
October 2021

Rose Lecture

Mackenzie Hobbs
mhobbs10@vols.utk.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.law.utk.edu/rgsj>



Part of the [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Juvenile Law Commons](#), [Law and Gender Commons](#), [Law and Race Commons](#), and the [Law and Society Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hobbs, Mackenzie (2021) "Rose Lecture," *Tennessee Journal of Race, Gender, & Social Justice*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70658/2693-3225.1205>

Available at: <https://ir.law.utk.edu/rgsj/vol11/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Volunteer, Open Access, Library Journals (VOL Journals), published in partnership with The University of Tennessee (UT) University Libraries. This article has been accepted for inclusion in *Tennessee Journal of Race, Gender, & Social Justice* by an authorized editor. For more information, please visit <https://ir.law.utk.edu/rgsj>.

Rose Lecture

Cover Page Footnote

Thank you to Taylor Flake-Lawson Symposium Editor, Rethinking Reentry Symposium; Juris Doctor Candidate, The University of Tennessee College of Law, 2021.

TENNESSEE JOURNAL OF RACE, GENDER, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
RETHINKING REENTRY SYMPOSIUM

ROSE LECTURE
Tuesday, February 23, 2021, 12:00 pm

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

*Johnelle Simpson**

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome. On behalf of the Tennessee Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice, we would like to welcome you to the Rethinking Reentry Symposium. My name is Johnelle Simpson, and I have the esteemed pleasure of serving as this year's Symposium Editor. I have had the opportunity to work with an amazing group of people, and at this time, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the RGSJ Rethinking Reentry Symposium committee members: Emma Cassell, Danielle Scola, Kelsey West, Raven Morris, Julia Slagle, Mackenzie Hobbs, Samantha Buller-Young, and Emeline Brown. And a special thank you to Professor Joy Radice. We would also like to thank our amazing advisor who has been with us along the way, Professor Valerie Vojdik.

At this time, I would also like to thank our event sponsors, The Chancellor's Commission for Disability, The Commission for LGBT People, The Council for Diversity and Inclusion, The Black Law Student Association, The Student Council on Diversity and Inclusion, and The U.T. Legal Clinic. We would also like to thank our alum, Mr. Rick Rose, who sponsors the Rose lecture every year. We appreciate his support of the law school. We thank him for contributing to our Rose Lecture every year. And this year, we are so pleased to welcome Ms. Cyntoia Brown Long along with Mr. Charles Bone.

And I want to give a special shout-out to Taylor Flake-Lawson. This time last year, Taylor Flake-Lawson, who was a third-year law student, was in my role as Symposium Editor. Unfortunately, Taylor planned this whole event for it to be cut short by the coronavirus pandemic. She had to cancel the event, but this year I was able to pick up the pieces and roll out Taylor's program, so much of the success for today's event is thanks to Taylor Flake-Lawson.

I would also like to give a shout-out to the Academy of Richmond County down in Georgia. This is a high school class who is tuning in today to learn more about reentry.

I'm super excited about today's event. We must rethink reentry. Last semester, I had the opportunity to work on a compassionate release case and help a man come home ten years early. And it was there where I learned that there are so many obstacles, legal and social obstacles, to individuals re-entering society.

I am glad today that we have community members, law school members, lawyers, and many thought leaders in our community, who can help us rethink reentry and bring about change to this important topic. So, thank you to all of you for coming today. A special shout-out to Micki Fox for coordinating our class and a special thank you to Rachel Wedding McClelland who helped

* Symposium Editor, Rethinking Reentry Symposium; Juris Doctor Candidate, The University of Tennessee College of Law, 2021.

advertise our program. And at this time, I want to turn it over to the person who thought of this amazing event, Taylor Flake-Lawson. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF THE PANELISTS

Taylor Flake-Lawson^{*}
Cyntoia Brown Long^{**}
Charles W. Bone^{***}

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Hello everyone. As Johnelle said, my name is Taylor Flake-Lawson, and I'm a class of 2020 alum of the College of Law and a former member of the Tennessee Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice. It's an understatement to say that I'm very excited to be here, but before we dive into today's discussion, I find it really difficult to talk about reentry-related issues without acknowledging some of the things that are happening across the United States. Today, we know that there have been over three hundred thousand reported cases of COVID in prisons. In addition to that, of those over three hundred thousand cases, 2,400 individuals at present have lost their lives to COVID-19 behind bars.

We also know that the south has experienced an unprecedented winter storm, leaving thousands, if not millions, from Texas to Tennessee, and those of us in the free world or those that are behind bars, without power or clean drinking water. I want to let you know that from the bottom of my heart, I am with you. I'm thinking of you. You are in my thoughts, in my prayers, and we just can't have this conversation without acknowledging all that is going on.

Now, today we have the pleasure of spending some time with two incredible individuals: Mr. Charles Bone and Ms. Cyntoia Brown Long. Now, Mr. Bone, I want to open the floor and allow you to introduce yourself to everyone.

CHARLES W. BONE: Well, thank you and I won't take much time because I want you to hear as much as possible, but I graduated from the University of Tennessee College of Law years ago and have been a lawyer for all these years and it's been my honor and privilege to have a terrific opportunity to do a lot of things in the law. I'm in Nashville today; we have a law firm Bone McAllester Norton, and we've had the opportunity to represent Cyntoia since 2010 as pro bono lawyers, beginning her post-conviction work and the story that has been told many, many times. And today I think we're focusing on reentry. Oh, I'll stop there and just say I'm proud to be a part of this and thank you to the University and to your Symposium for focusing on such critical issues because there are so many out there who need so much help in so many ways, that all of us as lawyers need to do all we can be available to help.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Now, Cyntoia, you have the floor.

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: Oh well, good morning everyone. I'm really happy to be here. I think reentry is such an important topic, and it's one that we don't speak about enough, but if we're really committed to doing work with reform and the justice system, reentry is a key area that

* Juris Doctor, University of Tennessee School of Law; Associate Attorney, Rainey, Kizer, Reviere & Bell, PLC.

** Author, Speaker, Advocate, Granted Clemency by Governor Bill Haslam.

*** Founder and Chariman of Bone McAllester Norton PLLC.

we're going to have to spend some more time really working on. When someone comes back out into the community, the resources that they get, the support that's available to them, the programs that are in place there in the community, are going to be a really, really big factor of whether they're going to end up back in prison. And beyond that, what happens while they're still in prison prepares them for reentry. It's something that's, personally just, I mean it's outrageous to me, the lack of resources, the lack of programs that the Department of Corrections actually offers, and I'm excited to have that conversation today.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Okay, so Cyntoia, a lot of us have this iconic image of you ingrained into our brains. So, for me, it was you looking so beautiful and young with your two braids, in an orange jumpsuit, a sixteen-year-old facing a life sentence. Can you please talk to us about your experience in the Tennessee Juvenile Justice System and just what you observed during that time, your thoughts on it, just anything you're open to sharing?

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: Um, yeah, so I mean honestly my experience in the Juvenile Justice System, unfortunately, was a lot like my experience in the Adult Justice System. When you think of juvenile justice, I'm sure all of you in law school have taken a class on it, you know that you know its purpose, it was designed to remove the taint of criminality from young people who come before the Court, having some issues. So, the Court was supposed to play this role where it's like, well, how can we help this individual? What is it that's going on, and how can we help this kid? This child? But it's evolved into just a mini Criminal Justice System, and kids are treated as mini criminals.

My very first time actually going before the court was because I was skipping school, alternative school, and ended up catching a charge with some of the older kids that went to school with me. And you know, instead of someone sitting down to talk with me and trying to figure out what was going on, how I ended up in that situation, my father had taken me to the court, he had hired an attorney. And the attorney pulled us into a corner and basically just told me what was going to happen. He said, "Okay, well, you're going to go and you're going to spend thirty days in a facility for an evaluation, and then you'll be placed on probation." And I remember thinking, "Wow, no one's going to ask me what was going on?" Instead of trying to talk to me and trying to figure it out, it was kind of just already decided that you were going to lock me up. And then my parents had to pay you a lot for me. Thanks, that's great. So, it's just kind of like checking boxes and looking at different formulas on how you're going to treat a situation, but there's no real interaction to try to understand what was going on in the first place.

For me, I had trouble in school. I was having difficulties in school, and no one really, really paid attention to that. No one really tried to help me. They kind of just pushed me off and locked me up and got rid of me, kind of just an out-of-sight, out-of-mind kind of thing.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Now, you mentioned a couple of things, and for me, I've had the pleasure of working with you, and our clients have experienced firsthand some of the things that you're talking about. And I feel like to some degree, we're all broken, and to have a child operating in a broken system like the Juvenile Justice System, that has this mission which is supposed to be to rehabilitate some of our most vulnerable population, kids, I just find that baffling. So, do you have any thoughts on what can be done to kind of push the Juvenile Justice System back towards rehabilitation, backs towards restoration, to where it's actually doing what it's supposed to do?

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: We got a lot of work to do. Yeah, that's going to take a lot of work. Number one: we got to start looking at kids as kids, you know. And, when kids are having trouble, like there's something going on that they're responding to and acting out in this way, so, really taking the time to look and figure out. What that was for me was, it was identity issues. I was struggling with my identity as a young biracial girl, adopted girl, and my peers in class, they didn't understand that. I was really rejected by them. And I was struggling with that rejection, but I didn't know how to really articulate that. I didn't really know how to talk to anyone about that, and you know, the school didn't offer any kind of guidance counselors that could really have that conversation with me. Every time my parents were called to the school because I got in trouble, you know, they weren't told any real solutions, like what they could do. They were asking, "Well, what do we do about this?" and "How can we help her?" and "We don't understand what's going on." And there was no one there to help them understand, so you know, that was the first thing. It starts way before the kid gets into the system. Once they come into that system, you really just need to backtrack and try to figure out what's going on and how we can help.

Another thing is to stop always thinking that you have to put a kid in a facility. Like, that should be the last resort. Facilities are horrible. They're horrible. And when you're going into a facility, and you're already suffering from trauma, you already have all these issues going on, like it's going to be compounded to the nth degree. It's horrible living in that, because you have a lot of kids going through things they don't understand how to navigate and here they are, just thrown in this facility, locked in this box, and it's like, "Have fun, figure it out." That definitely needs to be the last resort. There are so many programs within the community, different organizations, nonprofit organizations that are doing great work but somehow, you know, there's this disconnect between the court system, between you know DCS, and all these places where these kids end up. You know, they're not being referred to these different programs and the community's response is just to lock them up.

You know, that's unfortunate because I'm here to tell you that once you enter that system, it's a very slippery slope. That's one place where the slippery slope is absolutely real. So, that's another thing, if we get to the point where a kid is actually facing, you know, some serious charges, honestly, we need to rethink the system as it is. It should be, okay, here's a seventeen-year-old kid, a sixteen-year-old kid who the juvenile justice system has for two years, maybe, to do what it can do to help them, to help them to rehabilitate. Or, we send them to adult prison where, you know, they're going to spend, let's say, twenty-five to fifty years for whatever happened, and they're going to end up serving more time than an adult would serve, or the same sentence pretty much.

There has to be some kind of some kind of middle ground, some kind of sentence change, some kind of a different system for young adults, where, you know, there's a longer period of time where restorative efforts can take place. Like, you'd have an extended jurisdiction where you can actually work to help this kid because you're seventeen. You're not an adult. You're still a kid. Your brain is not even, you know, processing the way that it should yet. It's not even fully grown.

I think that we need to have something in place, we need to start working with legislators and figure out what it is that we can do to handle this issue because, you know, there has to be middle ground between those two extremes.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Yeah, I echo all of what you said, and the thing is, I feel like there also needs to be some mindset shifts. I think a lot of times when we're operating with kids, we're always on the defense, especially lawyers. We're trying to like fix something or clean

something up after something has already happened, but there are plenty of moments where intervention can occur prior to a child being referred to the Juvenile Justice System, prior to a child having to show up to court and just being completely unaware of, like, what will actually unfold. So, I think you've got some good suggestions there.

So let's walk through your story a little bit. So, you go through the whole Juvenile Court piece, you eventually get transferred to the adult system where you're ultimately convicted of first-degree murder. And even after that conviction, you went through quite a few legal battles trying to get that conviction overturned and that life sentence reversed. But here's the thing, this is what gets me about your story, which I love the most, and you talk about it in your book: while you're on the inside, you are mentoring youth who are also in very, very crazy situations. And also, in chapter sixteen of your book, you talk about your experience as a Lipscomb University student, which I really enjoyed reading. It's nice to see and to learn about that because, you see, from the outside looking in, we're like, "Oh my gosh, she's facing a life sentence," but on the inside, for you, you're preparing for a life outside in the free world. And that brings us to this reentry conversation. For you, like, where did that whole reentry process begin? Where do you think it should begin for individuals?

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: I mean honestly, reentry should begin from the moment that a person walks through that prison gate. You should be preparing that person, you should be figuring out how we can help this person get to a place where they can reenter society and be successful in society. Unfortunately, that's not what happens, you know, here in the state of Tennessee, especially in Tennessee. I'm here to tell you, I've witnessed it myself. But there was something within me when, you know, they told me I was going to spend the rest of my life in prison, that was just like, "No, that's not going to happen." And, you know, thankfully, I had people around me who were telling me, you know, "You don't have to accept this, you know, with God, all things are possible." And you do what you have to do. You get in there and you take as many classes as you can, do everything that you possibly can to develop a meaningful life, despite the circumstances. You don't stop it. And I didn't. I didn't stop fighting. I didn't care how many courts told me, you know, I was denied and I was going to sit there with that life sentence. I was like, "No, it's not happening," and, you know, I just kept pushing.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: So what were some of the tools that you used? And talk to us also about what were some gaps in resources that need to be provided, but aren't being provided.

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: A lot. So, for me, the most helpful thing was Lipscomb, was taking that college course, was actually learning all these things. You don't get that from being incarcerated. I'm telling you, they don't offer you, the state does not offer you any kind of educational opportunities that are worth anything. Like, they have HiSET there, but, you know, when you're in HiSET class, which is the high school equivalency for people who didn't graduate, you don't really learn anything.¹ I promise you, I was a clerk, and I had to really sit there and tutor people because, you know, they're in the classrooms, and the teachers are being forced to do, you know, all kinds of administrative tasks. They don't have enough time to really spend in the classroom. They're dealing with people who are at different levels of learning and so they're trying to figure out, you know, how to help this person that's maybe on a seventh-grade level and help

¹ *Education*, TN DEPT'T OF CHILD. SERV., <https://www.tn.gov/dcs/program-areas/juvenile-justice/ydc/wilder/education.html> (describing the HiSET program and its requirements).

this individual who's maybe at an eleventh-grade level, and this person who's ready to take the test and needs to go through it. And they have like three hours, maybe, where they could just really try to figure all that out in three hours a day. So you're not really learning anything there in the HiSET classes.

They have vocational classes, but those were pretty much eliminated and there were only four to start with. They had office technology, which you learn, by the way, on like 1997 word, and so it was completely out of date. You had cosmetology, which they pretty much had to keep most of the time because of the policy that you get haircuts every thirty days or so. They have culinary arts sometimes, and then they have building trades. And, you know, when I left, all they had was cosmetology. The office technology teacher retired and they never bothered to replace them. The building trades teacher retired; they never bothered to replace them. The culinary arts teacher left and went to the sheriff's department; they never bothered to replace her. And, so it's like there's not really a focus on, you know, these vocational classes, which could really go a long way in helping people prepare to have a career outside of prison. And there's really not much of a desire on the part of the prison and the corrections department to actually provide these classes.

I remember, you know, before I left, right before I left, the department that I was working in and, you know, the things I had access to. There was an email that was sent and it was from, I believe it was the National Association of Women in Construction, and, you know, they said they wanted to come and they wanted to offer this course for the women, where they could get certified to be working in construction and have good jobs, good-paying jobs. They wanted to come into the prison and wanted to teach us. They had the space that was there from an old building trades class. There was tools in there and everything, and, you know, we were told as clerks to just file it under miscellaneous, and they never followed up with it. It was nothing that they were interested in. It was like, "Wow, like, they really don't want to help us," and so that's something that's a huge gap.

When I was granted clemency by Governor Bill Haslam, he, you know, said that he wanted me to go to the reentry program because he understood the importance of having, you know, that reentry training. Unfortunately, to see their reentry program, it's just not what it should be. You know, I mean, if I'm honest with you, most of the programming there at the prison is, you know, they're just checking boxes so they can get whatever funding that they're after. They can say they have this class, but the teacher may not show up. The teacher may show up for maybe two hours out of a week, instead of, you know, the six hours, five days a week they're supposed to be there. And you know, you're not really learning anything. I was forced to take part in one of those classes where it was basically just reading through this little booklet that they had put together. And they asked you fifty-nine times, you know, "Do you think you should do drugs when you get out?" It's like, "Look, I don't have a drug problem. Like, this is not what I need to learn. Teach me how to negotiate healthcare prices, teach me how to negotiate with doctors' offices about medical bills, teach me about health insurance options."

Which, you know, health insurance is another thing that we don't talk about when it comes to people who are coming out of incarceration. When you're there in prison, I can tell you, healthcare is pretty much non-existent. It pretty much consists of Tylenol and ice packs, because whatever you go to medical for, that's where they're going to tell you that you need. That's going to cure you. Take a Tylenol, put an ice pack on it, and you're good. I witnessed several women die in prison from conditions where, you know, medical kind of just ignored it. You really have to fight to get attention. Dental is pretty much out of the question. Like, don't even think about dental. Like, you're going to be put on a waiting list, but never be seen. Like, don't worry about it. By the

time you come out of prison, you're going to have whatever health conditions that you had while you were in prison, and they're going to be magnified with your teeth. When I came out of prison, I was told by my dentist that I needed about ten thousand dollars worth of work done in my mouth. When you look at insurance plans, you know, that amount, like, you can't get that much services in one year and so it's like, well, what are my options? And, you know, they don't teach you about that before you leave. And that's something real that you need to know. That would have been something that I could have benefited from.

You know, while I was there, they don't teach you about how to go to an employer and really, you know, talk to them about your criminal case. And, you know, it's not the certificate of employability that's really an issue there. They don't really teach you about it. Just telling you that now, I only happen to know because I have friends in the legislature that tell me about it. But they don't teach you about that. They don't offer resources for you to actually go through the steps to file this. You know, there's so many things that they don't teach you about. And it's like, man, like this is the stuff that they need to know. Like who was in charge of this? Who was in charge of, you know, coordinating all the things that we're taught? Because we're not really getting it.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: And so you talk to us about them not teaching you this stuff, but to really paint the picture, you really have to have access to get this information for yourself because there's a lot of people that'll say, "Oh, you can figure it out yourself." What access to resources did you have?

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: The lovely thing about being free is that you do have access to resources, like every one of us carries it around in our in our hand every day. You can look up anything, you can figure it out. But everything in prison, you don't have that. You can't access the Internet. If you go to the library, you may have some resource books and they're going to be like the 1998 yellow pages. It's going to be like the 2002 encyclopedia. That's what you're getting. If you can have access to the Internet, the programs that they're providing you are outdated. And there's nothing; they're not really keeping up with it. Whatever funds that they're getting for these programs, like, I can promise you, they're not putting it into the library. They're not making things accessible to people. You literally are there, pretty much like on a deserted island. You don't have much access to the outside world whatsoever. So if you have family members that you can talk to on the phone, if you're fortunate enough to be able to afford phone calls, which the prices are astronomical, if you're fortunate enough that they can afford the phone calls, you can sit there and you can ask them to look up things for you and mail it into you and hopefully it gets in the mail room.

But yeah, it's like pulling teeth trying to get information and trying to get access to resources while you're incarcerated. You really do depend on the staff who are there, the counselors who were there, and you know, by the job description, it says that's what they're there for and that's what they're supposed to do, but I'm here to tell you that they don't. A lot of times counselors are pulled in fifty-seven different directions and they don't necessarily have the time to see you. And when they do see you, they don't have time to go looking up stuff on the Internet for you about like different resources. They have packets of information that somebody may have compiled a long time ago they'll give to you. And you figure it out. And when it comes to halfway houses, many of the halfway houses that are listed in those packets, they're not in existence anymore. It's like not being updated. It's from 2013 and here we are in 2020. And so yeah, it's an issue. A lot of people don't know about some of the resources that are out there, and they don't have access to that

information. So, even if there are programs out there, you need to know about it, you need to have somebody who's telling you about them.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Yeah, you need a reasonable way to have that information. And just to think, that's also an immense burden to put on your family members to have to call them, and you know ask them to look things up for you. To even to be able to pay for phone time or to pay for stamps to mail things, you know. It's just absolutely ridiculous and it's hard to get those tools on the outside and just really set yourself up for success when you exit prison.

So you talked about healthcare being a big challenge that you faced and, since you've been out, are there any other challenges? Not just for you but maybe for people that you know, people that you love, that face challenges on the outside?

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: In housing. Like, where do you live? Like, who wants to live with family or someone else forever? And it's hard. Number one, it's expensive, you know, to live out here in this area, to live in Nashville, it's expensive. Some of the things you can afford, they're going to be in areas that you don't want to be. Like, if you're, especially if you're trying to turn your life around, you don't want to go back to the same areas. You don't want to live in public housing if you qualify for that. And it's like, I mean well, what can I do? And I can't pass a background check, you know. They're going to go check and by the time you get out of prison, depending on how much time you serve, you probably don't have good credit or no credit. And so it's like, well, what do I do about a place to live? Like, how do I figure this out?

And I mean, not just that. Transportation. What about transportation? Like how are you going to get around? And everybody's like, "Well, you can take the bus." Well, it's not that simple. Bus passes cost money. You may not necessarily have that much money. And if they give you a bus pass to leave prison or if you go to Project Return or some other group and get a bus pass, what happens with that?² Like, you're going to ride the bus forever? And the buses don't go everywhere. The buses, the timing of when the buses are coming, like it can get difficult sometimes. You may have an emergency where you have to get up and go, like how are you going to get there? So, transportation is issue. And when people have children, you have to think about that. Like going through all the hurdles of custody. God forbid they have to go through that where they don't have the capacity. But we have all those issues.

So there's so many things that go on, because you have to think, you're basically coming out and starting fresh. If you think about everything that you have access to right now: you can go somewhere, you have a bed to sleep in. If I'm coming out of prison, I'm sleeping, I mean, I don't even have clothes. The clothes that I have may not fit me. You're starting from scratch. And you're starting from scratch with pretty much next to nothing in your pocket. And so really just wrap your mind around that. Like, you need help, you need support, you need resources.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Yeah, yeah. Like from housing to reunifying families. Like, wrap-around resources are needed. It's not just like one sector resources are needed. Like, people need help from beginning to the end and that need is not being met right now, which is why we're having this conversation today. And so, if you don't mind me asking, because one of the things we're going to talk about later on today is restoration of voting rights. You may know people that have been affected by this issue. And especially with the election we just went through, we've seen

² PROJECT RETURN, <https://www.projectreturninc.org>.

the importance of really mobilizing anyone that has the right to vote. So, can you talk to us about your thoughts on that piece? Maybe share your experiences with that, just anything on that.

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: You know, I'm going to be completely honest with you, I I don't have a right to vote, so I don't even think about that. What I think about is, you know, I know that I can't vote, and they're not gonna let me vote. That's okay. That's the world as it is, let me figure out how I can navigate that. And so, what I like to tell people is, you know, think about what you can do. What you can do is, you can go to anyone who is sitting in any position in office and you can talk to them about the changes that you would like see. You can go to anyone and, you know, you can ask for a bill to be presented. You can show up to any hearing there at the Capitol and you can have your voice heard. You can schedule meetings with these legislators. It doesn't matter if they're in your district or not. If they're sitting on a committee where it's an issue that you care about, an issue that's that's relevant to you, you have something to say on it. You can reach out to them. There are different groups that are behind a lot of legislation that you can reach out to. Like there's things that you can do to actually participate in that process even if you don't have the right to vote. So, you know, that's what I like to focus on. That's really important for me. In addition, you know, to the voting rights, there are so many other rights you don't have.

One of the women that the foundation was working with, you know, she has been receiving threats because she came forward about the lack of self-defense options available, and it's like, how do I protect myself? Because, you know, I can't legally protect myself because I have a conviction. And so it's like, well, can I have pepper spray? Can I not have pepper spray? You know, as a woman living in this, you know, day and age, like that's a big thing, and so it's like man, there's so many different things that people don't really talk about that's affected when you have a conviction and when you are, you know, coming out into society.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Thank you for sharing. I know that may have been difficult to talk about, but I appreciate your transparency with it. Okay, so I want to shift a little bit because I want to ask Mr. Bone a question. I admire you, Mr. Bone, especially as a young attorney because you did a lot that you really didn't have to do. You do not practice criminal law. At the time that you got involved with Cyntoia's case, your firm was already named after you. You'd already made a name for yourself. You literally did stuff that you didn't have to do. So, I admire that because we get talked to a lot about managing expectations and the type of relationship that you need to develop with your clients. And you really set the standard for developing authentic relationships with clients and the type of work product and dedication that you need to have, no matter if someone's paying you or not paying you. So, talk to us about some of the tools you used, how you assembled Cyntoia's team, and just how you think about your practice, and in that lens.

CHARLES W. BONE: Well, thank you and I appreciate the compliment, but I think it's it's really an issue of what are we about as lawyers? And what are our duties? And, I guess, I was the first person in my family to go to college, and certainly the first person to ever go to law school. And you know, I've always thought from the very beginning of my practice as a lawyer that I had an obligation to give back and to help those in need. And I think that's an obligation that we have whether we're lawyers or not. I mean, it's pretty much a question, as far as I'm concerned, that says, you know, that our responsibility in life is to take up for other individuals where we can. And my ability to help there is enhanced by the fact that I'm a lawyer and I have had, you know, so many great lawyers who've been in our firm and otherwise, that when this came about the way this came

about, a longtime friend of mine called me to say, "You need to watch this. You need to come see this documentary that has been done on Cyntoia Brown." And when I saw it out there, you know, I was just angry. I was compelled by the issues that are faced by Cyntoia and others in the system and, as Cyntoia said, the system is broken. And anybody who denies that the system is broken has really not looked at it very closely. And many avoid the issue. The Governor said he was gonna fix the criminal justice system, but he hadn't. And, you know, it's a broken system.

So, when I saw that, the first thing I did was call my friends. One of them, Houston Gordon, is a great, well-known criminal lawyer, and I said, you know, "We've got to do something about this." And Houston agreed after he watched the documentary and became aware of the issues of inmates here. So, I think I've counted seventeen lawyers who helped in some way with Cyntoia's case, and that's what this is all about. It's gathering a group of lawyers who are just as concerned as you are with what can we do to make a difference. And those lawyers cross a lot of different lands in terms of where they were located, or what they've done in the past, or the contribution that they could make. For example, former Chief Justice Lowery joined in with us to help. Another friend volunteered to help on this case because they understood the importance of the issues involved, and Cyntoia needed this kind of perspective, so we assembled. And nobody ever said no when I called because they helped us, and that's pretty remarkable when you start down to help somebody for free and nobody's ever paid a thing. Another friend joined us kind of at the last minute to help with the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. Ed Yarborough, who is now my partner, joined us, you know, with the clemency application and was instrumental in our presentation to the Governor. And, you know, I sent you a note my daughter, Baylor Bone Swindle, who was very involved in working on this, and before long, I mean there are fifteen of us. Another shout out I want to give is to Governor Haslam, who was like our warrior. Another lawyer, who is now back in Knoxville, responded he had a team of people to work with him. And, you know, it was such an amazing opportunity to put together so many different voices and for many different lawyers to make this work.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: That's good. And I am reminded about some of the things I learned in law school. We had some leadership development courses offered at the College of Law, and as part of that process of learning how to be a leader as a lawyer, we talked about, you know, knowing what our strengths and weaknesses are. And I think that is imperative when we're going to advocate, especially in a very complex case like Cyntoia's. And it seems like that's something that you knew. You knew what your strengths were, but you also had a network to lean on to help you fill in the gaps where that was needed.

CHARLES W. BONE: There are a lot of gaps in my practice because I just wasn't aware of the opportunities in the criminal area that I needed to be to make it really work. And so, I've left out, you know, half the lawyers' names who helped us in so many different ways. In particular, Kathy Sinback, who works with the Juvenile Court System here, and thankfully now has been part of this case from the very first days when Cyntoia was arrested, because she was a public defender back in day. So, you know, this has been for sure an effort of different lawyers in a lot of different ways.

I would just say to the law students who are part of this program today, don't ever think you're not. We have to make something good happen, to fight for justice. No matter what kind of law you're practicing or what kind of job you have, it is a responsibility I would say that we all have. And there's so many different ways to implement the work that we can do and execute that

responsibility. So that's the primary message that I would give to you law students and young lawyers who are watching here. There are so many opportunities. There are so many needs in so many areas, not just in the court system, but across the board.

Let me say one final thing. Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock central time, the Tennessee Supreme Court is going to hear the case of Tyshon Booker³, who is from Knoxville. Five years ago, six years ago, seven years ago, we were fighting for that same opportunity to have sentencing discussed, and those issues are going to be heard tomorrow. And the fifty-one years is unconstitutional. There is no question in my mind about that and it needs to be overturned, and I just hope that the Tennessee Supreme Court will really consider that. I'm a very religious man.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: All right then. And I had the pleasure of talking with you all prior to this, and it's very obvious that you two have a very special relationship and still have a good relationship. And I admire that because we learn about the attorney-client relationship in school and we see it in practice. And I want to know, from Mr. Bone's perspective, like talk to us about the value of developing those authentic relationships with clients. And Cyntoia, I want to know, how does it feel to have, you know, that type of relationship with your your lawyer?

CHARLES W. BONE: Well, for anybody who has met Cyntoia, you love Cyntoia and appreciate what she accomplished in her life. And what she didn't say is, I mean, I don't know if Cyntoia ever got to the seventh grade or eighth grade. Seventh, but never any higher than that. What she did was take her God-given intelligence and worked really hard to get her GED and to get her bachelor's degree from Lipscomb with honors. And I hope you all join me in advocating for Cyntoia to go to law school at some point in her life and become an advocate for these issues. That's the one thing I've never been able to get her to focus on, yet. And she's been a very busy lady now and done a lot of good work speaking all across the country and around the world. And I urge you all in the audience to read her book. Cyntoia, go write another one. But truly, what a great lawyer she would be.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: I can agree with that one. How does it feel for you to have this type of relationship with Mr. Bone?

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: I mean it's important, you know, when you're going through the court system. And, I mean, I'm telling you, it's not just that you feel you don't have a voice. You don't have a voice, like when you're going through that system and then once you're there in the facility, so to know that you have someone that will go to the ends of the earth to advocate for you, to know that all you have to do is voice your goal and it's taken care of—like, that's everything, because you know he does care. And it's like there's nothing that you can't go to him and be like, “Well you know the medical department said this, and I'm having this problem” where he's going to be like, “Well, I don't know what to do.” Like Mr. Bone's like, “Well I may not know, but I know I know somebody who does know, and I'm just going to reach out to this person.” And so it's like man, like that's a great feeling to know that you have an attorney that is going to be your advocate. Like no matter what, he's going to advocate for you and, you know, that's one of the most important things that you want to instill in your clients. When you're going out there, you want them to have that confidence that you know that they've got my back. They've got my back and, whatever is going on, I know that they're going to have my best interests. You know when

³ State of Tennessee v. Tyshon Booker, No. E2018-01439-SC-R11-CD (Tenn. Feb. 24, 2021).

they go before the judge, when they have the meetings with the D.A., no matter what, I know they have my best interest, and I know they're going to fight for me. I don't have to worry, you know, that they're going to just take a bad plea deal because it's convenient. Like no, like they're going to fight and they're going to figure it out.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Yeah. Okay, so I love it. It's like Mr. Bone, you're encouraging all of us lawyers to be ten toes down for our clients at all times and just have their best interests at heart, and just truly advocate on their behalf.

Okay, I am getting a flood of questions from our audience and this one is for you, Cyntoia. We have an attendee who is starting a nonprofit to educate and employ formerly incarcerated women, and the first issue she's running into is how to tackle the issue of child care, and she is just wanting your feedback or any advice you can give about that piece.

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: One of the women that you're gonna, you know, have working at the company to watch the kids. Like, that's a job. You're creating a job and you're solving the problem. The childcare is an issue. Like, number one: it's expensive. I mean, I don't personally know, but from talking with, you know, the people that I work with, that's one of the big things they have to worry about. Like, I want to go to work but, you know, what about my kids? But yeah, like if you're gonna have a nonprofit that is hiring women, like think about hiring one of those women to serve as, you know, the child care facility director.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: That's a great idea. Okay, so the next question is for Cyntoia, so one of our students has—I'm just going to read it word for word. “One of the things I was personally most shocked by in learning about your case is how you were transferred to adult criminal court. Could you speak at all to the way that young, black girls in particular are treated more harshly in the criminal system when it comes to behavioral issues?”

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: That is something that is evidence-based. There are studies on that, yeah, and you know, that's historical, like there's a long history of that happening. You know, these girls are seen as, you know, less needing of nurturing, you know, they don't need to be taken care of, but they should know better. Like no, if this is a thirteen-year-old kid, why should they know any better than this other thirteen-year-old kid? Like, this is a child. I don't care if you think, “Oh well, she's being made to take care of her brothers and sisters, she should be more responsible, and she's more mature.” You know, we talked about that a lot in sex trafficking where these young girls are seen as young adults. They're not adults. They're children. They're kids. Period. And they should be treated as such. But yeah, it's a very real thing.

There's actually a study, what's her name? Jasmine Phillips Sankofa, and it's called “The (Im)Possibilities of a Victim Trope.”⁴ And it's, you know, black girls, and you know, they're adults and the Adult Criminal Justice System. But I definitely think that everybody should read that study. If you go on SSRI when you look it up, you could pull it up free of charge, but yes, that's definitely a study that I think everybody should read.

⁴ Jasmine Phillips, *Black Girls and the (Im)Possibilities of a Victim Trope: The Intersectional Failures of Legal and Advocacy Interventions in the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Minors in the United States*, 62 UCLA L. Rev. 1642 (2015).

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: As someone from our law school community and, like, I am sorry to have to put you on the spot like this, but Mr. Bone made a reference today wanting to know if you will ever go to law school.

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: That's okay, put me on the spot because I'll put you right back on it. If you start a Cyntoia Law School Scholarship Fund, where my law school tuition can be taken care of, then yes, I will take it into serious consideration. I have no problem going to law school, but yeah, take care of that tuition because it's expensive.

TAYLOR FLAKE- LAWSON: It is. It is expensive. I'm speaking from experience. So, you know, higher ups, y'all hear that? She has spoken. She'd be a great advocate.

And okay, so before we get off, the whole thing of this is like talking about rethinking reentry and I think sometimes we get stuck in this space where we're always thinking about it or talking about it or discussing it, but not pushing things into reality, like making our world a better place based on the things we talked about. And personally, I feel like every day, every moment that we let go by, and reentry is not a priority, our society is missing out on the gifts, the talents, the abilities of millions of individuals. So what I want to know from you is: what can we do to like not just think about reentry, but like actually make this a priority and get some of this work done? Because we can do it.

CYNTOIA BROWN LONG: Um, start talking to people, you know, who are in office, who can actually, you know, amplify the need to get that done. Start looking at some groups in your community who are actually doing the work or going to some of those groups that you know may work with with people who are not necessarily coming out of prison, but they may offer services that will be helpful to them, and talk about setting up a program for them. But, for me, like the biggest hurdle that I see is actually getting that information into the people in prison before they can get out. A lot of times, you know, some groups will try to go in, as I mentioned, with you know, the National Association of Women in Construction, they try to go in, but you know they're having an issue. If we have more people reaching out to those groups and trying to be a bridge and connect them with the people within the Department of Corrections who can make those programs a reality, that would be phenomenal.

I saw another group that is trying to have like college programs, trying to get more college programs there in facilities, not just in prisons and jails. Like there's different things that you can do. They're like trying to really facilitate a lot of those things happening, but we definitely need people in the community, you know, to act as bridge builders, like to build these bridges, you know, between the people that need the services and the services that are available.

And to even, you know, put it out there, like what needs to happen. Some people may not be thinking, you know, like here's a program that that offers clothes for job interviews. Well, maybe if I connect them with this halfway house, with people who are coming out of prison and and connect them with resources, so they can get wardrobe, so they can get clothes, you know, maybe people just need to put that out there and propose that.

But everyone can do it, anyone can do it. And you know, it's just, it's a matter of if you care enough about it to do it, like do you care enough about it to actually do something, or are you just going to post something on social media or, you know, post a comment in the question box and act like, you know, you care enough about it to actually do something about it.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Yeah, Mr. Bone, do you have anything to add?

CHARLES W. BONE: Well, I would just say the Bar Association, legislators, and of course, others that we need to reach out to to convince, lobby, and advocate and say please, please, please understand that this system is broken and needs big reform. Human lives are at stake, and the only way to do that is by getting inside of the prison system, the justice system and making these corrections that people all over the world understand. It's just a question of whether we're going to act and that's a good word. And I would just encourage everyone who's listening, watching today to become an advocate for these things.

TAYLOR FLAKE-LAWSON: Alright, well folks you've heard the call to action. We've learned so much today, and I just want to thank you guys so much for sharing this moment with us, very special moment with us. And if you did not know, Cyntoia is an author of a very incredible book called *Free Cyntoia*.⁵ So if you want to learn more about her story, please take a moment and just support her in her entrepreneurship as an author and get some more information and, like, let's go out and do the work.

And with that I'm going to turn it over to Johnelle Simpson.

JOHNELLE SIMPSON: On behalf of the University of Tennessee College of Law, our Dean, Doug Blaze, and the Tennessee Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice, we would like to thank each of you for joining in the Rose Lecture this afternoon. We thank Taylor Flake- Lawson for coming back to moderate, and we thank Cyntoia Brown Long for her transparency, her advocacy, and her commitment to bringing attention to this very important issue. And we thank Mr. Bone, one of our alumni, for joining in on this conversation to talk about the critical and important role lawyers play in this advocacy.

We would like to invite each of you to our panels that are coming up this afternoon at 1:30 p.m. You can view our Overcoming Obstacles Panel. Somebody will post the link for all of the participants. That is going to be the link so you can access our panels. We have lawyers, we have representatives from the Tennessee General Assembly, and we have community members who are working on this very important work.

After that, we will have a panel on voting rights restoration. Please come to that panel and learn about the obstacles individuals face in restoring their voting rights. And, on March 20th, we didn't only want to talk about it, we want it to be about it, so the Tennessee Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice and law students will be hosting a community event here in Knoxville for individuals to learn more about how to restore their voting rights. For more information—I remember this website—visit expungetn.org to register, so that you can be paired one-on-one with a law student and a lawyer to discuss how you can restore your voting rights. Again, we'd like to thank each of you from the bottom of our hearts for attending our symposium.

⁵ CYNTOIA BROWN LONG, *FREE CYNTOIA: MY SEARCH FOR REDEMPTION IN THE AMERICAN PRISON SYSTEM* (2019).