

Good morning members of the Sentencing Commission,

My name is Sharon Rabera and this morning I will be speaking to you on behalf of youth activists in New Haven. I represent the Citywide Youth Coalition, Inc. of New Haven, a 40 year-old organization responsible for organizing and convening youth serving non-profits, professionals, and youth lead group for the purposes of creating a courageous community where all youth can succeed. We are the amplifiers of the youth voice and are staunch supporters of youth-led activism. I speak to you today to tell you the story of Aymir Holland.

Aymir is an adolescent African American male currently sitting at Mason Correctional Facility facing injustice. He was arrested almost a year ago for his alleged participation in an assault for which he has been held with a bond of \$250,000. Aymir has no prior criminal history and has NEVER been suspended from school. But to tell you his circumstances without telling you who Aymir is would be a great disservice.

Aymir is described by his teachers as a gentle giant; the anti-bully at Highville Charter School. He played in his church band and began learning Chinese to challenge himself as he prepared to embark on the journey of applying for college. Last year Aymir lost his best friend to cancer and his mother worried that the loss would result in isolation. To support her son Mrs. Willis, Aymir's mom gave her son some leeway to get involved in more school activities that would encourage interaction with other students such was that of sports. So Aymir hung out with a new friend at the library and later walked home last November, which would result in his arrest and incarceration for being present during an assault.

Aymir has never been arrested or involved in any disciplinary action. Although he is over 6 feet tall and weights 250lbs, Aymir has never been involved in any acts of physical aggression as a victim or perpetrator. He's the kind of young man that remained close to his family and seldom spent time with peers after school. And today, at this very moment as I speak before you all, Aymir is in high court awaiting trial facing 61 years. This story has scared youth activists everywhere as it is a cautionary tale of the challenges that youth of color face in our inner cities and suburbs. Judged solely by his appearance and presenting circumstances, Aymir has spent almost an entire year in jail due to an excessive bail and stacked charges for an offense that he did not commit.

According to the Center for Children's Advocacy, youth at Manson Youth spend on average 19 months in pre-trial lock up. For Aymir, he is now entering his 12th month. An entire year gone and this young man has yet to resolve this dilemma. So why stand before you all today to bring this up? Aymir's story is not unique as this is a reality for many of young people currently awaiting trial. With excessive bails that keep young people locked up not for their crimes or perceived threat to the community but instead for their inability to afford the bond, the state is essentially criminalizing poverty.

In 12 months, Aymir's bail has not been reduced by a cent. The prosecution has switched attorneys at least 3 times dragging the process along and in fact violating Aymir's 6th amendment right to a speedy trial. The impact of incarceration on young people has proved to be detrimental and often times irreversible in its affects on the mind and spirits of young people that are unable to afford bail and as such should be reconsidered in its entirety.

As I speak before you activists are demonstrating outside of court supporting Aymir, in fact that is where I would be if I wasn't here. As you weight the pros and cons of bail reform please remember how this system impacts adults, youth and families at large.