

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING H.702, THE PEOPLE’S JUSTICE GUARANTEE

WHEREAS, the Somerville City Council affirms the federal People’s Justice Guarantee resolution by establishing goals, identifying actions necessary to meet these goals, and calling for the federal government to enact policies to advance The People’s Justice Guarantee; and

WHEREAS, public safety is of paramount importance for every person and family in our community; and

WHEREAS, a humane and effective justice system is a necessary predicate for a functioning and healthy democracy; and

WHEREAS, decarceration is a moral and societal imperative that the United States must strategically and effectively pursue at every level; and

WHEREAS, expanded and militarized police forces, including in the form of proactive policing or so-called “broken windows” policing, has led to mass criminalization, worsening police-community relations, and unacceptable levels of State violence, specifically impacting Black people; and

WHEREAS, one in two adults in America has had a family member in jail or prison, and one in five has had a parent incarcerated; and

WHEREAS, nearly 65 percent of families with an incarcerated or detained family member are unable to meet basic needs, including housing, health, food, and employment; and

WHEREAS, children with an incarcerated parent are nearly six times more likely to be expelled from school and increasingly less likely to graduate from college than children without incarcerated parents; and

WHEREAS, zero-tolerance policies, including exclusionary disciplinary policies and school-based arrests, result in the growing cradle-to-prison pipeline; and

WHEREAS, the consequences of criminal convictions do not end with the prison sentence served or fines paid, and a majority of people imprisoned in the United States are expected to return home, return to society, and become productive members of their communities; and

WHEREAS, yearly, over 680,000 people are released from incarceration, and are expected to be taxpayers rather than tax burdens, yet the reality is that these individuals go home to find that their sentences, although served, are far from over; and

WHEREAS, there are many collateral consequences and civil disabilities across jurisdictions that prevent people with criminal records from reentering society, gaining meaningful employment; and

WHEREAS, a vast, sound, and consistent body of scientific evidence suggests that—

- 1) the best estimate of the overall effect of incarceration on crime is modest, deterrence effects are negligible;
- 2) increased coordination between local law enforcement and immigration enforcement has not been shown to have a measurable impact on reducing crime and have been shown to destabilize communities;
- 3) the root causes of crime and instability are typically poverty, substance use disorder, family and generational trauma, and poor access to health care and other basic social services; and

WHEREAS, the City of Somerville recognizes the above problems and has already acted to prioritize treatment over punishment; and

WHEREAS, a 2017 study published in Environmental Research found that urban communities of color and people with low incomes in Massachusetts are more impacted by air pollution, particularly in the forms of particulate matter and nitrogen oxides from proximity to roadways; and

WHEREAS, the Environmental Protection Agency has recognized that fine and ultrafine particulate matter is associated with increased health risks, including but not limited to premature death in people with heart or lung disease, aggravated asthma and increased respiratory symptoms, such as irritation of the airways, coughing or difficulty breathing; and

WHEREAS, the New Deal demonstrated that federal government actions, such as investing in infrastructure and housing, creating employment programs, regulating financial institutions, and bolstering the labor movement, can be effective in significantly reducing poverty and income inequality; however, the New Deal's lack of focus on racial equity resulted in worsening existing racial and economic disparities, with long-term negative impacts to the economic mobility and security of communities of color, especially Black and Native communities; and

WHEREAS, decades of *de facto* and *de jure* racial discrimination in housing, education, and employment have prevented people of color from benefitting fully from public investments and programs; and

WHEREAS, Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities are the most heavily impacted by the American legal system; and

WHEREAS, the toll of incarceration and detention has had a severe impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (“LGBTQ+”) individuals who are imprisoned at far higher rates than the overall population; and

WHEREAS, local governments calling for the federal government to pass The People's Justice Guarantee will help to demonstrate widespread popular support for necessary and just action; **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED,

1) that this City Council will convene a community process to help inform and draft legislation to repeal and dismantle punitive policies, and replace them with a holistic and community-led public health and safety agenda; **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**

2) that the new Director of Social and Racial Justice position should advance a community-led platform of justice, freedom, and safety, which shifts resources away from criminalization and incarceration and toward policies and investments that fairly and equitably ensure that all people can thrive; **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**

3) that the City Council requests the Somerville Police Department to decline to arrest or seek prosecution for consensual sex work; **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**

4) that Somerville support decriminalizing addiction, homelessness, poverty, HIV status, and disabilities, including mental health diagnosis, by declining to arrest or seek prosecution for simple drug possession and theft of necessity goods; **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**

5) that the City Council urges dramatically increasing diversion opportunities, community service, restorative justice programming, and treatment options that minimize court involvement and result in no prison time for offenses where the person does not cause or intend to cause harm; **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**

6) that the City Council calls upon the Somerville School Committee and School Department to end the criminalization of Black and brown students in school, including ending any zero-tolerance school discipline policies, the removal of police and school resource officers, the decriminalization of truancy, and requesting increased funds to support trauma informed, comprehensive mental health, and restorative services; **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**

7) that the Somerville City Council wholeheartedly supports these and the other provisions of The People's Justice Guarantee, H.702, and calls upon our federal representatives to work tirelessly towards its adoption.