

JUSTICE & SAFETY ALLIANCE

An Open Letter To Memphis & Shelby County Elected and Appointed Officials:

As we continue our work to protect and care for the safety of our communities, The Justice & Safety Alliance (JSA) asks that the elected and appointed officials of our region step down from their position as board members on the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission (MSCC).

The MSCC is a nonprofit organization and not intended to be a public/private or quasi-government agency. When elected officials serve on the board, they are, by fact or perception, “sanctioning” and promoting that organization. These situations can create complex ethical and legislative issues because the elected officials’ potential decisions are so closely intertwined with this nonprofit’s policy interests.

The Crime Commission makes policy recommendations that are meant to directly affect the practices of many of the officials that currently serve on the board. The District Attorney, Juvenile Court Judge, City Mayor, County Mayor, Chief of Police, and County Sheriff are all some of the biggest decision makers in Shelby County. Their current position on the board gives the impression that officials influence, are partial to, and agree with the platform put forward by MSCC, which only represents the views of a segment of Memphis/Shelby County residents. In a situation where an official would be affected by a recommendation of the MSCC (e.g. recommendations pertaining to youth justice), that official’s participation on the board presents a potential conflict of interest for the examination of that recommendation along with different, potentially competing, recommendations from other parts of the community.

In January, the Crime Commission held an event about youth justice that illustrated the problems that can arise from elected officials serving on the board. During the event, youth voices were dismissed, a group of people were blocked from giving input when the meeting abruptly ended, and the MSCC perspective was prioritized over meaningful community-driven conversation and solutions. In addition, the MSCC has spent the last month issuing a number of one-sided op-eds and fear-mongering statements regarding youth justice that reinforce the MSCC’s long standing “tough-on-crime” perspective. Since the Crime Commission presents itself as a unilateral body, the presence of elected officials on this board again implies that those officials agree with the ideas put forward, even though MSCC represents just one side of the issues related to increasing justice and safety in our community.

We, the Justice & Safety Alliance Partner Organizations, formally ask you to step down from the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission.

Please respond with your decision on whether or not to step down by Friday, April 14. We will follow up if we haven’t heard a response by then.

Sincerely,

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