

Council candidates on abolishing bail

The Bethlehem Gadfly Candidates for election, Election May 16, 2021

 Latest in a series of posts on candidates for election 

selections from Douglas Graves, “Bethlehem City Council candidates.” Bethlehem Press, May 14, 2021.

Why or why not would you support the abolishment of bail for both Lehigh County and Northampton County?

Kwiatek: I support the elimination of the cash bail system. The cash bail system discriminates against people of color and poor people. The United States is one of few countries that uses a commercial bail bondsmen system. Pretrial detainees make up 70 percent of our nation’s jailed population, and many are there simply because they are poor, not because they pose a threat. Lengthy pre-trial imprisonment has significant negative impacts on people who are, after all, owed the presumption of innocence in our justice system. Where cash bail has been eliminated and programs such as supervised release have been implemented, the data are showing no significant increase in recidivism. Defendants show up for their court appearances at very high rate.

Leon: Bail has disproportionately affected marginalized communities. I would support the restructuring of bail to include income and allegation considerations.

Callahan: For nonviolent crimes I would support the abolishment of bail. I would not support the abolishment of bail for violent crimes.

Crampsie Smith: I would support researching alternatives to cash bail. Three out of 5 people in U.S. jails today have not been convicted of a crime. Between 1970 and 2015 there has been an 433 percent increase in the use of pretrial detention in prisons. The cash bail system criminalizes poverty, as people who are unable to afford bail are detained while they await trial for weeks or even months. Cash bail perpetuates inequities in the justice system that are disproportionately felt by communities of color and those experiencing poverty. If detained due to lack of access to

bail monies, one can lose their job, their housing, etc. Studies have shown that pretrial arrests can actually increase a person's likelihood of re-arrest upon release. However, studies of New Jersey and Washington, D.C., indicate that defendants' rates of appearance for trial after cash bail reforms were implemented are similar or better to rates of appearance before the reforms. This is a critical issue to be further explored, and will likely be determined at the county and/or state level.

Wilhelm: Cash bail supports a wealth-based and inequitable justice system in which legally innocent people remain in prison for weeks, months, or years simply because of an inability to cover the cost of bail- and is one of the many areas in which criminal justice reform is needed.

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