

# JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

*Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes*

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 23:

Conditions of Pretrial Release - Home Detention Monitoring

**TO:** Hon. William Smith, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Travon Johnson

**DATE:** February 3, 2021

Good afternoon, my name is Travon Johnson and I was invited here by the Job Opportunities Task Force to speak in favor of Senate Bill 23. Last month, after a misunderstanding between me and my significant other, I found myself picked by the police. Even though my girlfriend moved to drop the charges three days later, I was stuck in jail and offered by the judge during my bail review, the option of Home Detention with GPS Monitoring a.k.a the box. Anyone will tell you that jail is an extremely unpleasant place- especially during the Coronavirus Pandemic- so when the judge offered me the chance to wait for my trial at home or in an unsanitized cell, I chose to go home.

What was not explained properly to me at the time, was how much going home would cost me financially. ASAP Home Detention, the company that demands payment to use their ankle bracelets, charged me **\$240 upfront** and told me, after much debate, that I would have to pay a minimum of \$70 every week or risk reincarceration. This was extremely unsettling for me, as I knew, undoubtedly, that I didn't have the money. I was anguished by the fact that the judge had not told me about this and in my recollection, this electronic monitoring service used to be free. It made no sense to me that during a pandemic when people are home and there is evidence of more domestic altercations because of economic stresses in people's lives, that the state would charge people **\$280 a month** to stay home.

I explained to ASAP my concerns and bewilderment at the costs- to which I was excoriated and threatened by the staff to sign on to the paperwork. They repeatedly stated that if I did not sign up for these expensive services at that moment, that I would go back to jail. When I asked them to explain the complexities of the documents to me, they repeatedly refused. You must understand- my freedom was at stake- and it is both traumatic and bewildering to strong-arm someone into signing documents they don't fully understand, charge them excessive fees for service, and then threaten/bully them with incarceration until they do so.

I worked out a deal with my lawyer who split the upfront cost of \$240 with me but I shouldn't have had to. That the cost for hook up and the following **\$280 per month** even exist is a serious problem in Baltimore. It has come to my attention that there are no electronic monitoring costs in Montgomery County and I firmly believe that the entire state should follow suit- especially for people who don't have the money to buy their freedom. No one should risk going to jail because they can't afford 'freedom fees.' Senate Bill 23 will go a long way towards fixing this issue for myself and the hundreds of others in the struggle right now. For these reasons, I urge a favorable report.