

October 2, 2020

Close the Workhouse Campaign Statement on the Shameful Public Safety Committee Meeting and Review of the Commissioner's Reports

Yesterday, the Public Safety Committee of the St. Louis Board of Aldermen convened for the first time since this summer to discuss the status of the Medium Security Institution (MSI), more commonly known as the Workhouse. Less than three months ago, the Board of Aldermen, spurred on by thousands of St. Louisans, came together to unanimously pass Ordinance 71217, directing the closure of the Workhouse by the end of 2020. It was a moment of unity and a high point for our City.

In yesterday's committee meeting, some City officials threatened to roll back that progress.

As directed by the July ordinance, Commissioner of Corrections Dale Glass released the second of two reports earlier this month. The Commissioner, who reports to Mayor Lyda Krewson, was tasked with developing a plan to close the Workhouse by December 31. Instead of doing that, he provided the committee with two reports attempting to make the case for keeping the hellish jail open. This attempt disregards local organizing and the decisions of our elected City officials, who voted--**unanimously**, following the lead of their constituents-- to close the jail.

But this is not about Dale Glass. It is about the people of the City of St. Louis, and it is about the elected legislative body and mayor of the City of St. Louis keeping their word. Nothing has changed since Ordinance 71217 was passed that would excuse them going back on that word. The Workhouse remains a site of abuse, neglect, and inhumane treatment. It remains an unnecessary and irresponsible use of millions of public dollars. And it remains a monument to white supremacy in St. Louis. Now is precisely the right time to reverse the racist policies of past and present, re-envision public safety, and place millions of dollars directly in the hands of impacted communities through a participatory budgeting process.

But Commissioner Glass did say one thing yesterday that is worth noting. Toward the end of the hearing, he was asked whether replacing those held solely on federal charges in the City Justice Center (CJC) with those remaining in the Workhouse would reduce the CJC population from its current level, and he answered yes. That's right: by choosing not to hold just a fraction of those currently charged with federal crimes in the City's jail, we would **reduce** the population in the CJC and close the Workhouse at the same time. We will not be fooled by scare tactics. The solution to the problem of future overcrowding is simple: jail fewer people. Transforming our bail practices and drastically reducing lengths of pretrial detention would be a great start.

We must act now so that justice is neither delayed nor denied.

Demand that the mayor stand by the ordinance she signed into law. Demand that your aldermen stand by their votes to close the Workhouse this year. Demand that the will of the people be respected and implemented.

We have three months. The path is clear. It's time to close the Workhouse.