

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Tony Gant

Phone: 517.977.7559

Email: antoniese.gant@gmail.com



Voting Access For All

Nation Outside

Nation Outside and VAAC Release First of Its Kind Jail Voting Report

‘Our democracy works best when all voters can participate.’

FLINT-GENESEE COUNTY JAIL — People held in pretrial detention in Michigan have the right to vote but are routinely denied the basic help and access they need to cast a ballot, a recently published report from Nation Outside and the Voting Access for All Coalition (VAAC) has found. The findings of the report will be detailed at a press conference to be held at **11 a.m. on Oct. 13 at the Genesee County Jail.**

Many people feel disconnected from society after months and years of incarceration in jail. About half of all people held in Michigan jails haven't been found guilty of a crime, yet being held in detention keeps them away from the forms, government offices and absentee ballots they need to access in order to cast a ballot and participate in their government. Being divorced from their most basic civil rights is one of the key factors that cause people to recidivate. The recommendations in the report would increase civic participation across the state of Michigan through voter education and engagement, which decreases crime and creates safer communities.

“I think it is very important because I think people although they may be incarcerated deserve the right to vote” **quote from Flint City Clerk Inez Brown**

“In this country, you are innocent until proven guilty,” **Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich (D-Flint) said.** *“But for those who are in jail while awaiting trial, it can be confusing about which freedoms you still have access to. Today, we are saying loud and clear to anyone*

waiting for their day in court: you maintain your right to vote until your trial. Democracy works because each person has a chance to have their voice heard, and those who have encountered the criminal justice system have an important perspective to add. I'd like to thank Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson and his office for advocating for voting rights and access to the ballot."

A number of states have implemented laws to protect the rights of voters held in jail pretrial, like 'The Value My Vote Act' in Maryland, which requires that people held pretrial be provided voter registration applications and provided instructions on absentee voting, among other things. In Illinois, county jails and elections officials are required to establish a process that allows people held pretrial to cast their ballots during elections. Additionally, counties with a population greater than 3 million would be required to establish a temporary polling place in county jails.

The report makes some basic recommendations to address challenges facing people in jail who want to exercise their right to vote. Those recommendations are in the areas of:

1. Voter Education
2. Voter Registration
3. Absentee Voting
4. Election Day or In-Person Voting
5. Partnerships and Collaboration
6. Transparency and Accountability

To read the report, please go to <https://www.nationoutside.org/votingandcivicengagement>.

The press conference will be held at the **Genesee County Jail, 1002 Saginaw St, Flint, MI, at 11 a.m.** Participants include:

Moderator: **Daniel Jones**, Voting Access for All Coalition Chairperson

- **Inez Brown**, Flint City Clerk
- **Dominique Clemons**, Genesee County Board of Commissioner District 4
- **Raquel Thueme**, Ruth Mott Foundation President
- **Todd Womack**, City of Flint Resident, Pastor of Community Connections, Academic Advisor & Lecturer for the School of Social Work for the U of M-Flint
- **Bilal Hammoud**, Public Engagement Associate, Michigan Department of State (SOS)

- **Johnnell Allen-Bey**, Nation Outside, Genesee County Sheriff Deputy
Ambassador

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Nation Outside (www.nationoutside.org) is an organization working for criminal justice reform that is led by people who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system. Nation Outside uses community education strategies and civic engagement initiatives to inspire members and the community to get involved in knowledgeable, sustainable, and socially just forms of advocacy to support currently and formerly incarcerated folks, their loved ones, and their communities in order to inspire and create real reform in the criminal justice system. Safe & Just Michigan is currently the financial sponsor of Nation Outside.

Voting Access for All Coalition (VAAC) mission is to ensure that all persons in pretrial situations, individuals about to be released from prison, and those formerly incarcerated, along with their families and community members, have the opportunity and knowledge they need to exercise their right to vote in every election.