

HB-20 Targets People with Disabilities

Michele's Story

Handwritten text in cursive script, likely from a letter received by the Texas Jail Project. The text is written on lined paper and is somewhat illegible due to the cursive style and blurriness. It appears to be a letter from Michele G. to her mother, discussing her situation in jail and her mental health.

Michele's handwriting in crisis, from a letter received by Texas Jail Project after she had been decompensating in Smith County Jail for nearly 3 years

- Michele G. is a middle aged Black woman in Smith county with a decades long history of state mental health treatment
- In June 2018, Michele was arrested when she was accused of stealing **.80 cent nail polish**
- Michele was disoriented at the time of arrest, and confused when police confronted her
- Despite the arrest affidavit describing her disorientation and only describing an *attempt* to resist arrest, Michele was charged with assault on a public servant and given a **\$25,000** bond
- Michele has decompensated in Smith county jail for nearly 3 years pending competency restoration, with only one short hospitalization

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House Bill 20 would...

- Add to the list of offenses that disqualify someone from getting a personal recognizance bond, which is the only moneyless way for an indigent person to secure their freedom
- Cause already overcrowded jail populations to skyrocket via unfunded mandates while not increasing funding for mental health treatment

In reality....

- In many counties, personal recognizance bonds are already too frequently denied – even when defendants are people with mental illness (like Michele)
- Smith county jail is already operating at ~95% capacity, while 1 in 5 county dollars goes to corrections and less than 1 penny goes to public services

Resource starved rural counties, like the one Michele lives in, have too few options for jail diversion of people with disabilities as it is. Judges and magistrates deserve the flexibility to make individualized assessments when determining bond.

VOTE NO ON HB-20