Illinois and take seriously their own public safety. Under the new law, people accused of serious crimes can still be detained if a judge determines that they pose a specific, real, and present threat to someone, or that the person has a high likelihood of willful flight; and

WHEREAS, this law is supported by survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault because it prioritizes their safety and prevents people who pose a direct threat to someone from being able to pay their way out of jail; and

WHEREAS, we must acknowledge that the current system in which our family members, friends, and neighbors are currently being incarcerated before they've even gone to trial is a far cry from the mythical imagery of wheels of justice turning smoothly that our State's Attorney imagined in a recent editorial. The majority of people we are currently spending our tax dollars to lock up are not some scary category of villains we need to be afraid of - they are regular people whose lives would be made worse by sitting in jail: your friend charged with a DUI, your grandson who may have stolen something, your coworker who has been accused of missing a court date. If anyone thinks the story of someone they know is the exception and they do not deserve to be incarcerated but everybody else does, they must ask themselves who benefits from a system that makes people afraid of one another; and

WHEREAS, nearly all of these people in jail that we are suddenly so concerned about are in fact going to get out of jail eventually, and no good comes from telling us to fear them rather than support them in getting jobs, maintaining housing, being taxpayers rather than a drain on our resources because they are incarcerated, and feeling included and supported by the community and thus less likely to be rearrested; and

WHEREAS, especially for people of faith who believe in mercy, forgiveness, and redemption, we must stop pretending that locking huge numbers of people in cages is a solution to society's problems and focus on solutions that restore us to right relationship with our neighbors and the teachings of the prophets many of us follow including the words of Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 that the Lord has sent us to "bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the undersigned Clergy of the County of Winnebago, Illinois demand the Pretrial Fairness Act be implemented on January 1, 2023 as it has already been signed into state law.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be immediately sent to all state office holders representing any portion of the County of Winnebago, and to the Office of Governor of the State of Illinois.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution shall be in full force and effect immediately upon its adoption, which we fully acknowledge has absolutely no legal implication, just as the Winnebago County Board's resolution has no legal implication and was a political stunt and a waste of taxpayer funds when the Board knows full well that Winnebago County must comply with the SAFE-T Act because it is already Illinois law.

The above and foregoing Resolution was adopted in the County of Winnebago, Illinois this 29th day of September, 2022.

Violet Johnicker

Rev. Violet Johnicker

Marlene Walker

The Rev. Dr. Marlene Walker

Matthew Johnson

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