

September 3, 2019

As Mayor of Cleveland, I am writing to the people to inform you that I made a decision as the Chief Executive of the City of Cleveland. I signed a letter of recommendation for restoration of rights for a fellow resident of White County. The individual asked for my assistance in obtaining a pardon from a felony conviction that occurred in 1996, which was the individual's first and only infraction of Georgia law. The individual completed all terms of probation. The individual has an opportunity to obtain a better job to support the needs of family. The letter dated July, 19 2019 was written to the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles. Many other leaders nationally, state, and local have written such letters.

The letter that I signed but did not compose is on City of Cleveland letter head. The City Council of Cleveland: Annie Sutton, Bradley Greene, Nan Mauney Bowen, and Kevin Stanley have made the decision to make my action public and resend the letter by resolution. I am disappointed in their decision. I want to make it clear to everyone that I stood alone when I signed the letter that was written on city letter head. I did not have the intent of representing the Cleveland City Council.

I stand firm on the enforcement of our laws and support the employees of the city to protect and serve our community. My belief is that citizens who are willing to admit their mistakes that were made in the past, paid their dues, show that they have changed, and are now lawful abiding citizens deserve a second chance. My goals have been and always will be to make Cleveland and White County a better place to live.

Being a lifelong resident of Cleveland and White County makes the community near and dear to my heart. During my term: I have spent countless hours promoting and helping new businesses in town, talking with business leaders to find out what their needs are, working with county commissioners on the 2020 SPLOST referendum, working directly with city employees, touring waste water facilities, representing the city on the White County Water Authority Board, representing the city at various functions, attending municipal training, and being fiscally responsible with tax payer monies. It is thrilling to see the progress that we have made in Cleveland since 2016. My record speaks for itself. I will continue to stand for what I believe is right, just, and do what is best for the citizens of my community.

On that note, I would like to bring attention to a Georgia program that benefits all Georgia communities. It is the Georgia Justice Project. The Georgia Justice Project gives second chances for people with records. This helps our community and all Georgians. Recently, according to an Atlanta news affiliate the Georgia Justice Project along with four Georgia county General Solicitors had the first of its kind job fair to help job candidates fast track the restrictions of expungement of arrest records.

One of the toughest hurdles if you're looking for a job is overcoming an arrest record that can stay with you forever.

But now, a first-of-its kind multi-county metro Atlanta effort to help erase arrest records and at the same time, help people find worthwhile jobs with a big job fair - all in one place and all on the same day.

It was organized and hosted by the Metro Atlanta Chamber and 100,000 Opportunities Initiative in East Point.

Bill Liss was there and during Bill's off hours, he serves as a volunteer attorney with the Georgia Justice Project, one of the day's participating agencies, helping people clear their arrest records.

It was a day this week that attracted almost a thousand people. They jammed the Impact Event Center in East Point, looking for jobs offered by 35 of Metro Atlanta's top employers.

But this job fair had an unusual twist.

It was a first-of-its kind effort by the Solicitor Generals of Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton and Douglas Counties, to help job candidates fast track the restriction and expungement of qualified arrest records.

"Most people don't look at their records. They don't know what's on them. Its been years since something has happened and it gives them an opportunity to say 'I've moved past this. It happened when I was young,'" said Donna Coleman-Stribling, Solicitor General of DeKalb County.

Sonya Compton, Solicitor General of Douglas County added:

"As a defense attorney I represented a lot of young people who made mistakes because they were teenagers--young dumb stuff-- and it affected them for the rest of their lives."

Keith Gammage, the Fulton County Solicitor, hopes joint programs like this one expand throughout the state.

"We've spoken with prosecutors from across the state who are interested, and we hope this model is collaborative, suggesting to them that is the right thing to do and it is the just thing to do," he said.

The alternatives can be daunting and life-long.

With an arrest record, even if you are found not guilty or the case is dismissed for a misdemeanor, it can have a profound effect on you trying to get a job.

For Tenita Miller, she's been turned down 20 times for jobs.

Why? Because she had an arrest on your record for something that happened 15 years ago.

Miller has two children, both in college and she wants to move on with her life and with a full-time job.

"The job that I want to do I cannot do because of my background and that is a hardship. It's making it hard for me to pursue and go on because of my background. If I can get my background clean, I can get any job I want. I can go in where I want and I can be happy," Miller said.

Georgia is one of 10 states that does not restrict convictions.

The Georgia Justice Project and others are working around the clock with legislators to change that

"4.2 million people in Georgia have a criminal record, so if you have a conviction in Georgia unfortunately the law does not allow you to deal with it, to get it off, to be able to get a job," said Doug Ammar, Executive Director of the Georgia Justice Project.

And Ammar added optimistically:

"My hope is that Georgia law will come to a place where we cannot just forgive but really recognize and honor rehabilitation." (Georgia Justice Project, 2019)

I support the efforts of the Georgia Justice Project and other programs of its kind. It is my desire that the current Cleveland City Council understand the complexity of such issues. Being mindful and knowledgeable of what happens in the real world is important. Checks and balances, separation of powers are also important parts of our government which ensures stability. I'm hopeful that egos can be put aside and focus can be put on more important matters. Sound business minded decisions should be made by the city that won't hold back our great town. We can be more progressive and thrive. Change is good!

My great grandfather Wilford Ash served as Mayor of Cleveland. It was instilled in me at a young age to be a leader, be involved in the community, and inspire others. I will continue to defend the goodwill of the people, as I ran for the office of Mayor of Cleveland and was elected to do in 2015. In the election of 2015, the people spoke out for change when my opponent

Rush Mauney was defeated by more than 70 percent of the vote. I encourage all citizens to get involved in our great community, vote, and strive to have compassion for others. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and represent the beautiful "City of Mountain Breezes".

Sincerely,
Roy (Shan) Ash III
Mayor of The City of Cleveland