

December 13, 2023

Ruby L. Bonner, Esq.
Deputy Commissioner

Division of Civilian Oversight
1520 Market St., Rm. 4029
St. Louis, MO 63103

Rev. Darryl Gray
Chair, Detention Facilities Oversight Board
Division of Civilian Oversight
1520 Market St., Rm. 4029
St. Louis, MO 63103

Effective immediately, I'm resigning from The Detention Facility Oversight Board.

For decades organizers demanded oversight over our detention facilities and the police department because years of abuse and inhumane treatment made it clear that without robust regulation people would continue to die in our city's jails. Although we understand that jails are inherently violent, dangerous and murderous, we believe oversight is necessary to protect the people who are detained in these facilities.

In 2021, legislation passed that gave true power to community members to oversee the jails. Following the passage of that legislation, Mayor Tishaura O. Jones nominated me to serve on The Detention Facility Oversight Board (DFOB) "to help ensure the claims of injustice within our facilities are taken seriously." The past 18 months of obstruction from the administration and the jail commissioner, however, have demonstrated that the administration does not want to take claims of injustice seriously. In fact, the DFOB bill sitting on the mayor's desk right now poses as a solution, but in actuality is a guise that strips the board's power to meaningfully investigate the jail independently and gives power to the administration to remove Board members.

Simultaneously, for more than a year we've been denied all data, complaints from staff and detainees. To date, "fully trained" DFOB members have not been on a tour of the jail. Meanwhile people continue to die at rates that should be alarming to the world, and the city's response is additional board training. It's clear to me now, the board was never designed to change the systemic violence in the jail, it was designed to give the illusion of progress while maintaining the status quo.

Over the past 10 years I've dedicated my life's work to increasing pretrial release, closing jails, and supporting survivors and families impacted by violence and incarceration. Through this work, I've witnessed the damaging effects of lack of food and showers, inhumane overcrowding in cells, abuse of chemical agents, and a devastating absence of adequate medical care. I've spoken to the mothers whose children have died in the St. Louis City Justice Center this year. They are in great pain. Along with the organizing community these families have demanded transparency about the circumstances that led to their loved ones passing. They've demanded that Jennifer Clemons Abdullah be fired. They've demanded

the DFOB be given unfettered access to the jail. They've demanded transformative change so another child is not lost.

Mayor Jones made a number of progressive campaign promises of transparency, accountability and reimagining public safety. I expected a sincere effort to disrupt the state violence in our city, but instead we've faced constant obstruction.

I resign in solidarity with people who have died in jail. Robert Lee Miller. Denelle Johnson. Augustus Collier. Donald Henry. Courtney McNeal. Ashley Davis. Carlton Bernard. Terrence Smith. Juwon Carter. Dejuan Cole. Javon White.

I'm stepping down from this idle and ineffective board, but I will never stop fighting against injustice and for our freedom.

Until we are all free,
Mike Milton

