

After attending the Senate Judiciary Committee meeting yesterday, I was disappointed that many of the voices in the room were left unheard. I understand the adherence to a schedule and limited time provided. Below are the comments I had prepared for the committee on March 12, 2024.

Good afternoon. My name is Mandi Fugate Sheffel. I am a small business owner in Hazard, and I also work for the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky on issues related to criminal justice reform.

I am here to speak in opposition to the proposed committee substitutes to House Bill 5.

I run the Read Spotted Newt bookstore in Hazard. I started my shop after 15 years in recovery from oxycontin addiction. I am proud to be an entrepreneur in a place that is struggling to build a sustainable economy and I am proud that as a person in recovery I can meaningfully contribute to my community. If the provisions harshly criminalizing addiction and limiting opportunity for recovery in HB5 had been in place when I was struggling I would likely not be here in front of you today.

In eastern Kentucky, our jails are already overcrowded and we don't need to be spending money on new jails. In Perry County, the jail is at around 155% of its capacity right now and overcrowding is common across the whole region. If this bill passes it will force us to devote even more of our county budgets to incarcerating our unconvicted neighbors.

Our counties in the coalfields are already struggling with lack of money to pay for the basic necessities we need for healthy communities. After the floods of 2022, we are in a profound housing crisis. We don't always have reliable access to clean water. We don't have good transportation for older folks to get to medical appointments.

If this bill passes, it will force rural economies to devote even more of our limited county budgets to incarceration. I'd rather see the \$25/day that it takes to keep someone in jail spent on services that actually help our communities like safe and stable housing, workforce development, and access to treatment.

I don't want my community governed by Louisville politics. Rural jail incarceration is already 3 times higher than what it is in Louisville. I worry about our neighbors who work in the rural coalfields' jails. With jails so full, HB5 will mean they get even more crowded, putting everyone, especially staff, at risk for dangerous conditions and increased violence.

House Bill 5 does not answer the needs of Kentucky, nor does it make us any safer. But it will put an especially hard burden on already distressed communities in eastern Kentucky.

I ask you today to vote no on the proposed committee substitutions to House Bill 5 and the bill should it come before you for a vote. Thank you.