

## AGENDA ITEM REQUEST FORM

Commission meetings: First and third Tuesdays of each month – 2:00 p.m.

Committee meetings: Second and last Tuesdays of each month – 1:00 p.m.

Commission/Committee: (Please check one and insert meeting date)

<input type="checkbox"/> Commission	Date of Meeting _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Public Safety Committee	Date of Meeting _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Public Services Committee	Date of Meeting _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Administrative Services Committee	Date of Meeting <u>02-25-2025</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering Services Committee	Date of Meeting _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Finance Committee	Date of Meeting _____

### Contact Information for Individual/Presenter Making the Request:

Name: Lawrence Brannen (JIRSI)  
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Telephone Number: (706) 524-6786  
Fax Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
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### Caption/Topic of Discussion to be placed on the Agenda:

Request the Commission hold a vote to approve adding "Persons with criminal histories ~~and to include persons convicted of violent felonies as defined by the laws of the state of Georgia~~ who have completed all court-imposed sentences and have been free from criminal involvement within three to section 1.40, of Article 5, Chapter 1 of Charter  
Charter Law and Laws of Local  
Applicants under  
Augusta-Richmond  
code

Please send this request form to the following address:

Ms. Lena J. Bonner  
Clerk of Commission  
Suite 220 Municipal Building

Telephone Number: 706-821-1820  
Fax Number: 706-821-1838  
E-Mail Address: [lbonner@augustaga.gov](mailto:lbonner@augustaga.gov)  
[nmcfarley@augustaga.gov](mailto:nmcfarley@augustaga.gov)

535 Telfair Street  
Augusta, GA 30901

Requests may be faxed, e-mailed or delivered in person and must be received in the Clerk's Office no later than 9:00 a.m. on the Thursday preceding the Commission and Committee meetings of the following week. A five-minute time limit will be allowed for presentations.



The Office of The Justice-Impacted Reformation Society Inc.

**Lawrence A. Brannen**

*Founder/Director*

**Mayor Garnett Johnson**

**2/9/2025**

**District 1 Commissioner Jordan Johnson**

**District 2 Commissioner Stacey Pulliam**

**District 3 Commissioner Catherine Smith-Rice**

**District 4 Commissioner Alvin Mason**

**District 5 Commissioner Don Clark**

**District 6 Commissioner Tony Lewis**

**District 7 Commissioner Tina Slendak**

**District 8 Commissioner Brandon Garrett**

**District 9 Commissioner Francine Scott**

**District 10 Commissioner Wayne Guilfoyle**

**Clerk of Commission**

**535 Telfair Street**

**2nd Floor**

**Augusta, GA 30901**

Dear Mayor and Commissioners,

At the outset I would like to state that The Justice-Impacted Reformation Society Inc. (JIRSI) is an apolitical, pro-government (not to include malicious politics or politicians), and pro-law enforcement (not to include “bad apple” policing) 501(c)(3) non-profit grassroots advocacy organization. Our optimism regarding our capability to accomplish all that we have set out to do stems from the fact that our endeavors do not require mass funding, and so we are well within our right to advocate as long as we pay our yearly tax, which is not much.

Our support comes from several local attorneys and a few judges around the state of Georgia who we will keep anonymous unless told otherwise. We also enjoy extended support from both Republicans and Democrats alike. Our support network is experiencing growth due to our advocacy work. There are a growing number of citizens of reasonable mind who think that the measures we advocate for are clear-cut commonsense measures that any reasonable mind can and should believe would not face any opposition at the local level. Yet they do.

Case in point: last October, we introduced a “Hiring Amendment” proposal to the Administrative Services committee. On its face alone, the approval of the proposal we introduced would have immediately opened more living-wage employment opportunities for persons with criminal histories—a measure that is direly needed in today’s society where the cost of living is constantly on the rise. As of today we have not received a final answer on approval or denial. Why our proposal has yet to receive a simple “approve” or “deny” vote has us confused. To the mayor’s credit, we appreciate the collaborative work that the Office of the Mayor was able to perform with the Biden-Harris Administration in 2023 and 2024 that cleared pathways to sustainable employment.

That said, we fully support any steps the Moving Augusta Forward initiative takes. We just want to encourage this body to keep “persons with criminal histories” in mind when taking those steps. More opportunities equals less crime; less crime equals low recidivism rates; low recidivism rates equal more two parent households; more two parent households equal positive community growth. And the best part about it all is that there is an action that this body can take to get Augusta to the “positive community growth” outcome without costing taxpayers any money.

As a side note we want to remind this body that persons with criminal histories also pay taxes. For example, just a couple of days ago I paid \$809 in state taxes for the 2024 year. Therefore, when we talk about taxpayer dollars, my voice is just as good as the wealthiest business owner in the state of Georgia. The same concept applies to local taxes. I pay, so I as well shall have an opportunity to play.

And play I will. Included with this letter is Exhibit A, Parts I, II, & III. Parts II & III of the exhibit display Sections 1-40 and 1-41 of Article 5 of Chapter 1 under the Charter and Laws of Local Application which govern “Equal Opportunity” and “Amendments” under the Augusta-Richmond Code. The sections provide as follows:

- **Sec. 1-40. Equal Opportunity.**
  - (a) The government of Augusta-Richmond County shall encourage the meaningful involvement in its operations of all citizens of Augusta-Richmond County, particularly those who are members of minority or other traditionally disadvantaged groups, as appointees, employees, and independent contractors. The Commission shall afford equal opportunities for employment and promotion to all persons regardless of race, sex, religion, gender, creed, color, or national origin.
- **Sec. 1-41. Amendments.**

- The Commission shall have the authority upon the affirmative votes of two-thirds of those elected to the Commission, excluding the Mayor,<sup>1</sup> to change the provisions of this Act which conflict with existing or future state or federal laws....

As it pertains to Sec. 1-40, we argue that “persons with criminal histories” are in fact a “traditionally disadvantaged” group and therefore deserve Sec. 1-40 protection.<sup>2</sup> To refute what we all know to be a fact is a moral bankruptcy; to refuse to recognize “persons with criminal histories” as a “traditionally disadvantaged” group is a refusal to acknowledge the validity of decades of studies conducted by respectable and reputable social scientists and the institutions they represent; finally, based upon the language of Sec. 1-40, to refuse to protect “persons with criminal histories” from employment discrimination creates a conflict between our local governing body and the code it is expected to uphold.

Therefore, at the next Administrative Services Committee meeting we will be requesting that this governing body in accordance with Sec. 1-41 vote to approve that Sec. 1-41 be amended to add the following words:

- Persons with criminal histories (not to include persons convicted of violent felonies as defined by the laws of the state of Georgia) who have completed all court-imposed sentences and have been free from criminal involvement within three years of applying for employment

We understand that there has been an expression of trepidation when the topic of granting “persons with criminal histories” protections. Some opponents of the idea have followed a widely-circulated myth that working alongside a person with a criminal history, particularly a convicted felon, poses a more dangerous risk than a non-offender. Allow me to present a few real-life events in opposition to such blatantly asinine theory:

- **Charles Richard Wilson:** In 2024, Charles Wilson, a North Augusta High School teacher and longtime pastor was arrested on 5 counts of sexual exploitation of a minor (child pornography).<sup>3</sup>
- **Hartwell Cooper Cliatt:** Last month, Hartwell Cliatt, a Lincoln County Commissioner, was arrested on two counts of child molestation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> With the majority of Augusta-Richmond County voters recently voting in favor of the mayor having a vote, I am not sure “excluding the Mayor” is still a relevant part of this section.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/criminal-records-create-cycles-multigenerational-poverty/> “**Criminal Records Create Cycles of Multigenerational Poverty**” -explaining how collateral consequences of a criminal conviction has traditionally led to multigenerational poverty due to permanent barriers that have proven insurmountable for many persons with criminal histories.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wrdw.com/2024/05/23/north-augusta-high-school-teacher-arrested-5-child-porn-counts/> “**North Augusta High School Teacher on 5 Child Porn Counts**”

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wrdw.com/2025/01/29/lincoln-county-commissioner-arrested-molestation-counts/> “**Lincoln County Commissioner Arrested on Child Molestation Counts**”

- **Douglas Williams:** On July 8, 2003, Douglas Williams shot 14 of his Lockheed Martin co-workers, killing six of them. His motive: anti-Black racism.<sup>5</sup>
- **Mark Orrin Barton:** On July 29, 1999, Mark Barton, believed to be motivated by large financial losses over the course of two months, went on a shooting spree at two Atlanta-area day trading firms. Nine people were killed, 13 others were injured. Later it was found out that Barton had also killed his second wife and two of his children from a previous marriage prior to going on the shooting spree.<sup>6</sup>

None of the individuals listed above were convicted felons at the time they committed those heinous offenses. The point is for every one violent workplace incident committed by a person with a criminal history—felons in particular—being cited in support of opposing our request we only need to conduct a simple google search and find several other violent workplace incidents committed by persons not convicted of crimes, felonies in particular. We also can find incidents that are automatic disqualifiers—such as child molestation and being in possession of child pornography—allegedly being committed by so-called upstanding commissioners, pastors and high school teachers. Therefore, we strongly caution against using the “dangerous risk” reasoning as a basis for rejecting our proposal, because one could easily argue that based on the numbers alone that it is safer to hire a person with a criminal history rather than a person without one (I know several non-violent felony drug offenders that have never thought of touching a child or possessing child pornography). Another point is simply this: a person’s future production or actions cannot adequately be measured by past indiscretions.

Lastly, there seems to be a floating narrative that the only reason JIRSI is bringing these issues is because I am disgruntled about not receiving an employment opportunity with the City of Augusta. That could not be further from the truth. My hourly wage at my current employer is more than I would have received had I been hired and taken the job I applied for with the City of Augusta. Also, where I was only being offered a part-time position with the City of Augusta, I work full-time at my current employer. I ask each of you: what does logic dictate I do in that situation?

I have also been accused of seeking self-gain from the advocacy work JIRSI is doing. That is indeed true. As the founder and director of JIRSI, I am fulfilling a life purpose and inspiring others who face similar background challenges to consider doing the same. I founded JIRSI under its previous name Ex-Offenders For Reform and Advancement Inc. while living in Gwinnett County, long before moving back to Augusta. Personally, other than a purpose for living, I have gained nothing nor do I seek to gain anything personally through the advocacy work of JIRSI.

Please understand this: I am a pre-law honor student at Georgia Southern University. This year I will be applying to law schools that I have already pre-qualified for. In Fall 2026, barring divine intervention, I will be a first-year law student. Please further understand that JIRSI has never come to this body or anyone else requesting funding for JIRSI because we do not need it. Every t-shirt bought for participants in our monthly cleanups were paid for with money out of my employment paycheck. JIRSI has now set-up a writing competition for disadvantaged T.W Josey High School seniors who have applied

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<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed\\_Martin\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Martin_shooting)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999\\_Atlanta\\_day\\_trading\\_firm\\_shootings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_Atlanta_day_trading_firm_shootings)

and been accepted into a college or university. The scholarship will split \$200 between the first, second, and third place winners. The funding for those payouts are coming directly from my employment paycheck. Not to mention I make less than \$30,000/year with overtime while taking care of a household and sending funds to children outside of my household.

Now, ask yourself: are those actions characteristic of someone seeking personal popularity gain? Believe it or not, I actually care—and that pathos has trickled down to JIRSI.

When I first moved back to Augusta, suggestions were made that I get involved with the Manhood Tour, a well-respected—as it should be—mentoring program here in Augusta. I declined because I knew that reform advocacy work was my true calling, and that reform advocacy is unpopular. So I kept a distance from those great men of the Manhood Tour out of respect for not bringing an unpopular vibe to their initiative. Just yesterday evening, however, a judge in the Atlanta area contacted me and made a request that I sit down with him for lunch. He asked if I wanted to become a part of his mentoring program. This opportunity I will accept because the judge knows my criminal history, is aware of JIRSI's advocacy work, and has no qualms bringing me on board.

So, let us not miss the bigger picture here. JIRSI respects every commissioner on the board, as well the Mayor. We are not enemies of the government. Nor am I, as the founder, director and spokesman for JIRSI, seeking personal popularity gain. We seek positive reforms that open pathways to quality of life improvements for “persons with criminal histories.” Any advocate (lawyer or non-lawyer) on the face of this earth will tell you that advocating is a natural phenomenon that inculcates within the hearts of some people. Our natural tendency is to open, argue, and close—albeit in a professional manner.

With that, I wish you all a nice day.

Respectfully,

***Lawrence A. Brannen***

*Founder/Director*

*The Justice-Impacted Reformation Society Inc. (JIRSI)*

# Exhibit A, PART I

## CHAPTER 1 ADMINISTRATION

### Article 1. Home Rule

- Sec. 1-1. Scope of county legislative power.
- Sec. 1-2. Salary of county employees; how fixed.
- Sec. 1-3. Filing and publication of amendment or revision of local act.
- Sec. 1-4. Supplementary powers.
- Sec. 1-5. Planning and zoning.
- Sec. 1-6. Eminent domain.
- Sec. 1-7. Special districts.
- Sec. 1-8. Community redevelopment.
- Sec. 1-9. Limitation on the taxing power and contributions of counties, municipalities and political subdivisions.
- Sec. 1-10. Immunity of counties, municipalities and school districts.

### Article 2. Taxation Power

- Sec. 1-11. Power of taxation.
- Sec. 1-12. Power of expenditure.
- Sec. 1-13. Purposes of taxation; allocation of taxes.

### Article 3. Intergovernmental Relations

- Sec. 1-14. Intergovernmental contracts.

### Article 4. County Officers and Employees—Generally

- Sec. 1-15. Election; term; compensation.
- Sec. 1-16. Civil service systems.
- Sec. 1-17. Reserved.
- Sec. 1-18. Bribery.
- Sec. 1-19. Violation of oath by public officer.
- Sec. 1-20. Receiving funds for enforcement of penal laws or regulations.
- Sec. 1-21. Improperly influencing legislative action.
- Sec. 1-22. Officer or employee improperly influencing another officer or employee.
- Sec. 1-23. Officer or employee selling to political subdivision.
- Sec. 1-24. Conspiracy to defraud state or political subdivision.
- Sec. 1-25. Conspiracy in restraint of free and open competition.
- Sec. 1-26. Malpractice in office.

### Article 5. Charter

- Sec. 1-27. Augusta-Richmond County Commission; creation; powers.
- Sec. 1-28. Commission districts.
- Sec. 1-29. Election of commission.
- Sec. 1-30. Powers of mayor; mayor pro-tem; committees.
- Sec. 1-31. Vacancies.
- Sec. 1-32. Quorum.
- Sec. 1-33. Bonded indebtedness.
- Sec. 1-34. Service districts.
- Sec. 1-35. Ordinances, continuation.
- Sec. 1-36. Budget; taxes; water rates.
- Sec. 1-37. Special services tax districts.
- Sec. 1-38. Pension plan; employees.
- Sec. 1-39. Sheriff; fire protection; boards and authorities; municipal court.
- Sec. 1-40. Equal opportunity.



# Exhibit A, Part II

[section 1-44], the City of Hephzibah shall be abolished 90 days after the members of the Commission take office under this Act. Such departments may be reestablished, reorganized, or consolidated; new job descriptions shall be established as appropriate; and a director or administrative head shall be appointed for each department by the Commission. Any person who formerly occupied such position and any other person shall have the right to apply for any position thus created. The provisions of this subsection shall not result in the automatic termination from employment with the reorganized government of any such person and the provisions of Section 12 of this Act [section 1-38] shall be applicable to any such person. On or after January 1, 1996, no person shall be eligible for appointment to any position as the director or administrative head of any department or agency of the reorganized government unless such person meets such qualifications as may be established by the Commission.

(g) The Municipal Court of the City of Augusta shall act as the Municipal Court of Augusta-Richmond County and shall have jurisdiction throughout Richmond County until such court is abolished by an Act of the General Assembly.

(h) No elected official of such government nor any member of the General Assembly of Georgia whose district lies totally or partially within Richmond County shall be eligible to do business with or receive any contract from such government except through competitive bids. Said persons shall not receive personal services from county vendors, attorneys, or others.

(1995 Ga. Laws, p. 3648; 1996 Ga. Laws, p. 3607; 1997 Ga. Laws, p. 4024; 1997 Ga. Laws, p. 4690)

## Sec. 1-40. Equal opportunity.

(a) The government of Augusta-Richmond County shall encourage the meaningful involvement in its operations of all citizens of Augusta-Richmond County, particularly those who are members of minority or other traditionally disadvantaged groups, as appointees, employees, and independent contractors. The Commission shall

afford equal opportunities for employment and promotion to all persons regardless of race, sex, religion, gender, creed, color, or national origin.

(b) It is the policy of the Augusta-Richmond County government to ensure the equitable participation of all minorities, including African Americans, women, and small businesses in providing goods and services to the city-county government. The goal of this section is to increase the use of such minorities and small businesses to a level comparable with their availability. This participation goal shall be used as a guideline to the Commission and shall not be construed as a ceiling or quota.

(c) In furtherance of the policies stated in subsections (a) and (b) of this section, the Commission shall employ a person to serve as equal employment opportunity director and as director of minority and small business opportunities. The director shall develop and, subject to the approval of the Commission, implement such policies, procedures, and guidelines as the director deems necessary or appropriate to ensure equal employment opportunities for all citizens. The director, subject to the approval of the Commission, shall propose and implement such policies, procedures, and guidelines as are necessary and appropriate to ensure equal opportunities for all businesses and citizens in contracting with the Commission and all departments, agencies, authorities, and other entities of local government and to encourage the development of minority and small businesses within Richmond County. In addition, said director shall have such other powers and duties as may from time to time be afforded by action of the Commission.

(d) The Commission shall establish a citizens advisory council for minority employment and small business opportunities to advise the Commission and director of matters pertaining to this section, and to meet with minorities and small businesses to review the problems of minority and small business opportunities.

(1995 Ga. Laws, p. 3648; 1996 Ga. Laws, p. 3607; 1997 Ga. Laws, p. 4024; 1997 Ga. Laws, p. 4690)

## Sec. 1-41. Amendments.

The Commission shall have the authority upon the affirmative votes of two-thirds of those elected



# Exhibit A, PART III

to the Commission, excluding the Mayor, to change the provisions of this Act which conflict with existing or future state or federal laws; provided, however, that no provisions shall be made which diminish or change the principle of representation of citizens by district on the Commission or any other entity.

## Sec. 1-42. Town of Blythe.

Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed so as to amend, modify, or repeal an Act incorporating the Town of Blythe, Georgia, approved August 3, 1920.

(1995 Ga. Laws, p. 3648; 1996 Ga. Laws, p. 3607; 1997 Ga. Laws, p. 4024; 1997 Ga. Laws, p. 4690)

## Sec. 1-43. Transition task force.

(a) Effective July 1, 1995, there is created a transition task force for the purpose of planning and preparing for the assumption of governmental powers by the Commission on January 1, 1996. The transition task force shall be composed of members as follows:

- (1) The board of commissioners of Richmond County shall appoint four members. One of such members shall be the chairperson of the board of commissioners, who shall serve as a member of the transition task force until January 1, 1996. The commissioners appointed to the task force shall be apportioned so that at least two of the commissioners are representatives of existing county commission districts three, six, seven, and eight and two commissioners are representatives of existing county commission districts one, two, four, and five;
- (2) The city council of the City of Augusta shall appoint four members. One of such members shall be the mayor of the City of Augusta, who shall serve as the chief executive officer of the transition task force. The city council representatives who are appointed shall be apportioned so that at least two of such members are representatives of former Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 12,

and 13 and two of such members are representatives of former Wards 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11;

- (3) The members of the General Assembly of Georgia whose districts include all or any portion of Richmond County shall appoint four members; and
- (4) The board of commissioners of the City of Hephzibah shall appoint one member, provided that, if the voters of the City of Hephzibah do not approve an Act enacted by the General Assembly of Georgia at its regular session in 1995 amending the charter of the City of Hephzibah providing for a reorganized government in Richmond County and providing for the repeal of said charter, the membership of such member on the transition task force shall be abolished on the date the results of such referendum are certified.

Any vacancy on the transition task force shall be filled by the appointing authority which originally appointed the member to such vacant position. The transition task force shall meet upon the call of the chief executive officer of the transition task force for the purpose of planning and scheduling the initial organization of the government in accordance with the applicable provisions of this Act. Any transition task force in existence on January 1, 1996, is abolished.

(b) The transition task force shall be authorized to make such recommendations as it deems appropriate for the assumption of governmental powers by the Commission on January 1, 1996. The transition task force is specifically charged with the responsibility of developing proposed ordinances, including ordinances relating to the creation of special services tax districts, which should be considered for adoption by the Commission at its first regular meeting held following January 1, 1996, or at a regular meeting of the Commission held as soon thereafter as practicable.

(c) All officers, officials, including elected officials, and employees of Richmond County, the City of Augusta, and the City of Hephzibah shall cooperate with and assist the transition task force. The transition task force shall be entitled to

