

Commutated film screening and discussion

UNDERSTANDING DRUG SENTENCING SYMPOSIUM

Thursday, October 7, 2021 | 5 p.m. EDT | Zoom

Panelists:

Nailah Jefferson, film director

Danielle Metz, student, community activist, advocate, and public speaker

Moderator:

Jelani Jefferson-Exum, Dean and Philip J. McElroy Professor of Law, University of Detroit

Please note that the portion of the event during which the film was screened has been removed.

Additionally, recording was accidentally paused and then restarted at one point due to technical issues. We apologize for any inconvenience.

TRANSCRIPT

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00:00:04.950 --> 00:00:07.770

Holly Griffin: Thank you for attending the Commuted film screening and discussion.

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00:00:08.280 --> 00:00:13.710

Holly Griffin: The event is part of the Understanding Drug Sentencing symposium organized by the Drug Enforcement and Policy Center

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00:00:14.009 --> 00:00:20.640

Holly Griffin: at the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law and the Academy for Justice at Arizona State University Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law

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00:00:21.000 --> 00:00:28.050

Holly Griffin: with help from Professor Mark Osler at University of St. Thomas Law School and Dean Jelani Jefferson-Exum at University of Detroit Mercy Law School.

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00:00:28.500 --> 00:00:36.540

Holly Griffin: Before we begin, we have just a few notes we'd like to share with you. First, to streamline the appearance of the event today, we suggest that you hide non-video participants.

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00:00:36.930 --> 00:00:44.130
Holly Griffin: To do that, click the three dots at the top right corner of any participant box that has their video off and click hide non-video participants.

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00:00:44.700 --> 00:00:51.480
Holly Griffin: Second, we want to draw your attention to the Q&A function at the bottom of the zoom window. You may submit questions at any time during the presentation.

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00:00:52.230 --> 00:00:55.770
Holly Griffin: Third, please note that auto-generated transcription has been enabled for this event.

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00:00:56.640 --> 00:01:02.550
Holly Griffin: To change how you view the automated transcription or to hide it click live transcript in the menu at the bottom of your zoom window.

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00:01:03.210 --> 00:01:13.110
Holly Griffin: Finally, this event includes an exclusive screening of an unreleased feature documentary. Attendees are not permitted to record or distribute any unauthorized recordings of the film shared today.

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00:01:13.710 --> 00:01:22.860
Holly Griffin: Note, though, that the event is being recorded by us and it will be edited and made available on the event page and social media channels as soon as possible after the event.

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00:01:23.340 --> 00:01:31.620
Holly Griffin: Follow us @OSULawDEPC to stay up-to-date on our research, programming, and future events. Thank you again for joining us and we hope you enjoy the event. Jelani.

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00:01:35.100 --> 00:01:36.660
Jelani Jefferson Exum: Thank you so much, Holly.

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00:01:37.050 --> 00:01:44.400
Jelani Jefferson Exum: And welcome to all of you, thank you for joining us for this part of the symposium, the film screening and panel discussion.

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00:01:45.180 --> 00:01:51.840
Jelani Jefferson Exum: I would like to thank Professor Doug Berman and the Ohio State Drug Enforcement and Policy Center for inviting me to be

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00:01:52.140 --> 00:02:02.340
Jelani Jefferson Exum: one of the organizers of this event to help to plan it along with the Arizona State Academy for Justice and Professor and deputy director of the Academy Valena Beety

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00:02:02.790 --> 00:02:12.330

Jelani Jefferson Exum: as well as as you heard Professor Mark Osler from the University of St. Thomas Law School. So, it's been great to be a part of the planning committee for this event, it's been a really fantastic symposium,

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00:02:12.630 --> 00:02:16.410

Jelani Jefferson Exum: and I'm just really excited about this part of it. We are the

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00:02:17.070 --> 00:02:26.040

Jelani Jefferson Exum: last event on the agenda today, but please remember to visit the the symposium website so that you can see the agenda for tomorrow.

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00:02:26.310 --> 00:02:33.570

Jelani Jefferson Exum: And you're able to register for the rest of the symposium. And then, of course, as you already heard, there will be recordings of this. I would like to invite

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00:02:33.930 --> 00:02:45.480

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Danielle and Nailah, you can turn your cameras if you'd like, and as our guests today. So, this evening, we will watch a portion of the upcoming documentary, Commuted.

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00:02:46.230 --> 00:03:01.110

Jelani Jefferson Exum: This that will be followed by a discussion with the main subject of the documentary, Danielle Metz, and the filmmaker the director, Nailah Jefferson, who also happens to be my sister so I'm really happy to be able to do this.

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00:03:01.860 --> 00:03:12.810

Jelani Jefferson Exum: In this film, viewers will learn about Danielle who in 1993, as a first-time non-violent offender was sentenced to a triple life plus 20 year term.

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00:03:13.200 --> 00:03:20.400

Jelani Jefferson Exum: In 2016 she was granted clemency by President Obama. Now Danielle is looking to just really make meaning of her life

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00:03:20.730 --> 00:03:33.780

Jelani Jefferson Exum: and the portions of her life that she lost to fulfill her dream and to unite her family. So let me tell you a little bit more about Danielle and also about Nailah before we turn to the film.

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00:03:34.290 --> 00:03:45.180

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Nailah Jefferson, my sister, as I told you, she is a filmmaker based in New Orleans whose acclaimed work has been distributed domestically and internationally on the film festival circuit,

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00:03:45.570 --> 00:03:51.540

Jelani Jefferson Exum: theatrically and also televised. Her debut documentary Vanishing Pearls: The Oystermen of Pointe a la Hache,

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00:03:51.810 --> 00:04:02.460

Jelani Jefferson Exum: told the story of a little known African American oyster fishing community in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana and their fight for justice in the aftermath of the 2010 BP oil spill.

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00:04:03.150 --> 00:04:11.730

Jelani Jefferson Exum: In 2017 Nailah was nominated for a National Magazine Ellie award for directing Essence magazine's Black Girl Magic episode 4.

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00:04:12.360 --> 00:04:22.020

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Nailah's first narrative film Plaquemines was chosen as an American Black Film Festival HBO Shorts finalists and is currently available on HBO platforms.

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00:04:22.500 --> 00:04:28.920

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Nailah's current work includes the recent short Descended From the Promised Land about the Tulsa massacre,

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00:04:29.280 --> 00:04:39.390

Jelani Jefferson Exum: currently touring festivals, a documentary in production about Danielle Luna, the first black international supermodel, and of course Commuted, which is in post-production.

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00:04:40.170 --> 00:04:45.060

Jelani Jefferson Exum: And let Let me also tell you about Danielle Metz. So, Danielle Metz is from New Orleans

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00:04:45.360 --> 00:04:55.380

Jelani Jefferson Exum: and was a 26 year old mother of two when she was convicted as part of her abusive husband's drug ring, sentenced to three life sentences plus 20 years in federal prison.

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00:04:55.980 --> 00:05:05.070

Jelani Jefferson Exum: When her sentence was commuted by the Obama Administration in 2016, she got a rare chance to regain live the life and family that she'd been dreaming about in prison

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00:05:05.760 --> 00:05:12.060

Jelani Jefferson Exum: but back home in New Orleans she steps into a different reality. For the past five years, Nailah and the Commuted

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00:05:12.330 --> 00:05:22.350

Jelani Jefferson Exum: documentary team have been working with Danielle, following her as she works to rebuild her life and legacy after 23 years of incarceration.

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00:05:22.890 --> 00:05:32.250

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Today, Danielle is an advocate for the incarcerated and for those transitioning home through her work with the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls,

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00:05:32.610 --> 00:05:37.320

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Voice of the Experienced and the Formerly Incarcerated Transitions Clinic in New Orleans.

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00:05:37.680 --> 00:05:47.190

Jelani Jefferson Exum: She's also an undergraduate at Southern University in New Orleans and a grandmother of two. So, I am so excited to be able to share a bit of this film with you all.

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00:05:47.820 --> 00:05:53.700

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Not just because, as I said a few times now, Nailah is my sister and I'm so proud of her and her accomplishments,

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00:05:54.060 --> 00:06:04.770

Jelani Jefferson Exum: but because this is really just such an important story to tell it's an important and inspiring story, and one that raises awareness of the true destructive impacts of our drug sentencing laws and policies.

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00:06:05.220 --> 00:06:11.370

Jelani Jefferson Exum: And I'm so grateful to Danielle for allowing her story to be told, and for being here to talk to us today about her journey.

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00:06:11.820 --> 00:06:28.380

Jelani Jefferson Exum: And just to let you all know, this film is what you're going to see is a work in progress. The film is still in production and you're going to see a few selected excerpts of the film, so think of it as a sneak preview of sorts. So with that let's now get to our main feature, Commuted.

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00:06:29.330 --> 00:06:34.120

Jelani Jefferson Exum: But I hope that with what you saw you were able to get a sense of

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00:06:34.780 --> 00:06:51.430

Jelani Jefferson Exum: at least the beginning of Danielle's story. You get some of the turbulence that it cost her family and how she really was focused on you know thinking about how to talk to her children about this, and what this would really mean for her life. And so, so we'll turn to our panel discussion.

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00:06:53.470 --> 00:07:06.700

Jelani Jefferson Exum: I have a few prepared questions but um I encourage folks out there in the audience to also put your questions in the Q&A function, and we can have some discussions

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00:07:07.000 --> 00:07:16.720

Jelani Jefferson Exum: that way. I'll pull from that to have some questions for you all. So let me start by first yeah well again I guess thanking Danielle for sharing her story.

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00:07:17.140 --> 00:07:23.800

Jelani Jefferson Exum: And I wish you could have seen a little bit more, but I think it, I think folks got enough of a flavor there of what you went through

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00:07:24.400 --> 00:07:30.790

Jelani Jefferson Exum: to at least get an idea to set the context for this discussion. So Danielle wanted to start by asking you a question.

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00:07:31.240 --> 00:07:43.630

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Can you talk to us about why it was important to you to even share your story? Because I could imagine that you know after going through all that you went through, it would have been easy to come home and just you know work on yourself and your own

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00:07:44.350 --> 00:07:54.850

Jelani Jefferson Exum: putting your own life together and not also have other people see, and you know sort of share. So, can you tell us why you thought it was important and what you hope people will take away once they're able to see the full film?

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00:07:55.750 --> 00:08:01.300

Danielle Metz: I think it was important for me to share my story, because I think we all can agree that um

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00:08:03.100 --> 00:08:08.050

Danielle Metz: the justice system has failed us with mass incarceration it to shed a light on

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00:08:09.250 --> 00:08:25.090

Danielle Metz: the importance of this issue, because I left so many women behind. And without clemency, the women will perish because most of them have exhausted all their appeals. And I know what it feels like to be on that side of the fence.

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00:08:27.220 --> 00:08:34.510

Danielle Metz: So I just think that um it's more important for me, because of the clemency issue because um

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00:08:35.980 --> 00:08:45.640

Danielle Metz: when our present, President, current president was talking about um you know when he was on a campaign trail, he was saying that he was gonna

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00:08:46.090 --> 00:08:57.760

Danielle Metz: cut the prison population, he can cut it in half. And we haven't seen it that and they have the tools to use, which is executive clemency, the governors and the president.

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00:08:58.420 --> 00:09:08.500

Danielle Metz: And I don't want them to wait until after the term is over, to start utilizing it. I want what I would hope that they were doing it do it going in.

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00:09:09.070 --> 00:09:18.340

Danielle Metz: So that's why it's important to me because they have over a million and something, millions and millions of people, 220,000 women are incarcerated at this time.

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00:09:18.970 --> 00:09:29.920

Danielle Metz: And most of them are mothers, daughters, sisters and really the pillar of the community, and they are they have been removed so that's why it's important for me.

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00:09:30.400 --> 00:09:37.120

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Thank you, thank you. So you're thinking about the women that you left behind when you got this is this real

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00:09:38.440 --> 00:09:44.440

Jelani Jefferson Exum: answered prayer of clemency. And in the in the discussions that we've been having today in this symposium,

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00:09:45.130 --> 00:09:56.800

Jelani Jefferson Exum: the audience has gotten to hear about really from some other folks who have also been incarcerated who have had their sentences commuted and had similar feelings that you know they couldn't just

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00:09:57.970 --> 00:10:03.220

Jelani Jefferson Exum: walk out into life without thinking about everybody else who was still affected, so thank you for that.

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00:10:03.820 --> 00:10:12.730

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Nailah, I want to ask you a similar question before I get into some more of the details from the film. So for you, you know you don't have a legal background.

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00:10:13.570 --> 00:10:24.670

Jelani Jefferson Exum: You know I know that you were working on other projects. What brought you to this project and what sort of captured you about it and made you say you know, okay, this is something that I really want to spend time working on and getting out there?

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00:10:26.020 --> 00:10:35.530

Nailah Jefferson: Well, first thanks for having me. Really excited that we got to show a little bit, I'm sorry that it wasn't as much as we hoped to share, but I guess that'll just build the

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00:10:36.070 --> 00:10:40.120

Nailah Jefferson: mystery, right? But Danielle and I were actually introduced

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00:10:41.080 --> 00:10:50.200

Nailah Jefferson: at a church service and feel free to jump in Danielle if I get any details of the story wrong. But I actually got a call from Bishop Love. I don't know if you got the same call.

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00:10:50.560 --> 00:11:01.180

Nailah Jefferson: But we both attend the City of Love in New Orleans and Bishop Love called me and he said, do you know Daniel Metz? I said no, and he was like, well, I think she has a story that needs to be told.

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00:11:01.960 --> 00:11:10.000

Nailah Jefferson: I don't know that the the call that Bishop gave Danielle but maybe it was something like that. I dont know. But we met one early

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00:11:10.720 --> 00:11:24.400

Nailah Jefferson: Sunday morning because Danielle was attending eight o'clock service, and I only attended 10:30, so I woke up early and we got to meet. And we had a brief conversation, and I think, like any filmmaker, when you meet someone

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00:11:25.150 --> 00:11:33.850

Nailah Jefferson: like Danielle Danielle who's very dynamic, very charismatic, but then also has a story that needs to be told, you kind of want to jump in.

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00:11:34.300 --> 00:11:42.580

Nailah Jefferson: But as I've learned through this process over five years, you can't you can't just do that. And so I think over time, and it hasn't always been a

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00:11:43.120 --> 00:11:50.710

Nailah Jefferson: smooth road, but I think it's been a necessary road. We're we've got to know each other, we've got to learn each other, we've gotten to trust each other.

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00:11:51.220 --> 00:12:03.790

Nailah Jefferson: And I think what we've put together is a really personal film and that's what it needed to be. If I didn't if I didn't take all this time to really get to know Danielle it would have just been a story that was more surface and maybe, something that was more about

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00:12:05.740 --> 00:12:15.790

Nailah Jefferson: what happened back then less so than what Danielle is doing right now, and all the progress that she's making and the healing that her family is experiencing and

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00:12:16.300 --> 00:12:18.730

Nailah Jefferson: the work that she's doing right now to really help women

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00:12:19.690 --> 00:12:21.250

Nailah Jefferson: get clemency as well.

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00:12:21.550 --> 00:12:32.320

Nailah Jefferson: And so that's what I wanted to uplift with this project. And really it's been a journey. I didn't know in the beginning, and I think that's for a lot of filmmakers you you think you're going to highlight one thing and it becomes something else.

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00:12:32.650 --> 00:12:35.440

Nailah Jefferson: And that's what this film has been. So we really wanted to focus

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00:12:35.920 --> 00:12:49.540

Nailah Jefferson: on the familial impacts of long term incarceration. And fortunately we've been able to not only talk to Danielle, but also her children, Carl and Glenisha and, as you heard in before in one scene, they were seven and three when

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00:12:50.320 --> 00:13:07.030

Nailah Jefferson: Danielle went away. And then 23 years later they're 30 and what is that, 27, 30 and 27. And so they're full grown adults when your mom comes home and we get to see them try to rebuild their relationship.

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00:13:07.600 --> 00:13:16.000

Nailah Jefferson: And again, just to thank you to Danielle because I know it hasn't been an easy process, but thank you for allowing us in. and I consider it a real honor to be able to tell the story.

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00:13:18.100 --> 00:13:29.290

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Thank you for that. We are starting to get a few questions in the Q&A but I'm going to ask one more of my own, before I turn there. This is for Danielle. So, Danielle, this has been an entire day of

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00:13:29.800 --> 00:13:43.780

Jelani Jefferson Exum: of the symposium where audiences learn different things about drug sentencing and its impact on mass incarceration. In our first panel session today, it was focused on mandatory minimum sentencing. I know you ended up getting

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00:13:44.440 --> 00:13:58.960

Jelani Jefferson Exum: a triple life sentence plus 20 years and so um I know that mandatory minimums played a role in that. I just want to know how much did you know, during your trial and during your case, how much did you know and understand about the sentencing

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00:13:59.590 --> 00:14:09.970

Jelani Jefferson Exum: the possible sentencing outcomes? Was this something that you were shocked to hear? I just take us through how that was for you and what you came to understanding when you came to understand it.

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00:14:10.870 --> 00:14:23.830

Danielle Metz: Well, during my trial, I didn't know anything about mandatory minimums and my lawyer, the lawyer, that I had he had never represented a criminal case before. I later learned that after I got convicted and

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00:14:24.460 --> 00:14:28.450

Danielle Metz: you know, I was on my way to sentencing and that's when I found out that he had never

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00:14:28.960 --> 00:14:41.740

Danielle Metz: you know, tried a criminal case before. So, he never told me that like career criminal enterprise, one of the offenses that I had, that it carried a life sentence no matter what, is was no 20 to life, he never told me that.

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00:14:42.250 --> 00:14:51.700

Danielle Metz: And he led me, in my mind, because we never set up a strategy, I thought that a lawyer comes and sets up a strategy, you know you can have your defense, and this is what we're going to fight. But

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00:14:52.060 --> 00:14:58.270

Danielle Metz: I only saw him the day before I began to go to trial, and at that time. That is when he told me that

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00:14:59.050 --> 00:15:07.030

Danielle Metz: my mother's sister was going to testify against me and he still didn't say well, hey, if you get found guilty you're going to automatically get it get a life sentence. So I'm thinking that

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00:15:07.570 --> 00:15:13.000

Danielle Metz: the worst-case scenario would be that if I am found guilty I would at least get probation.

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00:15:13.540 --> 00:15:22.000

Danielle Metz: And if I had to do 20 years probation that would have been easy for me, because I know after that one time with the law I wasn't gonna do anything else because you know I had

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00:15:22.540 --> 00:15:31.450

Danielle Metz: gambled with too much already. And so I was asking him, I said um, afterwards after they did my pre-sentence investigation, that is what happens when

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00:15:31.870 --> 00:15:40.450

Danielle Metz: the prosecutor come in and design your case, I asked why can't I just get probation and she was like I don't think you know the severity

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00:15:40.810 --> 00:15:48.550

Danielle Metz: you know of these charges. And I said but I've never been a prison before. So up until then, I never knew anything about mandatory minimum and

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00:15:49.150 --> 00:16:01.300

Danielle Metz: the sentencing guideline itself. When I went back afterwards and I started looking at the sentencing guidelines and I saw in Category one, I never had an offense, so I figured why didn't I get 16 months?

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00:16:01.930 --> 00:16:08.440

Danielle Metz: And you know at the most, that would have been the most in Category one for people who don't have prior offences but that didn't happen.

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00:16:10.750 --> 00:16:18.910

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Yeah and I know the folks who are out there watching, they haven't seen the full film, and so they don't know the basis of the charges, they don't have that all that context,

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00:16:19.660 --> 00:16:31.810

Jelani Jefferson Exum: so these were, you know, they were drug offenses. It dealt with a drug ring much bigger than you that you had some minor interaction with but that, ultimately, you were a no-violence on your part,

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00:16:32.680 --> 00:16:42.460

Jelani Jefferson Exum: first time offense. That's what she's saying that she didn't have any kind of prior criminal history and so was that the basis of why you were thinking, this must be something that will be probation only?

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00:16:43.330 --> 00:16:57.160

Danielle Metz: Yes, that that is why I was thinking that. Because, even at the sentencing, I still asked the judge, I said uh, can you consider my kids, take that into account, that I am a mother of two kids, you know, I don't have any prior offences? And

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00:16:58.180 --> 00:17:14.680

Danielle Metz: it was just talk for me because, lip service, because he didn't pay it any mind. And then, at the same time, I'm so you know what the guidelines he had the guidelines to go by, as well, but then he had told me that I had forfeited my right to live in a civilized society.

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00:17:15.760 --> 00:17:26.110

Danielle Metz: And those were the words that them words, I will never forget, but those words, I will wake up to for 23 years I couldn't get the thought of him telling me that out my head. Because I was like

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00:17:26.890 --> 00:17:37.180

Danielle Metz: you don't have any young woman related to you, nobody in your family has ever done anything wrong, you know wrong before? You know, and I just couldn't understand it.

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00:17:37.990 --> 00:17:51.790

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Thank you. I'm going to turn to some of the questions that are in the chat. They are also for you Danielle. Nailah, I have some questions for you I'll come back to. But um so one of the questions is, Danielle, how do you encourage the women who are still incarcerated?

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00:17:53.800 --> 00:18:02.260

Danielle Metz: How I encourage them? I always tell them that well I am a living example in a living witness a living testament to what can happen.

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00:18:02.770 --> 00:18:10.330

Danielle Metz: I was the last person that President Obama granted clemency to and every time those lists came out, I was just

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00:18:11.170 --> 00:18:19.750

Danielle Metz: couldn't believe that my name was not on it. So with that being said, I would always tell them where there is light, there's hope. It doesn't mean that, even after you know,

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00:18:20.440 --> 00:18:27.880

Danielle Metz: your appeals are, you have exhausted all your appeals, it doesn't mean that something wouldn't happen for you. If you have breath, as long as you wake up,

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00:18:28.240 --> 00:18:39.430

Danielle Metz: anything can change. And I tell him for one I encourage them tell them to keep on fighting. You know tell your story, because a lot of women who have been through a lot of traumatic experiences that they never talked about.

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00:18:39.790 --> 00:18:45.730

Danielle Metz: And that is how they find themselves in prison today because those are unaddressed trauma issues

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00:18:46.000 --> 00:18:53.680

Danielle Metz: that they never addressed. And once you're inside prison, you're incarcerated, you don't get any treatment. I never talked to a therapist or anyone about what I was going through.

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00:18:54.250 --> 00:19:02.110

Danielle Metz: In fact, when we were going through the video, one of those pictures with my mother and my daughter there. That was a very hard time for me right there.

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00:19:02.710 --> 00:19:14.320

Danielle Metz: And I was very thin, very frail, my hair was all flipped up. I don't know what it was, even my shoes look like dust shoes when I came to the visiting room. I was like what else what is going on with me, but it was hard so.

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00:19:14.860 --> 00:19:17.590

Danielle Metz: A lot of times when I was going through whatever I was going through,

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00:19:18.280 --> 00:19:25.450

Danielle Metz: it was getting hard for me, I would sometimes just shave off all my hair. And that was me trying to put a voice to what I was going through. But,

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00:19:25.840 --> 00:19:29.320

Danielle Metz: no one ever paid attention. You would have a few say, why did you cut off all you hair?

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00:19:29.650 --> 00:19:43.270

Danielle Metz: Girl why you color? I was hurting on the inside, but I didn't know how to connect my feelings what I was going through, so I would just do things to make people just at least know, hey, pay attention to me, I need help. It's not as easy for me in this moment.

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00:19:44.380 --> 00:19:51.100

Danielle Metz: You know, because a lot of times when you're incarcerated, you don't want your family to be worried about you, so I would never tell my mother that,

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00:19:51.460 --> 00:20:04.240

Danielle Metz: hey, I'm having a hard time because I know already that she's going through it herself. She's in prison as well. So, that was very hard for me as a lot of times and it's more, is you know, like we don't get any help on the inside.

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00:20:06.040 --> 00:20:10.600

Danielle Metz: We don't get the help that we need. I feel like a woman, 26 years old,

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00:20:11.080 --> 00:20:25.060

Danielle Metz: sentenced to three life sentences plus 20 years. It should have been mandated that I have some kind of treatment. Something, while I was going to be there. And of course I became the custody of the BOP, so why not help me while I'm there? They didn't even allow me to get an education.

128

00:20:26.470 --> 00:20:29.380

Danielle Metz: So, I just tell them be encouraged.

129

00:20:30.970 --> 00:20:36.640

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Thank you. I have a question for you, but I'm going to give you a chance to catch your breath and let me

130

00:20:37.390 --> 00:20:43.450

Jelani Jefferson Exum: because I know this is a difficult topic, and so let me turn to Nailah and ask her question and then I'll then I'll come back.

131

00:20:44.350 --> 00:20:53.110

Jelani Jefferson Exum: So, Nailah, what's something important that you learned during the just the making of this film about our criminal justice system. Like, just tell us about something that made a big impact on you.

132

00:20:54.670 --> 00:20:57.100

Nailah Jefferson: One of the most shocking

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00:20:58.240 --> 00:21:01.150

Nailah Jefferson: details that I learned is something Danielle just talked about.

134

00:21:02.170 --> 00:21:19.480

Nailah Jefferson: That she had no idea kind of what she was up against. And she had no idea that these were the charges, and these were the possible, this was the possible sentence that she faced. And you just think about other young black women, black men,

135

00:21:20.830 --> 00:21:25.900

Nailah Jefferson: you know walking into those court rooms and not realizing the odds that are against them.

136

00:21:26.770 --> 00:21:42.070

Nailah Jefferson: That will really impact your decision making. And so you know Danielle told me that story, and then she tells me the story about the work starts when you get in prison, you try to have to fight your way out of it. I mean you're already there, you're up against,

137

00:21:43.930 --> 00:21:48.520

Nailah Jefferson: you're up against Federal Government. I mean they throw they throw everything into the cases that they have.

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00:21:49.900 --> 00:21:53.590

Nailah Jefferson: So, I mean it's an uphill battle, and one that so many people don't fight,

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00:21:54.700 --> 00:21:57.850

Nailah Jefferson: don't win in order to try and get their freedom.

140

00:21:59.110 --> 00:22:10.480

Nailah Jefferson: That, for me, was just really eye opening when you think about what's going on in the justice system and the inner workings and how we wind up where we are.

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00:22:11.710 --> 00:22:17.110

Nailah Jefferson: But I will say one thing that was really encouraging is that Danielle would tell me about the sisterhood that

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00:22:17.620 --> 00:22:29.680

Nailah Jefferson: that she had in prison. And a lot of those women lifted her up every day and told her that she would go home and helped her to feel encouraged to get an education, even though

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00:22:30.370 --> 00:22:38.320

Nailah Jefferson: on the inside, they were telling her that it didn't make sense, because she was a lifer. And so I think with this film we really just want to

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00:22:38.890 --> 00:22:47.500

Nailah Jefferson: kind of go against the traditional stories that you hear about incarceration and talk about the human element that we all lose, that I think has been lost,

145

00:22:48.250 --> 00:23:02.170

Nailah Jefferson: when you think about sentencing, when you think about our criminal justice system. I don't know when exactly it happened, or why, but we really lost a sense of the people and the ripple effects of what happens when we

146

00:23:03.130 --> 00:23:07.720

Nailah Jefferson: when we hand down these lengthy sentences, especially to mothers, mothers of young children.

147

00:23:08.800 --> 00:23:10.900

Nailah Jefferson: And as Danielle tells me that's what [recording accidentally paused]

148

00:23:11.440 --> 00:23:13.150

Jelani Jefferson Exum: [recording begins again] those were a lot

149

00:23:14.200 --> 00:23:18.250

Jelani Jefferson Exum: reentering home and families, so what was how's that been?

150

00:23:19.720 --> 00:23:20.290

Danielle Metz: It has

151

00:23:22.300 --> 00:23:22.660

Danielle Metz: it has been

152

00:23:23.680 --> 00:23:25.960

Danielle Metz: still a challenge for me because

153

00:23:27.790 --> 00:23:36.970

Danielle Metz: I still have to get reacquainted with my kids. Although I know that I'm their mother, I have been out of their life, well in a physical sense, for 23 years.

154

00:23:37.480 --> 00:23:48.640

Danielle Metz: And sometimes even with me going during my day-to-day activities it's easy for you, because my kids are grown now. My daughter she's married she has a family. My son, he has a family. And you know,

155

00:23:49.720 --> 00:23:58.930

Danielle Metz: for some reason, when I thought when I got released it, they were going to leave you know, my daughter was there, but I thought he was gonna drop everything and want to be with me but life and moved on.

156

00:23:59.410 --> 00:24:08.860

Danielle Metz: So, I I expected that, but that is not what happened. So even now, some days I'm you know my mom is not here anymore. I don't know if um

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00:24:09.400 --> 00:24:21.160

Danielle Metz: Nailah told you, but my mother, several months after I came home my mom died. So that has been a big transition for me and it's easy for me when I'm not doing stuff or moving around for me to slip into a place like

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00:24:21.700 --> 00:24:27.850

Danielle Metz: a place of loneliness, a place of emptiness, because I missed out on so much, and when I visit my friends, you know,

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00:24:28.330 --> 00:24:36.670

Danielle Metz: when I go by one of my friends house and I'm hearing her telling her son he better have the room clean when he get home, and he'd better bring out the trash. I didn't get the experience that.

160

00:24:37.030 --> 00:24:41.920

Danielle Metz: So it's like it has me like really emotional imbalanced just listening to it all.

161

00:24:42.730 --> 00:24:51.190

Danielle Metz: You know so it's still a challenge. So I'm still getting to know, getting to know my kids and getting reacquainted with them so it's still an everyday

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00:24:51.610 --> 00:25:03.130

Danielle Metz: everyday thing. And I was telling myself just the other night I said, sometimes I think I'm not just that happy, I'm happy to be free, but then I have obligations for those that are left behind, I feel like I do because

163

00:25:03.580 --> 00:25:12.880

Danielle Metz: they are dependent on someone to come out and just be their voice. And that that that is what I chose to do for them, and so

164

00:25:13.420 --> 00:25:26.140

Danielle Metz: I was just saying you know it's gonna take me 23 years, I think, to get back to normal, you know just to where I was when I first left, because you know prison is about survival. You know some stories you probably would never hear.

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00:25:28.510 --> 00:25:31.300

Danielle Metz: Because prison is a world in and of itself.

166

00:25:32.470 --> 00:25:39.790

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Yeah. Can you um in that, and thank you for sharing that. Nailah, I'm sorry if you had anything you want to add just jump in.

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00:25:40.120 --> 00:25:40.720

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Um,

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00:25:40.900 --> 00:25:56.200

Jelani Jefferson Exum: so you're transitioning back home and it's a work in progress, but you really have really committed yourself to being a voice for incarcerated women, to be an advocate for change. So, can you tell us about the current work that you're doing Danielle?

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00:25:58.600 --> 00:26:06.040

Danielle Metz: Um I am a Community Health Worker for people that were formerly incarcerated people that comes back into society that needs medical attention.

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00:26:06.550 --> 00:26:14.200

Danielle Metz: So, most of the women or men are from this area and, like just say, for instance, the men that are in prison, most of them have been in there like

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00:26:14.620 --> 00:26:21.700

Danielle Metz: 44 years or 54 years and they're just getting back to society. Some of the women, they have been gone for

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00:26:22.120 --> 00:26:32.110

Danielle Metz: more than 23 years and they're just coming back. So what I do is I try to connect them with wrap around resources for reentry. We have a big network of reentry around here.

173

00:26:32.530 --> 00:26:44.890

Danielle Metz: And I'm also a Community um, I'm not a Community, oh I'm also the director of Clemency for the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. And what we do is we

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00:26:46.030 --> 00:26:53.080

Danielle Metz: want our whole mission is to end the incarceration of women and girl, because we know from experience, that prison is not a place for girls to heal

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00:26:54.130 --> 00:27:12.610

Danielle Metz: or develop in a healthy space. So our whole mission is to incarceration and we raise awareness, we pick up different people's cases and I'm I am the face of a campaign. And we go around just everywhere we can, we start now we started a campaign in the New England states.

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00:27:13.630 --> 00:27:22.540

Danielle Metz: Because that is the least number of women that are incarcerated and we are raising awareness, because right now they're trying to do a \$40 million prison there that

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00:27:22.990 --> 00:27:28.330

Danielle Metz: and they don't even have 2500 women in prison, so we don't see the need for that. And, just like the other day,

178

00:27:28.810 --> 00:27:43.810

Danielle Metz: I was reading about something in Alabama. They had money left over from the COVID and they want to build a prison. And I'm like can't you think of something great to do with the money? But all you can see how to further oppress us? That's just I just don't get it.

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00:27:44.950 --> 00:27:52.600

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Yeah. Well, one thing that that work shares is that I know a lot of times when we think about criminal justice reform,

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00:27:53.260 --> 00:27:54.820

Jelani Jefferson Exum: folks will think, I have to be

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00:27:55.060 --> 00:28:09.130

Jelani Jefferson Exum: a lawyer or you have to have some kind of legal background, but there's so much work that can be done in so many ways and organizations that can be supported, like the organizations that Danielle is working with. So Nailah, I want to ask you a question. I have two questions for you.

182

00:28:10.270 --> 00:28:17.890

Jelani Jefferson Exum: One is that folks want to know when they'll be able to see the full film. When and how? So can talk about that? But then also

183

00:28:19.090 --> 00:28:31.480

Jelani Jefferson Exum: what's your perspective on things that, just given what you've learned in the making of this film, ways that people can be impactful in this space? What what are you hoping, people will go and do after they see the film?

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00:28:34.270 --> 00:28:50.200

Nailah Jefferson: Well, as far as when the film will be available and where, hopefully 2022 and where I don't know yet. But I'll let you all know when I know and then you can let everyone on here know. Hopefully, you can, you know, we can just disseminate information that way.

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00:28:51.610 --> 00:28:56.260

Nailah Jefferson: As far as I guess what I want people to do or takeaway from this film,

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00:28:57.010 --> 00:29:01.960

Nailah Jefferson: again, to look at the human element, the family costs of long term incarceration.

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00:29:02.260 --> 00:29:13.510

Nailah Jefferson: To really look at someone like Danielle and imagine a prison is filled with women, just like her, so full of potential to come out and do great things, if only they have the opportunity.

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00:29:13.780 --> 00:29:22.870

Nailah Jefferson: And another thing that I've taken away from this film is how important it is for those who have been experienced who have been impacted by prison,

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00:29:23.320 --> 00:29:32.020

Nailah Jefferson: by the criminal justice system like Danielle, like the other women that she was incarcerated with, that they lead these conversations and they lead these efforts. So,

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00:29:32.500 --> 00:29:41.770

Nailah Jefferson: if I was going to tell someone you know what they should do to support the film or what an action item after seeing the film would be would, it would be support women like Danielle.

191

00:29:42.820 --> 00:29:56.410

Nailah Jefferson: Women and men who are coming out of incarceration, restarting their lives and know just what what's needed and what it takes to get themselves back on track. And not only that, as Danielle keeps talking about, mental health.

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00:29:57.460 --> 00:30:06.130

Nailah Jefferson: Work on that. If people who have been incarcerated for a very long time need these services, let's let's try and get them the services that they need.

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00:30:07.420 --> 00:30:14.110

Nailah Jefferson: Of course, we all know, a long time ago prison has not been used to reform or redeem in any type of way.

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00:30:14.710 --> 00:30:24.250

Nailah Jefferson: But we definitely need to bring that back into the equation, so that it's not just about punishment, it's about healing and giving people a second chance.

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00:30:24.670 --> 00:30:42.190

Nailah Jefferson: Danielle has allowed me to read the the commutation letter that President Obama wrote, and one of the things that he mentions is in our Constitution, we talk about giving people a second chance and that's I mean if that's what we're founded on then that's what we should do.

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00:30:43.810 --> 00:30:55.420

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Thank you for that and we had in one of the earlier symposium sessions, a gentleman who had been incarcerated and his sentence was commuted he we saw a clip of him reading from his

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00:30:55.930 --> 00:31:09.520

Jelani Jefferson Exum: from his letter, and it was definitely very emotional for everybody, but you know echoed that sense of giving people another chance, of mercy, of potential, and so I think that's a really, really important point.

198

00:31:10.450 --> 00:31:21.670

Jelani Jefferson Exum: So, we have still about 10 minutes left in our session and, though I have more questions that I can ask I don't see any from the audience, and so what I would like to do,

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00:31:22.000 --> 00:31:27.730

Jelani Jefferson Exum: unless there's an objection by our organizers is to allow people to see a bit more of the film.

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00:31:28.300 --> 00:31:37.390

Jelani Jefferson Exum: So, I hope folks will will stay on to see a little bit more. The buffering issue is due to bandwidth so we can't fix it so this would just be you know folks who who are

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00:31:37.840 --> 00:31:47.350

Jelani Jefferson Exum: have become interested enough based on this discussion so just want to see a bit more of it, because it is has been prepared, so if we could show a little bit more, that would be great.

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00:31:48.670 --> 00:32:01.840

Jelani Jefferson Exum: And folks can stay on. But before we do that I did want to ask if Nailah or Danielle had any additional thoughts, closing comments, that you wanted to make and you wanted to share before we try to show a little bit more of the film.

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00:32:05.560 --> 00:32:10.270

Nailah Jefferson: Thank you for having us and, hopefully, this is the first of many Danielle.

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00:32:12.400 --> 00:32:14.680

Danielle Metz: I want to say thank you for having me.

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00:32:16.600 --> 00:32:25.180

Danielle Metz: This is, I feel safe in this space, and I think that we are where we need to be in this moment, but I encourage, I want to challenge

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00:32:25.510 --> 00:32:30.490

Danielle Metz: everybody that's on the call to just reach out to somebody else incarcerated because, I mean,

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00:32:31.090 --> 00:32:40.330

Danielle Metz: get to know who they are, because they are some beautiful people on the inside, and very talented, very educated, very intelligent. I mean,

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00:32:40.930 --> 00:32:47.920

Danielle Metz: you would be thrilled to know some of those people. And a lot of them, who have done lengthy sentences, they don't have family anymore.

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00:32:48.280 --> 00:32:54.220

Danielle Metz: Their families are not around, they don't have support. So, a letter goes a long way in the institution.

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00:32:54.850 --> 00:33:06.070

Danielle Metz: I mean, you can get an email, but a letter is really personal and that is really uplifting for some because we rush to mail call every evening, hoping that we get a piece of mail from somebody.

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00:33:08.620 --> 00:33:14.860

Jelani Jefferson Exum: And there's actually there's another question in the chat so let's let me ask that, first, while they

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00:33:15.490 --> 00:33:27.340

Jelani Jefferson Exum: are trying to pull up the film. Um says to Danielle, I want to know how has, how has COVID complicated your work? So, getting out there and and

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00:33:27.850 --> 00:33:40.150

Jelani Jefferson Exum: advocating for incarcerated women or maybe even advocating even harder for incarcerated women, given that in prison COVID has been a real challenge. But how has it impacted what you've been doing?

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00:33:41.200 --> 00:33:46.210

Danielle Metz: COVID has impacted in a lot of ways, because we can't you know

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00:33:46.840 --> 00:33:55.630

Danielle Metz: go places and meet with people or the families, because a lot of times if I'm connecting with somebody I want to meet with the family and then just give them a brief

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00:33:55.930 --> 00:34:04.120

Danielle Metz: overview of some of the things that worked for me. But we can't talk anymore, you know we can't go face to face and people don't want to travel, because of that.

217

00:34:04.690 --> 00:34:19.720

Danielle Metz: And um it impacted in a lot of ways, because now, even the people that I've communicated with sometimes they are locked down, they can't come to the phone you know, because they had another COVID outbreak, so they can't use the phone. So it affects, it impacted in a lot of ways.

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00:34:20.830 --> 00:34:35.020

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Yeah. Yeah, I guess, a lot of us are feeling that in lots of different spaces. There's actually another question here wanting to know how can families support the work you do and work that the Council is doing? Is there someplace we can direct folks to to support that?

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00:34:35.110 --> 00:34:39.130

Danielle Metz: Yes, you can go to the National Council.

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00:34:40.840 --> 00:34:48.880

Danielle Metz: Just look it up on the web, Google it, the National Council for Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls.

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00:34:49.330 --> 00:34:57.790

Danielle Metz: And we had just launched a national campaign, where we asked President Biden for his first hundred days to grant 100 women clemencies but he didn't.

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00:34:58.060 --> 00:35:08.110

Danielle Metz: But that doesn't mean that we're not going to stop asking him to do it. So the more we have, the more our voice is going to be heard. We walk around,

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00:35:08.500 --> 00:35:22.060

Danielle Metz: we go out of town we're doing rallies. We're bringing up people, getting their kids to come speak for them, and um a lot of things just in the membership is only \$5 a year. So not \$5 a month, \$5 a year.

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00:35:23.710 --> 00:35:32.380

Danielle Metz: So, join the movement. We just had a big conference. We're going to have another conference, but we had to restructure around COVID again. And um

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00:35:33.220 --> 00:35:46.060

Danielle Metz: we, for me, I want everybody to know that timing is everything, because a lot of the women on the inside, they have a lot of health issues that unaddressed and on top of COVID, you know you just never know.

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00:35:47.320 --> 00:35:59.050

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Uh huh. Yeah. So well, thank you for that. I I'm kind of checking our chat situation. I don't see additional questions and, unfortunately,

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00:35:59.560 --> 00:36:05.800

Jelani Jefferson Exum: the virtual space has worked against us because we're unable to pull up the film, so I can't

228

00:36:06.400 --> 00:36:18.550

Jelani Jefferson Exum: show those these last few minutes and I'm sorry about that. But I do thank everyone for tuning in. Please be on the lookout and you know in what, when did you say Nailah, to start looking for the film?

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00:36:20.200 --> 00:36:20.920

Nailah Jefferson: 2022.

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00:36:21.700 --> 00:36:25.510

Jelani Jefferson Exum: Okay, in 2022. And we'll be sure, you know I'm a proud

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00:36:25.510 --> 00:36:26.770

Jelani Jefferson Exum: sister, so I will be

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00:36:26.860 --> 00:36:33.040

Jelani Jefferson Exum: pushing the word out for sure, as it comes out. And we'll be sharing it through a lot of different avenues, including

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00:36:33.790 --> 00:36:40.480

Jelani Jefferson Exum: including the list from this conference. And you have in the chat some of the information for the National Council

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00:36:40.840 --> 00:36:49.090

Jelani Jefferson Exum: to support Danielle's work and then also a link to the film's website. So thank you all so much for joining us. Really appreciate

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00:36:49.870 --> 00:37:01.540

Jelani Jefferson Exum: the organizers of the film and also Nailah and Danielle for sharing this important work in this project. Best wishes to you all, as you continue to work on it and, and thank you all for coming.

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00:37:02.260 --> 00:37:05.140

Danielle Metz: Thank you for having us Jelani and Holly.

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00:37:05.530 --> 00:37:08.830

Danielle Metz: The pleasure was all mine, thank you.

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00:37:10.000 --> 00:37:20.290

Jelani Jefferson Exum: And please everyone, remember to check out the agenda for tomorrow's events. We have more more panels, more interesting discussions and so we'd love to have you join in, thank you all.

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00:37:20.710 --> 00:37:22.360

Danielle Metz: Thank you. Have a good day.

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00:37:22.780 --> 00:37:23.320

Jelani Jefferson Exum: You too.