

# Liberate! Don't Incarcerate

Washtenaw Black & Brown Leaders  
Demand County Prosecutor to Support  
Community Investment  
& End Mass Incarceration



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To learn more about Liberate Don't Incarcerate Washtenaw please email us at [liberatewashco@gmail.com](mailto:liberatewashco@gmail.com) or visit [liberatedontincarcerate.org](http://liberatedontincarcerate.org)

# Platform



**Stop Targeting Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Immigrant Communities**



**Ensure Transparency and Accountability**



**Decriminalize Mental Health and Poverty**



**Treat Kids with Dignity & Compassion**



**Stop the Machine**



**Divest from the Machine & Invest in Communities**



### **MARIA THOMAS, ANN ARBOR**

I'm a fierce community health advocate and mother of three living in Washtenaw County for 13 years. Working in public health, I see the "criminal justice" system punishing those struggling with mental health, addiction, homelessness and poverty. I see prison and jail making our people sicker. People with disabilities, Black and Brown folks, trauma survivors, trans and gender non-conforming people and poor people suffer the most, by being constantly surveilled, disproportionately targeted, unfairly sentenced and crushed inside the system. The best way to keep our community safe is to ensure that people feel cared for and loved, and have the resources they need, not through institutions that cause horrific harm, rip families apart and force our children to harden themselves. Safety happens when our community's needs are met. It's really that simple. I want our next prosecutor to understand that you can't tie social services to

the prosecutor's office. Our next prosecutor needs to advocate for funds to be directed to community-led initiatives and community-based programs that operate independently from jails and prisons, so true healing can take place. We all deserve healing, peace, community and joy.

### **HOAI AN PHAM, ANN ARBOR**

Prisons affect everyone, everywhere: through families separated, violence, pollution - all the way down to the products we use every day made by prison labor. Everyone has a stake in dismantling the prison industrial complex (PIC). Yet, voting, and the electoral system in general, are only tools: they will never be our final answer - particularly when people in confinement cannot vote. Our current reality in Washtenaw County is a strong school to prison pipeline, and an anti-Black prosecutor who has constantly supported incarceration and police brutality. Mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex only serve to make our communities more dangerous by wrongly teaching us that people are disposable. Under the PIC, we take people who need the most support, and put them in harmful, traumatic conditions where there is no support at all - everything that we lock people up for is because of a social service we don't have. Prisons serve as our communities' excuse for a lack of real, tangible structures that we need, such as mental health and drug use. Abolition goes further than simply the physical prisons (and extension of them through monitoring, etc): we need to undo our socialized behavior and learn how to truly treat each other as human beings. If we truly believe in community, we need to invest in it - and abolition is the only way to liberation.



### **KRYSTLE DUPREE, YPSILANTI**

When we really think about the power the prosecutor has, that sense of consciousness should evolve into critical thought that develops critical and uncomfortable questions. These questions deserve to be answered absent flagrant rhetoric delivered by a capricious candidate who may not understand the importance of learning from the community they serve and whose plans we cannot see so we therefore cannot hold them accountable. It is important that we pick someone we can work with, not someone we'll spend time fighting against. I think we had enough of that already.

## **BRYAN FOLEY, YPSILANTI**

In our original languages prior to the European and Arabian colonization of Africa we knew of no name for jail or prison. I often think of that and wonder what it was like for our ancestors. To be pursued, herded like cattle, and placed in chains, then thrown into structures of unknown existence by a strange people.

Placed and stacked into the bottom of a ship to traverse the ocean. Then placed onto blocks to be auctioned with the pigs, cows and goats. Slavery was big business then. It is a mega business today. A Prison Industrial Complex is what it is today, where the prosecutor acts as a pseudo-broker of modern day slaves. Slavery wasn't abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment. It codified it.

Mass incarceration can only be brought to an end by a complete overhaul of the judicial system beginning in the office of the prosecutor and the removal of imprisonment for profit. The first American business was slavery, and slavery by punishment for a crime is a 182 billion dollar a year American industry today. Blacks who are an estimated 13% of the U.S population are incarcerated at a rate of 2,207 per 100,000 contrasted to whites at 380 per 100,000 who make up 72% of the population. This is why our next Prosecutor of Washtenaw County has to be an anti-racist prosecutor. One who has experience and the intestinal fortitude to change the integrity of the office from the inside and implement policies of social justice and racial equity in hiring. No, there was no name for prison or jail in our original tongue because no one had ever been to or seen one before. I believe Hell is where my ancestors thought they had docked, where many of their descendants today are Thirteenth Amendment slaves in a hellish nightmare prison called America.

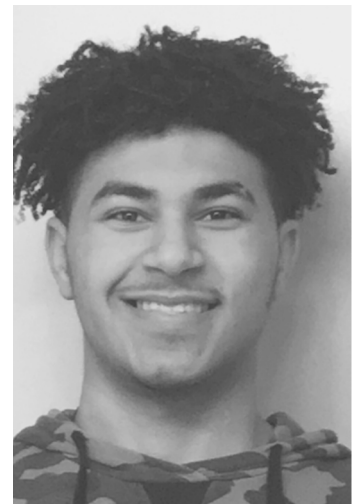


## **LESELIEY WELCH, YPSILANTI**

Mass incarceration damages health and shortens lives, harming our families and communities. Anyone running for county prosecutor should have a strong commitment to ending mass incarceration and redirecting resources to programs and practices that improve health, strengthen families, and build restorative communities. I want our next county prosecutor to fight for what is best for our community today, tomorrow and for generations to come, and that includes ending mass incarceration.

## **CAZMIR ZABOROWSKA, ANN ARBOR**

It is always shocking to me when I hear politicians talk about the helpless condition of our disadvantaged citizens, as if they do not have the power to change their situation. A community is like a cake: the better the ingredients, the better the taste, but if you spoil the cake and leave it on the counter, it will not suddenly start tasting good on its own. We need to prove to our communities that we care, that we believe in and support them; enough discussion has been had on the topic. Through continuing with policies of mass incarceration, we are further depriving our struggling communities of the power to build and make positive change.



## **WILLIAM LOPEZ, ANN ARBOR**



Mass incarceration is not just about the bars. It's about the intricate system of courts, judges, lawyers and surveillance that puts people away in cages. Most often, it is Black, Latino, and Indigenous community members locked up, with their time behind bars predicting future health education, and employment. Prosecutors are important parts of this incarceration system, and electing a prosecutor attuned to issues of racial equity and social justice is one way we can support communities of color in Washtenaw County.

## **YMA JOHNSON, ANN ARBOR/YPSILANTI**

I'm profoundly concerned about the way mental health and criminal justice have been integrated. I don't want to see large amounts of money funneled into treatment programs within the criminal justice system. I disagree with locating mental health and substance abuse programs in jail because we're normalizing a punitive response to people who need treatment. Substance abuse and mental illness are medical problems. Over 60 percent of people in county jails nationwide have some form of mental health problem. We need the resources that are allocated to criminal justice to be re-allocated to mental health. I share Angela Davis' view on this: Let's start by investing in things like mental health, education, literacy, homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence, and pre-K education. We need to stop using incarceration to solve complex social problems. I also want to see some reparations work done on the part of the police system. The trauma inflicted on communities of color in Washtenaw County needs to be acknowledged. I want a Prosecutor to acknowledge the disproportionate targeting and prosecution of people of color, to acknowledge that policing has persecuted communities of color in significant ways and created a hostile environment where Black people are not treated with the respect we deserve. Just because there isn't a string of Black bodies doesn't mean there isn't a problem.



## **TRISCHE' DUCKWORTH, BELLEVILLE/WASHTENAW**



Ending mass incarceration would be justice on behalf of those who are incarcerated due to Prosecutorial Misconduct! If we continue to allow Prosecutors to conduct their business-as-usual agendas, we will continue to see prisons filled with people who are innocent or overcharged. The power is ours, however. We must educate ourselves and vote for those who truly reflect the agenda of the people!! "We The People" must use our voices and our vote to end mass incarceration for good!!

## **YODIT MESFIN JOHNSON, YPSILANTI**



I once visited a juvenile lock-up just outside of Detroit. I can still see the small suitcases stored in storage bins, that the children brought from home after being sentenced to lock-up. The guards told stories of keeping mics on all night in the children's cells so they could listen for suicide attempts. I wept throughout the 'tour' of this hell that was holding our children. A year or so later, I wrote to our local Prosecutor after learning of five Black youth, under the age of 16, who had been charged as adults for crimes they allegedly committed. As a mother myself, my heart broke, as my mind tried to understand how this could possibly be happening. How, I wondered, could officials whose charge is to serve the community see any child, regardless of guilt, as being best served in prison? Especially with all of the data that shows the school to prison pipeline and the disproportionate numbers of black and brown children who are pushed into this pipeline. How, when we know that their brains are under-developed and that so many youth who get caught up in the system are also experiencing the realities of decades of racism and

poverty here? Not to mention the compounding forms of generational trauma our babies are holding? How does a prosecutor, in good conscious, lock up children? I want a prosecutor who loves children, sees them as our most precious asset, and one who will advocate for deeply anti-racist policies and practices to keep our children out of jail. I want that prosecutor to strive for a beloved community where everyone, especially our youth of color, has the chance to live into their fullest potential.

## **AUDREY ANDERSON, YPSILANTI**

More than a few years ago I volunteered to serve in a county jail ministry. My observation of the inmates there was disturbing. To pierce my disturbance even more was reading the book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. My mind went to those I had given patient care to. Did I judge them wrongly? I made a choice to unlock the black box of prosecution. Before that I did not pay attention to the prosecutor's role in the criminal justice system. Their policies and practices were not transparent to me and I did not understand what they do. What I have learned is that they are extremely important to the advancement of equal justice. I look to the Vera Institute of Justice to learn there are seven key decisions points to ask prosecutor candidates in how they see their role to make a change in policies and practice: 1. Charging, 2. Bail, 3. Diversion programs, 4. Discovery, 5. Case processing, 6. Pleas, 7. Sentencing



## **MATTHEW HUGHES, YPSILANTI**

Knowing what I know about mass incarceration and how it disproportionately affects people who look like me, it is not something that I, or anyone should want for the future. Prosecutors are the ones with the power to make a difference. We need a prosecutor who understands these issues, these broken systems and wants to change them. Let's enrich our youth, not entrap them.

## **DESIRAE SIMMONS, YPSILANTI**



I have felt pulled toward abolitionist principles more and more since giving birth to my daughter. I refuse to accept a world where her freedom could be in danger because of how she looks, where she lives, and what she does as she's growing and living as a child in this toxic culture where fear and punishment rules. She has allowed me to dream bigger and deeper about how to shift our culture so we can all be our best selves. And, the criminal (in)justice system has proven that it can't operate within the bounds of love the community is building. So, it's time to move resources from within the system to outside of it. That's the kind of attitude I expect the next County Prosecutor to have. It is time to radically change the way we approach public safety and the law. We can no longer insist that bad actors within the system are the problem; the system itself is the problem. And we, in the community together, are building what needs to take its place.



## **CECILIA SORENSON, ANN ARBOR**

"Liberate don't incarcerate" means don't target certain communities of color and find other solutions to problems that is not just locking them up. It means giving people things like mental health support and other opportunities. It means looking for solutions that aren't just about punishment. In my case I had a public defender who was very helpful to me against the system and I was able to do community service. Sometimes people just need to hear "I'm sorry", not that someone needs to be punished.

## **KWAME HOOKER, ANN ARBOR**

It's 2020 and our nation and communities still face the unfortunate reality of battling against the scourge of racism that negatively impacts black and brown people on a daily basis. As community members, we are morally and ethically obligated to look after one another and treat each other with compassion, empathy, and kindness. Likewise, as recognized guardians of our communities, our elected officials, particularly judges, public defenders, and prosecutors are charged with the awesome responsibility of constantly calibrating the sensitive scales of justice to keep them in balance. It is our duty as citizens to hold them accountable for this precious opportunity to lead and impart the law justly and fairly. Advocating at the ballot box is a tremendous way to do so! Get up, get out, get active, and vote your values!!



## **VIDHYA ARAVIND, YPSILANTI**



As a trans woman of color, I have a deeply hostile relationship with the carceral state. My sole focus in everything I do is building the power and capacity my communities need in order to survive. We need housing, healthcare, and food, and often, in our struggle to get these things, trans women turn to sex work. Cisgender people love to denounce us as disgusting in public while fetishizing our bodies privately, and in a world without social safety nets or employment protections for trans folks, we do what we must to survive. This sex work is often done in unsafe conditions, so in particular, Black, LatinX, and indigenous trans women suffer both at the hands of the state for working "criminally," and at the hands of murderous transmisogynists. We don't need a prosecutor who is "mostly" against pre-trial incarceration. We don't need a prosecutor who wants to put the "right people" away. We don't need a prosecutor who wants to do his job the "right way." We need a prosecutor who recognizes that his job is a fundamental gear in the machines that kill us. We need a prosecutor who is determined to do the work to create care that's not tied to the state, and to do the work that puts them out of a job. Being caring and carceral are mutually exclusive, and if you aren't invested in a world without prisons and police, you're invested in a world without care.

## **DWIGHT WILSON, ANN ARBOR**



A Prosecuting Attorney's primary responsibility is to guarantee justice. Thus she or he must seek an even playing field without favoring the rich and powerful or the poor and despised. A Prosecuting Attorney must understand that they are operating within a society and systems that were established to ensure white supremacy whose existence threatens us all. A Prosecuting Attorney who does not understand this will kill mercy and damn truth. In a society that purports to be Democratic, that makes the office potentially more dangerous than a foreign enemy or more healing than a skilled surgeon.

## **GAIL SUMMERHILL, YPSILANTI**



It is my belief that mass incarceration was increased by the dismantling of Michigan's mental health services. Instead of getting people the mental health services that they need, they are now housed in their new home, the Michigan Department of Corrections. Restore mental health services to the level they once were and provide more strategic services for those who suffer from addictions. Then you'll see a decrease in Michigan's prison population drastically. We can no longer afford to treat this with a bandaid. We need to get to the core of this issue.