

Texas After Violence Project
Interview with Roderick Johnson

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Location:	Home of Roderick Johnson, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas
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Equipment:	Sony FDR-AX1
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[CLIP 1]

AEMS EMSWILER: So, my name is aems emswiler, I'm here today with Jane Field on videography, and Roderick Johnson. We've reviewed the consent documentation for this video, for the Texas After Violence Project Archive, the oral history archive. Do you consent to this interview?

RODERICK JOHNSON: Yes.

EMSWILER: So to start off, can you just tell us where are you from — where were you born?

JOHNSON: I grew up in Marshall, Texas. It's a small town in East Texas, Piney Woods. Mostly, 20,000 people, one high school. I went to a Catholic school out there. Grew up on a ranch, about 300 acres out there. Being out there we raised our own food, our own livestock, so we were pretty much a self-sufficient household which was basically ran by my great-grandfather. Worked the fields as a kid. Did lots of farm work, hay-baling, things like that. It was a nice town, very racist town when I was kind of growing up, because it's kind of like a separated town. You know, one part of the town is mostly white on this side, mostly blacks on that side, you know? But now it's more integrated.

It's actually a very quaint town. I enjoyed growing up there. I have a lot of good childhood friends, a lot of good childhood memories there. It's a pretty nice place. Mostly wonderland of lights at Christmas, lots of pine trees, lots of lakes, lots of fishing, lots of hunting, things like that. Mostly a retirement town now. Everybody's moved away, factories are gone that was there when I was there. So it's actually a pretty nice place. And that was kind of like where I got my start in life. Big church orientation. Went to a family church. Come from a huge family.

My grandfather had eight brothers and four sisters, and each of them had very large extended families. Coming from where we come from there's a lot of — we all had homes situated there within perimeter of each other. So we were the only friends and family that we knew, because there were so many of us that were the same age, and so many that would be a little bit older, a little bit younger, so we kind of used each other as playmates. We all went to school together and gravitated to each other while we were attending school. The church was a family church, it was basically built by the community that we lived in and was predominantly all family members. We had a scholarship fund for each one of us that actually went to the church. Which is kind of like continuing education, college, because education was real big in my family.

EMSWILER: You said y'all went to school together. Where did y'all go to school?

JOHNSON: We went to St. Joseph Catholic School. I went to a private school up until the sixth grade. After that I came to Dallas, that's where my mother first moved, to Dallas. And one year

here in Dallas, out in the Duncanville area. I stayed one year then went back to Marshall. The city life wasn't for me at that time. You know, I was from the country, that's all I knew, and friends and family — everything that I really knew was there. And I didn't, basically, adjust or acclimate to being in the city. It was more fast, the people weren't friendly, the people weren't loving and kind. It was a lot of things that I wasn't used to. So I returned home and graduated high school. I stayed there until after high school and I would come back and forth to Dallas with my mother in the summers. After school, I was the first person to go into the military from my family. — Well, actually I had other family members that went into the military, but one of my mom's oldest cousins died — he was an airplane pilot in Vietnam. And dying in Vietnam, really took my family out of the realm of military service. Military service was not something that they really particularly cared for. They felt like they were more education geared, as opposed to relying on military as a form of trying to make a living. Most of them are middle class people. Very, very Christian people.

So, I went into the military, and then started attending San Diego State University as a course because that was one of the primary reasons I went into the military. I actually went into the military with a friend. That's how I got involved in that. And then when I went, one of the conditions— I was seventeen years old when I graduated high school, so my family, my mom, had signed for me to go into the military. So the only way they would sign the papers for the military would be the option that I was able to attend college at least. Went to San Diego State University, came home in 1991. After coming home in 1991 I enrolled in the University of Texas in Arlington and finished my last year in college there, gaining a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration. After the college times, I started working with a place called Cultures Barbecue and Grill, and they were a pretty good family-oriented restaurant here in Dallas, and I became a restaurant manager with them.

Becoming a restaurant manager with them kind of put me in a position to further my career in management. That was the first instance I had in management. After business, I mean after staying there, is when I had my first interaction, more or less, with drugs and alcohol. Drugs and alcohol were a big thing in the Navy. I mean drugs— I mean, alcohol was big in the Navy, drugs not so big. But that's kind of like, where I started a downhill spiral, more to say. I'm more allergic to drugs than alcohol. It plays a dramatic effect when it— you know, really — the phenomenon of craving for me at that time was intense, simply because it was something that I didn't do. But, I had smoked marijuana in high school, things like that, and that's kind of like, kept me mellowed and not much trouble. So I start having struggles getting to work, things like that. I felt kind of compelled that the job wasn't sufficient, I didn't want to hear what you had to say, I don't care if I'm late, you know what I mean? That's your problem. And I moved on [laughter]. So moving on, I started working with Merrill Lynch as a small business consultant with them for a couple of years. And the same spiral continued. Left there, started selling cars for a while. That

didn't go so good, partying a lot. So I said, well I'll uproot from here, geographical location is what they call it. Doing a geographical location, I went back to Marshall. My great grandfather died when I was in high school, my last — my senior year of high school, which was devastating for me. Missing that father component was very emotional for me at that time, because he's pretty much all I knew as a father figure. After my grandfather, this was my great grandfather. He was pretty much — he took the role because my grandfather died, I think when I was eight or nine years old, and he was pretty much the caretaker. My grandmother is pretty much the primary caretaker of the family. You know she's — we — our family is very patriarchal, there's patriarchs in our family, where people are — we look up to the elders in our family. They kind of, lead the direction of where everyone else goes. After going back there, I moved into the family house, you know, because no one was living there. After moving there, I had moved there with some friends from Dallas, so pretty much I took the problem with me [laughter]. One of our neighbors, which was good friends with my grandfather, his father died. He was a lawyer living in Tyler. He would come home on the weekends, and me and him knew each other, and I wended up, after using one night, burglarizing his house. I didn't know there was an alarm on the house, which there was. So, the alarm went off, the police came. After the police came, me being the upstanding citizen I felt at four o'clock in the morning, going out there and talking to the police, finding out why all these police were in the yard [laughter].

After going out there, I was automatically the first suspect. What are you doing up at four o'clock in the morning fully dressed? You know what I mean, like, You don't have a house-robe on and slippers. So that was my first arrest — and first interaction with the criminal justice system. That time within the criminal justice system was the first time I'd been in trouble and I think maybe I was 23 or 24 years old at the time. That was my first time knowing how to even deal with the criminal justice system, so I was green. A friend of mine, we were growing pot out there — we were doing a lot of things no one knew we were doing. After the police came they found most of the pot plants we were growing inside of the house and so, we went to jail, ten thousand dollar bond for me, two-thousand dollar bond for him, because I took the blame for the burglary, which I did and he had no opportunity. And so my friend bonded him out, made him go and show where all that stuff was before the land gets confiscated. He comes back and says, "The police are suspecting you." But they had no proof. And so he says, "You better go down there and you better tell them people everything because they say they're going to send you to prison." They're going to do this, they're going to do that, these things are going to happen. I never been in trouble before.

So I went down there and told them everything. So basically I confessed, which is today, a modern form of extortion. You know, that's how most people go in and out of the criminal justice system — with those kinds of assurances that everything's going to be okay, and you're thinking that's the way it's going to be. So I'm telling what's going on and he's going to let me

just go home. But that's not the way it turns out. And, so, after that I was given ten years probation. After getting ten years probation I came back to Dallas, starting working more with — as a waiter in different restaurants. Drug use continued. As the drug use continued, I moved into a state of just losing control. So I had transferred my probation to Dallas, and after being in Dallas probation kind of worked out. Winded up in jail for some reason, after I winded up in jail — can't remember the exact reason, but it was something drug related and after going to jail, that's when I was sent back to Marshall. Told to go through treatment at that time, you know, it was only trying to change my life more to please the probation officer, please the family, make everything great again. And after making everything great again, everything was going to be fine. And it didn't work out that way. So in 1996 I absconded from probation. Finally caught up to me I think in 1997 and that was the first time that I was sent into the prison system.

Being a first-time offender, they only kept me there for about eighteen months on a ten-year sentence. After eighteen months, I was released on parole and this would have been like August of 1998, and after August of 1998, I got out on parole. Probably lasted about five months, and violated parole. I violated parole with possession of a controlled substance and after violating parole with possession, I was sent to a state jail for about six months. And due to the fact I was on parole, four months or five months, the parole revoked my parole. And that's when I went into the prison system for the second time, on a parole violation. And that was year 2000. In year 2000 was when I was in the Gurney Unit for what was probably a year or so. After being there a year — it's just a transfer facility, so being a transfer facility it's not a permanent housing — that's when I was sent to the Allred Unit.

EMSWILER: Can you speak a little bit about your experience on parole? What are some of the reasons that led up to violation of parole?

JOHNSON: The violation of parole happened due to the fact I was using, dirty UAs [a violation of probation], half reporting — those were the things that really violated it, and then catching a possession of a controlled substance charge was basically picking up a new felony conviction. And picking up a new felony conviction actually is you know, pretty much grounds that actually sends you back to prison. Had it been a technical violation which is dirty UAs, things like that, I probably could have gotten different alternatives. You know like, SAFP [Substance Abuse Felony Punishment Facility] or some kind of drug treatment program or something like that, but catching a felony conviction, you have no opportunity to actually have an opportunity to plead your case.

EMSWILER: Who was there for you during that time?

JOHNSON: My family was there for me then. During the '94 - '97 period, I had begun to destroy family relationships. Most of my family relationships at that time had begun to deteriorate

dramatically, because I had stole from my family, lied to my family, and it was always going to get better. You know, you were making these false promises. So they stuck by me, my grandmother and my aunt Mildred, which is my grandfather's brother's wife, and both of them were deceased, but her and my grandmother kind of raised me as a child. Both of them were there for me. They wrote me faithfully every week. My grandmother supported me one hundred percent financially. Not one time did I go without while I was in prison. So I never had that issue, so family was there for me then, from their point of view. You know, but mother, cousins, people like that you know, had drifted out of my life and I had drifted out of theirs. My life was in one direction, theirs was in another. I didn't care about their direction, they didn't care about mine at the time. That was how my family relationships were and I always had financial support and moral support each time I was in prison.

EMSWILER: So they continued to write to you while you were in Allred?

JOHNSON: Yes, yes. They were — that's kind of — the Allred situation was — when I got to Allred, I was immediately approached by prison gangs. Preferably a Gangster Disciple by the name of Andy [inaudible- dragged me in?]. He told me — you know everybody knew that I was a homosexual — and he told me that homosexuals on this unit have to have a man. I was more dominant, you know, defiant that that's not what I needed. If that was the norm and that's how people operated, and people chose to be with somebody out of — that's the way things are, I chose not to do that. I had a — they had what they call set-up situations, to where I had a fight with a crip the following morning. The guy Andy steps forward, and he's basically like, hey, okay y'all had this fight. And they were like, well a homosexual beat you up, this that and the other — that's total violation of the code in prison. And so he basically steps forward and says, "Hey, this is mine, I'm going to represent this." And, not knowing the culture, the politics, it was more of a protective pairing, as it was called then. I don't think that it was more of a situation of me — I felt comfortable with him, you know I felt grateful, gratitude that he actually stepped forward and done that. He made me feel like he was my friend. I wrote my grandmother, and she would always continue to write and I would correspond with her. And he [Andy] and I got into a relationship, and being in a relationship with him made me property of the Gangster Disciples.

After about two months of this then, the leaders of his gang approached him and told him that I would have to be doing a little bit more to contribute, financially, to the gang — not just him. I didn't agree with that and that was the first time that I was actually violently attacked. And I told Andy that we would no longer be together — I'm with you not your gang. We separated. That wasn't something he wanted to happen because he felt like you belonged to him. Then we had a fight [laughter]. And after us having a fight, we were separated and then his gang pretty much intervened and that's when Mexican Mafia, Crips, Bloods, Aryan Nation, Aryan Brotherhood, the Tangos, pretty much took ownership. Went into a big war on the facility over ownership of

me. Lots of turmoil, lots of drama for me. I went to the administration — that's when I first approached the administration and told them what was going on. Administration said I had no evidence. I went back, went through the pimping process, had to have sex with numerous guys — sometimes two, three guys a day, at their behest, not my own. I went back to the administration a second time. This time, go before another UCC panel. A UCC panel is basically who decides if you get protection or not.

EMSWILER: What does UCC stand for?

JOHNSON: Unit Classification Committee. And they're— consists of a warden or a major as the committee chairman, as classification official, and then another ranking official on the facility such as a lieutenant — it could be anybody. Went back the second time and they said, "Okay, we're going to investigate this." Didn't take me out of the situation, they only went down there and asked all the people's whose names you gave them — did they do this, and were they doing that. Which only — everybody denied it, and after, denying it only intensified the treatment I started receiving then, because then I was branded not only as a sex slave but also a snitch. Which kind of brought a new form of ownership, which means that you had to choose for protection until you could actually find a way to get protection.

Went to UCC again for the third time. After that, nothing happened — no evidence. And that's when I started writing my grandmother and my aunt and explaining to them what was going on. And you need to come down here and talk to these people. They had no knowledge of how to approach the system. These were old ladies by the time that I got to Allred, and their only means of comfort were to pray if this is happening. Fifth time — went to UCC again. And it was the same outcome. This time they said, "Okay, we're going to move you to another building." They moved me to another building, moved me to another building, means that the problem followed you there because that's when the Tangos and Eric [inaudible 30:41] said that he was now in charge. So I started going through the same process. Then sold from dorm to dorm.

I wrote home a sixth time and my aunt's daughter, Sharon Bailey, who lives in Houston, had a son that had been incarcerated. So she was a little bit more familiar with how to handle the system than they were. And she called and she was, you know, very demanding to know what was happening and, "Why weren't you getting protection." And they said, "Okay, we'll look into this and he'll be alright and this, that and the other, nothing's wrong, we've investigated, blah blah blah blah blah," and gave her the run-around. I'd write her another month and tell her to call again and they'd say the same thing. Another month, the same thing. Finally they were just, [their hands was wringed], like, you know — "There's nothing we can do, every time we call these people are stonewalling us." So the seventh time going to UCC, I went in and had to go in in make up before the committee. And that's when the classification committee had insulted me and

they told me, "Oh, you're just a dirty tramp. Get that make up off your face. You want this shit, this is what you want. This is what you need. If that's what you're getting that's what you're supposed to be getting."

Right when I had got to Allred the first thing that was told to me in the first, initial, Unit Classification Committee which puts you in housing, was that, "Don't touch my white boys on this unit." And I said "Well, I'm a homosexual and I'm supposed to be in safekeeping." And he said, "Well, we don't protect punks on this farm." And they didn't. And at that point, I think like the eighth time going to UCC, it was a form of more insults. This time the warden said, "Well, I can't believe all of these Crips and Bloods is letting no Black be used by Hispanics and Whites. Why don't you just go down there and get one of them to protect you?" And I said, "Well why do I have to have gangs protect me? I came into here over and over and over and told you what was going on." And he says, "Well, maybe you have to learn how to fight because there's nothing that says Black homosexuals can't make it in general population." And I said, "So you're telling me I need to go down here and fight to survive, to live?" And he said, "Woah now, I didn't tell you to go down there and use a weapon, I just said go down there and fight." So this is the eighth time, and I did.

When I went down there and fought, I was locked up, I was stripped up, all of my line class status which basically would have helped me make parole — I was put in solitary confinement for fifteen days, and basically put in a disciplinary dorm which was medium custody, which is the worse building, which means everything intensified. That's when I was sold to the Texas Mafia. But the leader of the Texas Mafia that I was sold to was — understood my plight. And that was the first time that the ACLU was coming in as part of the Ruiz lawsuit, and it was the ACLU of Texas. And the leader of that gang actually said, "I'm just doing this because I don't think this is right, what's going on with you." So he was the first sympathetic pimp that I ever had. He made things seem as though I was being abused by him, that he had control, that he was in charge and, I mean, he role played. And the ACLU was just going around interviewing people but they couldn't take any kind of action to help anybody. So he told the ACLU people, they were like, "Do you know people that's been raped?" And he said, "Yeah, that homosexual upstairs up there has been raped numerous times. Went to UCC and they didn't do nothing." So Meredith Martin Roundtree came and talked to me, but there was nothing she could do.

After that he was real, real heavy in drugs and tobacco in the facility. Pretty much had all of the corrupt guards in his pocket. Somehow, somehow he got locked up for that. He was too powerful and they sent him to seg [administrative segregation], so I lost my only hope, my only protection. Finally, I was able to get in touch with a friend that I told about the ACLU, and he's told me about the ACLU helping people that are in prison rape situations. So I got to UCC one more time and I'm like, "This boy's gone. My only protection is gone and I'm going to die, either in my own

hands or I'm going to die at the hands of somebody else." Their approach was, "Let us know when it happens." Then I wrote the National Prison Project and probably about three weeks later I was called out to the major's office for an attorney phone call, and Craig [Calloway] and Amy Fettig from the ACLU's National Prison Project was on that telephone. I told them everything that happened. He said, "You mean these people have done this to you over and over and over and over again?" And I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well do you have any — I mean what proof do you got?" I said, "Over the past two years this has happened, I got every grievance, every letter I wrote my family, I got every phone call documented that they've called up here and told these people what the hell's going on." He said, "Well, you mean to tell me you they allowed you to keep all that?" I said, "They don't care. They felt like all of this was redundant anyway." He says, "I'm going to put our director Amy Fettig on the plane tonight and they're going to come talk to you." They came, talked to me, and I told them everything that'd happened, and they were totally devastated. I turned in every piece of evidence I had to them, not knowing if they were going to help me, not knowing if they were going to take this out of my hands and I'd be left with nothing. All I could do was give it to them in faith that something would happen.

They contacted Sharon and asked her what they were telling her on the phones, and she told them everything that I had wrote in those letters, and everything she had said when she wrote those people. At that point, the ACLU called me back and the ACLU told me at that time, they said, "Mr. Johnson your evidence is overwhelming. We're going to send Amy back down there again and you can sign some forms and we're going to represent you. We usually only handle class action lawsuits, we don't do individual cases, but this case is just — the magnitude is too devastating, we're just compelled to get you out of that situation. Even though it goes against what we do, we're just bound to have to do something, we just can't stand by and see this happen." They gave me a call again after that, and you know, we discussed the terms of the agreements and things like that. The major walks in and says, "Get off the phone." I said, "Well I'm talking to my attorney." "I don't give a fuck about no attorney. The ACLU don't run a goddamn thing here." And they [the ACLU] said, "Who just said that?" and I said, "That's the major." And they said, "We have to do something fast because they're probably going to kill you now."

A couple of days later I got another phone call and that's when they told me that they were— as of nine o'clock Texas time, they would have a letter on the desk of the governor of Texas. George Bush had just ran for president and just made president, which means Rick Perry was taking his place into the election. So technically George Bush was president, I mean technically he was still governor, but Rick Perry took his place until he was inaugurated. So technically George Bush was governor but Rick Perry was basically operating Texas at the time. They said, "We're sending a letter to the governor. We're also sending a letter to the director of the prison system." Because their strategy was, "We're either going to have to file this letter or we're going

to have to go to a judge right now and get a temporary restraining order." About nine o'clock that next day, about two years later, I was called to the major's office and told that the director of the prison system had got that letter and it was sent down and they needed a response immediately. I went into the office with the major and he's like "I'm going to investigate this shit and if I don't find nothing, you're going right back out there" because they locked me up that day. The next morning, they called me up there and said, "I didn't find nothing and I'm going to send you out there and I'm going to send you to the worse place I can send you for lying." The head warden [name check] came into the office and he's like "Look Mr. Johnson, we need to resolve this situation, the major said he didn't find nothing and you know, the ACLU are saying this, this, that and the other," he said "When was the last time you was raped?" and I said, "Last night."

And he looks at the major and he's like, "Woah, how is this continuing now?" And then he had a guy in there by the name of Captain [Boyle?]. He said, "Okay Captain [Boyle?] I want you to take Roderick back to this back room and I want you to take his whole statement and everything" and do this and do that. When I went to that room Captain [Boyle?] was like, "Well okay tell me this and tell me that." I said, "Sir, there is really nothing to tell." I said, "The only people that said they're going to help me, I'm going to allow them to do their job, because I've given you people two years to do yours and you didn't do it." And he says, "So what are you saying, you don't want to talk to me?" and I said, "There is nothing to talk about. If you want to talk to somebody you can talk to those people from this point on, and I think they can handle this situation because I have no faith and no trust in none of you." He picked up the phone, called the warden, tells the warden that. The warden comes in there and basically turn over the desk and says, "You'd better stop this shit right now." And I stood my ground, and I told them — I said, "Well, I've told you and you didn't listen. Your staff, your administration didn't listen. So maybe you can hear — now, you hear my cries."

They took me back to solitary confinement because they had locked me up in pre-hearing detention, which is a form of protection until the investigation is complete. I went to classification then, and that morning I went to classification I was told that I was going to be placed in safekeeping, and I was sent to the Michaels Unit and put in safekeeping. I was there maybe thirteen months. Being there thirteen months I had lost everything, I was stripped of all my line class so I couldn't make parole and I had to basically regain all my line class back in order to be eligible for parole. But at least I was in safekeeping to do that. After about thirteen months at Allred — I mean, at Michaels — during that thirteen months there ACLU came and talked to me then and I think two days after that is when they filed the lawsuit. And when they formally filed the lawsuit — when they formally filed the lawsuit, I saw them, then that's when a couple of people from the media came down and talked to me about the story. And one of them was, I think, the USA Today, because the lawsuit got widespread media coverage.

I just remembered that it was like front-page news all over the United States. I remember that, I think, Sharon had told me that she had seen it on the TV, and she had been going online or something and said she had seen it in the New York Times, LA Times, it was everywhere. But they didn't know the grievances that you'd written, they didn't know the letters and kites and all that was being sent to the administration — that they had to read in the newspaper. And my family was devastated, because they felt like they had failed me and they felt like they were at fault and they didn't know that that was what was going on, they just thought you were having problems. But I had never written and gave them the gory details. After that I was released from prison in 2003. While I was at Michaels, the prison system — the litigation, had started and I sought out mental health counseling. I sought out psychological treatment. But due to the litigation they couldn't actually do that, because that would be admitting that it really happened, because their whole thing was it never happened. At that time, I think [name check- Gina ?] was the inspector general at the time and she — that's when the governor took the first step and abolished Internal Affairs in TDCJ, because he'd seen that the internal system had failed me miserably.

I think the governor established the office of the Inspector General, that's when that started and she was like a person that came in with police powers, and she went through everything on that facility and tore it from top to bottom. They went in and changed everything on that unit to make it look good.

EMSWILER: Allred or Michaels?

JOHNSON: On Allred. I mean, she — that was her job, she was tasked. Her and the Texas Rangers were going in there and finding out what happened, on Allred Unit.

EMSWILER: When you were going — do you mind if we back-track a little bit?

JOHNSON: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

EMSWILER: When you were going to UCC over and over — can you talk a little bit about what you were asking them and what you were saying you needed? Talking about safekeeping and what that kind of means.

JOHNSON: When I would go into the committees, the committee is basically designed around your needs. The committee would basically say things like — you know, you go in and you explain your problem, "Well I'm being raped. I'm being sold among prison gangs." Before you go to UCC and you have to file what they call a life endangerment. A life endangerment is basically saying, "My life is in danger." It's investigated by a sergeant and he performs a quote for quote investigation, turns that information over to the UCC committee. The UCC committee

weighs that evidence, if there's any — and usually there isn't any because they don't go talk to anybody, at that time — and then you give them your story and they ask, "Well what will resolve this problem?" You know, "I need to go to safekeeping." And then those three people on that panel decide if you need safekeeping or not. And in my case, nine times and nobody on either of those panels felt I needed safekeeping, which is a form of protective housing for people that are openly gay, transgender, ex-gang members, people that has hits on them, things like that. That's what safekeeping is basically designed of.

EMSWILER: So safekeeping and protective custody are synonymous — the same thing? And then, ad seg — is that a form of temporary safekeeping or is that just kind of —?

JOHNSON: No, safekeeping and protective custody are two separate —

EMSWILER: Oh, okay.

JOHNSON: — forms of custody. Protective custody goes to the extent of putting you in ad seg which means you're locked away from everybody. Nobody can get back there to you. The guards have to bring you your food, you have to come out of the cell and go to a shower, the guards have to do that, you have to be escorted everywhere you go, they have to shut down the unit, you know, that's protective custody. Safekeeping allows you to live among other inmates and be able to go to the town hall, stuff like that, school, medical, you can go with the general population, you basically live on your own building and go to rec on your own building. So you have a completely separate wing that you are living on and that's what safekeeping is.

EMSWILER: And how was that experience for you?

JOHNSON: It was a sigh of relief. You know, it was comfortable, I felt for the first time that I didn't have to live like that anymore. By the time I got to safekeeping, litigation had just started, so there wasn't much that I had to experience. You know, I mean on safekeeping you still got your racist guards, your homophobic guards, and a lot of things still happen there. But by this time TDCJ was doing everything they could do to try and make sure that nothing happened to you, because they know there was a huge microscope on them then. So, a lot of the things that some people may encounter with those type of people, I didn't have to encounter. Their basic approach and their basic mindset was, "This boy's hands-off." Pretty much, "If he wants it, give it to him. And document it when you give it to him so we can make it look like we're doing our job." They tried every trick in the book. They had their — we had our psychological experts come up and do psychiatric evaluations. They found me psychologically scarred. They would send their psychologists through the courts, that says, "He's not psychologically scarred. I think he's just feigning his symptoms." So that would lock it up in litigation for six, seven months for them to try to say, "Give him some mental health treatment."

They even tried to send an old cell-mate to me one time. They made a deal with him to let him out of prison, if he went in and had sex with me. And then they could have that on record or on tape that it happened and they could use that as justification to show that you wanted this. As that was about to happen, the guard came in, stood on the pod like he was checking the pod the guy was like, "Hey, c'mon, you know, let's go." So we were standing there talking and another guy looks up and he was talking to that guard and he looks up at me and he says, "Don't go in that cell because he's wired." And I knew something was wrong because why would a guard walk another inmate over to another cell-block, just to see you? And he didn't live over there. So I already — you know, it all dawned and it all snapped, and he was talking to me. I remember the lawyers came and I told them about that. And come find out there was a tape. They had him wired the whole time but it was thrown out of court and they were sanctioned behind that because that was basically a form of trying to set me up, and that's when the judge saw that my life was in danger and that's when he told them, "He's going home."

EMSWILER: If safekeeping was so — such a relief and a good place for you, why do you think TDCJ or the UCC committee — what was their reasoning for denying you that over and over and over?

JOHNSON: Well, not protection, you know they said, no evidence, the claims are unsubstantiated, that black homosexuals don't need safekeeping, that there's nothing to say that these Bloods and Crips is letting no Mexican and white boys pimp out no black. These are the things they told me. They said, "You want this shit. I think you like this shit." Those were the reasons they denied me.

EMSWILER: Were those the same reasons they continued to give during the litigation and in the hearings?

JOHNSON: Oh, no. There was absolutely no — I mean after I got to safekeeping there was absolutely, I mean there was a restraining order in place then. A protective order. So other than the instance of trying to set me up with the guy, there was never anything else that ever came out of that, I mean, that they could do because everything they done, all I had to do was write the lawyers and it went straight to the judge. So their only outlet was kicking me out of prison, which was keeping them out of further harm, because had you gotten into a fight, or somebody would have jumped on you, anything like that would have been way more devastating for them. And it had already been written by the USA Today that it was the worst form of prisoner abuse in US history, that's the way their story read. Inmate — you know, and then they gave the story. So at this time Texas was really really looking bad. Legislators were being approached, the governor was being approached, and they were like, "Why are you being this abusive in prisons?" I remember that, that's when — they had overthrown, I think Saddam Hussein at the

time, that's when they invaded Iraq, and they had what they call the Abu Ghraib scandal. The Abu Ghraib scandal is where military guards were abusing the inmates — inmates were being raped over in those prisons that they were using to lock those people up.

It came back that George Bush was a human rights violator because they had actual pictures and people that stepped forward and spoke up about it. And the US government said, No, we don't violate human rights, we don't allow this in our prisons. And the BBC ran a story and said, "You allowed one of your own prisoners in Texas to go through the same thing, so how can the US government say they don't allow this?" And the Abu Ghraib scandal became something that had to prompt litigation by the US government because the world had put then on the spot that you allowed a person in the Texas prison system to go through the same thing. Because you was governor, technically still at the time, that this boy was in your prisons. The state legislature was stunned, the state legislature was devastated. They were looking like some of the worst — the worst prison system in the world at that time. They flew my family to Washington, D.C., back while I was in safekeeping and Sharon testified before US Congress. She met with Just Detention International — well actually Just Detention International is who took them there. And they made them tell Congress, Prison Fellowship, lots of faith-based organizations, the ACLU, all types of people — but they went in and they testified, and they told my story from a family point of view.

George Bush flew them back I think like a week to the White House and they told him the same story, and he says that, "Congress is taking action, and I'm going to guarantee what happened to your son, what happened to your grandson, what happened to your cousin, what happened to your nephew would never happen in another prison again." And I think four months later Congress unanimously passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act in my name back in 2003, and that's kind of like when my case propelled because it became the poster child for prison rape across the country. It sparked the movement for reform because the whole country was outraged when they heard that story, because people thought that it was happening but they never read it. They never read the story and grievances printed in the papers. They never read the story — they never heard it until ABC said it, until CBS said it, 'til all of these people had to tell everybody what was going on. And everybody knew that it was happening and everybody knew that their kids were going through the same thing. They knew that their family members had to face the same fight because these people were hearing the same stories. And people was outraged.

After I was released I was sent all over the country to talk to different universities, judges, criminal justice professionals. At that time I was sent in to do a training video for the National Institute of Corrections, which is the same video that's used today to train all correctional administrators and top prison officials within every prison system. And that video goes play by play on where people are being raped, what time they're being raped, where — how they're being

raped. The showers, stairwells — and it also chronicled how I had to go into a shower stall with nine other people watching me while a mentally ill dude jacked off on me and stuck his finger in my ass. And that was something that had to be shown. And people couldn't take that, people couldn't stomach seeing that no more. And it became something that gave me the opportunity to go out and tell families. And prison officials were scrambling all over the country to clean this up. There were family groups I would go talk to and women would pass out in the crowd simply because one lady said, "My son said the same thing. I got the same letter from my son." Another lady said, "My husband, I sat there and tried to hold his hand and he put his head down the whole time I held his hand, because he was too ashamed to look me in the eye, and I knew something was wrong, because I knew him better than he knew himself." So prison rape became a national issue and I was very honored and became very inspired and I became very fierce in my advocacy to make this known, to do something about it, because the stories I was hearing from those family and women knew — I knew, that those stories weren't just mine. Because I knew other people that were around me that were going through the same thing, but they didn't get lucky like I did. Had I not gotten lucky, it'd still be going today. The same exact thing.

When I got out, I testified before the Texas Criminal Justice Committee and the State Senate. They took PREA a step further and passed what they called the Safe Prisons Program. The Safe Prisons Program says we're going to go a step further — but that was all for the courts. That was all to make it look like, well, "We're going to go the extra mile." But at that time, the extra mile they had to go. But I felt confident, I felt exhilarated, that these people were doing that and I'm glad that there was enough pressure on them to make them finally get a conscience of what they were doing to people in the Texas prison system. And the Texas prison system was a brutal prison system at that time. There were a lot of people that I knew I had left behind that didn't know how to write the ACLU. A lot of people the ACLU wouldn't even respond to their letters because they don't take individual cases. Mine was a needle in a haystack. That's why I feel that God used me. Because that was truly a miracle. That was truly a miracle. I started — then, working through the litigation, doing mostly interviews. Oprah Winfrey, Anderson Cooper — he was with CNN at the time. Time magazine, People magazine — all types of different media outlets. I told every story in graphic detail to let people know what was going on, to bring some attention.

After that I had gotten out — I was out of prison. They had arranged for me to go to Austin because Austin was where the ACLU of Texas was based — that was their headquarters then, wasn't in Houston then. When they made sure that those attorneys and everybody in Houston had gave me a base to be able to work out of and they could kind of coordinate everything for you in

the community, Mike Ward with the Austin American Statesman wrote a story in Austin that went statewide — I mean it was really the first story that people in the state heard — I mean people heard it, but they were hearing it from national papers. But he wrote a story that was picked up all across the state, and that's kind of like what galvanized people here in the state of Texas to do something. And after, I remember, it ran on a Sunday, and I went with a girl from the Crime Prevention Institute back then — they were a real two man organization back then — and she and I — she had read the story from a national level and me and her became real good friends. She took me to a homeless task force meeting with her one day, because that's when I really was interested in social advocacy because that's what I had been doing. And I met a lady named Angela Smith, I think, and she was the executive director at the time of Safe Place. She offered me an apartment and safety at Safe Place. And I was the first man to ever move in to Safe Place.

EMSWILER: What year was this?

JOHNSON: 2004. And I was the first male they ever took into that program. So I lived among like four hundred women that were victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. It was a very interesting time but I was under Austin-Travis county MHMR, receiving intense counseling through Safe Place's counselors, which were private counselors that work at their centers. Through Austin-Travis county MHMR I was able to receive disability. So I started receiving Social Security Disability, which allowed me the opportunity to go out and start doing other things. I was contacted by Ronnie Earle and Darla Gay [name checks] and met with them and they told me about establishing something called a Reentry Round-table. And at that time we call it a Reentry project. Me and Darla Gay and Ronnie Earle put together a whole list of people from the community that we felt would play a part in that. And we convened our first meeting about four months later. And that's when we call it the Reentry Round-table. And I was one of the people that helped start that in Austin, and from what I understand it still exists today, except it's gotten stronger.

I was the vice-chairman of the Discharge Planning Committee of the Austin-Travis County Homeless Task Force, and I was a member of the Community Action Network. Did a lot of advocacy work in Austin. Actually, TAASA approached me after that, them and the National Center for Domestic Violence, was ran by Julia Waters, and I remember Annette Burrhus-Clay

and Anita Perry, which was Rick Perry's wife, she worked at TAASA at the time. And she was their development officer or something like that. TAASA back then I think only had six employees, they were that small. They basically had to coordinate the whole state.

EMSWILER: Can you say what TAASA stands for?

JOHNSON: TAASA is the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault. And her and Anita Perry became real mentors of mine and they actually groomed me for going out and speaking against sexual abuse. And that's when I started doing a lot of sexual abuse work across the state with TAASA. And the program that they have is the incarcerated survivor program, was a brainchild that came back then, it just never took off until Erica Gammill got there and she's actually turned it into a success. That's kind of like how I came into contact with knowing who Erica was. Back in — so the trial came about in 2006 and the trial brought out a lot of emotions. It made my feelings — everything I felt, everything I knew, was raw. I mean they stripped me all the way down of every emotional defense I had built up over the last two or three years that this case was going on. I had to face accusers, I had to face guys that stepped forward the put their life on the line, that said they were pimps that had to come in and testify, and I had to face these people on a day to day basis.

I relapsed back into substance abuse. This went on for about, maybe a year, and that's when I caught a new charge, which was a robbery charge. Didn't have a gun or anything like that, it was just a simple robbery to a store, a convenience store. I was sent back to prison for nineteen years. Going back to prison, I probably stayed within TDCJ probably a day, and they sent me immediately to the New Mexico Department of Corrections on an interstate compact, which is where I did the first four years of my incarceration — in another state.

EMSWILER: New Mexico?

JOHNSON: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I was housed there for four years for my protection. The litigation factor was too high for them, you know, they were like, "We are not going through this —" [laughter]. And so I stayed there for four years, but the story was national — everybody knew who you were. And New Mexico don't have jailhouse lawyers and people that have high-profile litigation. They have not the same problems over there — over there, there's no such thing as prison rape over there amongst them — I never saw it. As far as it is to — the way the

system is ran in trying to get the standards of living to come up, I assisted a lot of inmates. I had built a vast network of lawyers and different organizations I could rely on while I was out, and I provided them access to those and New Mexico wasn't too happy [laughter]. And they immediately sent you back to Texas. After they were like, you know, this is it. So coming back to Texas, I was immediately placed into solitary confinement.

EMSWILER: In which unit?

JOHNSON: At the Pack 1 Unit, which is where I was placed in the quote "protective custody" which is ad seg. You remain in the cell twenty four hours a day. You come out for one hour a day for recreation, the rest of the time you're locked in a cell — with no human contact. With mental health issues, being the victim of sexual abuse, it opened up a lot of horrible wounds, and they tried to band-aid it by putting a TV in my cell. Then solitary confinement had become a hot button topic. That's when lots of litigation around solitary confinement was beginning to start, and I read about that. I wrote JDI and I wrote TAASA because —

EMSWILER: What's JDI?

JOHNSON: Just Detention International. A human rights organization that goes against prison rape. Their old name used to be called Stop Prison Rape. And that organization was very, very familiar because I used to be on their National Survivor's Network. At the time — there's another — Chris Kaiser at TAASA, I wrote Annette Clay and she appointed him to do what he could. And Chris Kaiser and Just Detention International begin fighting side by side with me, working with prison officials to get me out of solitary confinement.

EMSWILER: And you said you'd called TPI as well?

JOHNSON: That was later down the line.

EMSWILER: Oh, sorry, I messed up.

JOHNSON: Yeah, that was later down the line. So Just Detention International and TAASA started working with me. And they were giving them a lot of road blocks to let me out, and when they were giving me a lot of road blocks to let me out, then that's when, I said, okay and I'm

going get them some more help. I started — I wrote NAMI, Texas, and I think Rebecca Koval wrote me back.

EMSWILER: And can you define NAMI? Sorry, so many acronyms! (both laugh).

JOHNSON: National Alliance on Mental Illness. And she wrote me back. Wasn't familiar with the prison system — never had been. But I had Erica call her and explain the prison process and NAMI was like, "Oh, he's mentally ill we're going to help. We want to be a part of this task force." And then — you know, that's what I called it from my prison cell, a task force — and then I wrote the National Center for Transgender Equality — I probably wrote about thirty Texas senators and congressmen and I probably wrote over a hundred organizations across the country that were litigating against solitary confinement. So NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness, stepped in and joined the team. The National Center for Transgender Equality wrote me back, and they joined the team. And Erica and Rebecca primarily organized and galvanized these organizations, and they were having weekly conference calls on what to do. I wrote the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking in Los Angeles, wrote me back and Sara Leddy called — and gave me a call. And she joined in and said — the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking was going to back their efforts up with litigation against solitary confinement.

That's when Trans Pride Initiative wrote back. And there wasn't much they could do, being a small organization, but the dedication of writing my letters, and — they felt intimidated by the bigger organizations quote, "because we don't work with the bigger organization because, you know, you need to just keep dealing with them if you got them on your team." So we fought them and once the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking came in, then that's when they all made a joint meeting with Brian Collier and Oscar Mendoza. The meeting was set for like May the tenth or something like that. I think May the first or the second of 2017, they came to the unit and pulled me out and talked to me, which has never been done in TDCJ — you're never going to get the executive director of the prison system to come talk to nobody. He may come talk to a warden, but he ain't coming to talk to no inmate. So they took everything serious because they knew what was coming against their solitary confinement and then they changed their solitary confinement policy, to where it's not used for victims and survivors of sexual abuse, and they basically overturned their solitary policy so solitary confinement no longer exists in the

Texas prison system, because I was refusing to give up and I said, "Yea we're getting justice for me but we're going to keep this fight against solitary confinement." So they cleaned it up.

So after they met with me, Cynthia Tawton from DC, National Center for Transgender Equality, TAASA, NAMI, I remember Greg Hansch from NAMI, Rebecca Koval, Erica Gammill, Chris Kaiser, Sara Leddy, all of them went and met with TDCJ officials and explained what was coming if I didn't get out of solitary confinement. I think they assured them that they were going to find some alternative, you know, "We've got to do something — we're either going to send him back out of state or put him back in safekeeping."

EMSWILER: How long had you been in solitary at this time?

JOHNSON: Six years. Six years in solitary confinement, while they fought the whole six years— NAMI, TAASA and JDI were the primary people that stuck by me the whole six years. Then, about three weeks — I guess it was early June — after they met with him, a guy from the unit parole officer came, pulled me out and said, "Hey, I was told to come interview you." And I was like, "What? I think I come up for parole in about another year, I was just denied like in March." He says, "I don't know, I guess your file came back up or something, I don't know what's going on, but I was told to come interview you" and blah blah blah blah blah. About two weeks later I was told that I was granted parole. I was released (coughs) in early August and I went (coughs) to the Beaumont transitional center because they were trying to kick me out of the system so fast they didn't give my family time enough to react and respond that they were going to let me stay there.

EMSWILER: And what year was this?

JOHNSON: 2017.

EMSWILER: 2017.

JOHNSON: So I had to go to the Beaumont transitional center, so while I'm there, waiting to get my family to give me an address and give them the green light to let me go, then Hurricane Harvey hits. The entire unit flooded and I spent about four nights in waist-deep water. The entire unit flooded, they couldn't get any guards in to provide food — anything. So the whole facility had flooded out and nobody could get in there to bring food, water, anything. After about two

days of that everybody was kind of hungry and raided the kitchen. Then the guards that had been there for four days without going home — because no guards could come to work — after two days they were so exhausted they left their post. So the inmates had basically just taken over the facility, overran the gates just to get to a store. Overran the stores in the area just to eat. And then we were finally bust out, and evacuated to the Gib Lewis Unit. I can't remember where it's at exactly, but I was there for about two days. Called my family and told them what was going on and they were like, "Look, somebody got to get you out of there." A day later I was sent here to Dallas. And that was like the first of September.

When I got here, the first of September, while I was in prison I had read a lot of work of issues that were hot button issues that I was passionate about and I became passionate about, and I became very dedicated to the organizations that worked with me for the past six years. When I got out, each of those organizations provided me the opportunity to start working with their organizations and connecting with their organizations. They started moving me around. Got here in September, started going to the library every day, all day long. Just doing massive research on computers, reading, getting involved and just learning the city itself. And I went to the National Alliance on Mental Illness Annual Conference — State Conference, as a guest in November and while I was there I was able to meet with Senator Whitmire and Representative Four Price and establish a real good relationship with a lot of different NAMI chapter leaders and members. And they were putting together their Peer Leadership Council again and they approached John Dornheim, which is the policy director over at NAMI, because I had rode down with him and the education director. They pretty much nominated me for the peer leadership position of Dallas — to represent Dallas. And John was like, "Yeah, that guy I think would be perfect to fit into that job." After that, I think I met with John, then the Peer Leadership Council met, but I finally was able to — I think my first project was, I had been at that library every day and got to know everybody there. And me and Lin Lim — she's the library's program director, she told me about how they have events there and stuff like that — they had space. After that, I think I — early December, I think I organized my first event at the library — awareness event.

Then in January — no, yes, I think I took Christmas off — no right before Christmas, I contacted a guy named Dave the Superman. He has one of the largest homeless ministries in Dallas, and every year he partners with the Omni hotel and the Omni hotel gives a hundred and forty homeless people a free hotel room on like the tenth floor at the Omni. And then on the third day

we feed them all. It's like a big gala in their ballroom. It's like, people come out and the volunteers are like maître d's, you know and they're treated like royalty that day. He was the first volunteer project I had — major volunteer organizing project that I had. After that I think that — me and Erica were talking a lot and I was doing a little work and I think right before Christmas while that was going on somehow — Oh! As a matter of fact I was doing some volunteering over at TPI at the time. And the ACLU's of Texas were getting ready — they were preparing to kick off their Smart Justice Campaign. She told me about it, she was like, "Well, I got this maybe you might want to contact them. I don't work with the ACLU." And I said of course, I'm trying to do everything I can in the community. They called me probably two or three days later. Blair Wallace from the ACLU's Smart Justice Campaign contacted me, gave me a brief overview of what it was going to look like, what it was going to be like, and what kind of role I could play, and offered me a position on their advisory board and an opportunity to be a canvasser for them on their Smart Justice Education Campaign in the community. It was paying like thirteen, fourteen dollars an hour.

So finally, in January, that project came together and I organized a event with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture at the library and and after organizing that event at the library, because I was looking at all types of events and things that I could participate in — I was looking at a lot of different organizations and reaching out to them at this time. After reaching out to them, the National Religious Campaign gave me like a small grant to put that National Week To Close Guantanamo event on. I done that and then I started getting with — getting a little bit active with NAMI, a little. At first the NAMI Dallas people didn't know me because NAMI Dallas and NAMI Texas didn't really work together, so they were kind of reluctant to work with me at first. I was still participating in the peer leadership council meetings because it's basically ran through NAMI Texas, coordinated by Rebecca Koval. Then the advisory board met and I started doing canvassing work with the ACLU I think about mid-January, end of January, then I helped organize the Black Joy Brunch for Color of Change, here in Dallas. It was on Martin Luther King Day. After organizing that event, it turned out successful. And finally, the ACLU finally started giving me a more active role in their Smart Justice Campaign. I met a lot of people in the community at that event. Networked with a lot of people and started getting involved with the Texas Organizing Project. Then I — after that I think I was doing that, things just took off from there [laughter]. I mean everything took off.

Oh! and I think Sara Leddy from the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking, I'm going to go back a little bit, when I was — before the NAMI conference I think, Erica was reaching out to make sure resources were there, things were organized for you, Rebecca was doing it, and Sara Leddy said, "Well, hey, I might have something too, we have what we call the National Survivor's Network." And the National Survivor's Network is the advocacy and speaker bureau for the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking. I was interviewed by them and then I became a member of the National Survivor's Network, which basically provides me the opportunity to do speaking engagements all over the country now. So that had all fell into place, and then after that fell into place, Cynthia Totten from JDI sent Jason Lydon, from Black and Pink, and Evie Litwok [name check] in New York — she put us in touch together I think in first part of January, something like that. She put us in touch with each other and then that's when they made me a member of the National LGBT Working Group.

EMSWILER: Black and Pink, or —?

JOHNSON: No, the National LGBT Working Group consists of — maybe we could take a break?

EMSWILER: Yes, absolutely, sorry I should have checked earlier.

[END CLIP 1]

[CLIP 2]

JOHNSON: Part of the working group — I became a part of the LGBT National Working Group, which is the ACLU's legislative office, ACLU LGB-AIDS Project, Prison National—Prison Project, AIDS United, Black and Pink, Break-Out, Campaign For Youth Justice, Center for American Progress, Center for Constitutional Rights — just a number of groups that are all a part of the working group. And we are the incarcerated members of the working group, and it consists of about seventeen of us from across the country, which is Jason Lydon — started Black and Pink — Evie Litwok who started Witness to Mass Incarceration — a number of other people. I haven't met everyone but we'll be meeting — I'll be going to my first meeting June tenth through fourteenth in Washington D.C. in the Human Rights Campaign Headquarters. And the National Center for Lesbian Rights, Human Rights Campaign are basically going to be hosting it for us this year. Working with them, then I'm working with the ACLU's Smart Justice Campaign, doing work with them. After I joined the working group, I started stepping more into a heavier role with National Survivor's Network and doing speaking engagements for them. Then out of those — out of networking with them I stepped more in with NAMI and started helping them organize their national walk. I've been doing some projects with Forward Together, working on Second Chance Month with the Prison Fellowship. Like I said, working here on local projects with the DA's race and those have been my primary focuses over the past few months up to now.

EMSWILER: So, looking forward, what are some of your big goals or projects, looking forward? And what does the public still need to know, in your opinion?

JOHNSON: The project goals that I have going forward is my primary purpose and mission, is to reform the criminal justice system. I have a few components to reform the criminal justice system and I'm targeting that with outside issues, which is addressing sexual abuse to prevent these women from going — you know sexual abuse and domestic violence for these women going into the prison system, for being survived and punished, simply because my mother is also a person that's a victim of domestic violence that killed her husband and was sentenced to prison for forty years for that. And so that's something that I'm very passionate about — the prevention side and preventing that from happening, and then the sexual context of it, prison rape. Working to improve prison rape elimination, continuing my work through the LGBT Incarcerated

Working Group in order to advance LGBT rights and to get more programs and services for LGBT persons within the criminal justice system, specifically aiming at discrimination, and reentry. And working through the criminal justice context to address mental health issues. The number of people we have behind bars that are mentally ill are like eighty-five percent here in Texas. The ACLU Smart Justice Campaign — I'm using that as the platform to begin working with the district attorney's office for alternatives to incarceration that helps reduce mass incarceration. And reducing mass incarceration means that first we have to have the person that's the actual front-line of actually increasing mass incarceration, which are our district attorneys because they make the rules on who goes to prison and how many people go. Working to establish a national model through NAMI to provide alternatives to incarceration for the mentally ill and divert them into treatment and create what they call mental health courts, and strengthen mental health courts. And I'm going to begin — I joined as a Shatterproof ambassador back in March, so now I'm an ambassador with Shatterproof, which is a drug policy and drug treatment advocate, and actually the founder is on the office of National Drug Control Policy Council. So he's on one of the president's primary cabinets [singing in background] to eliminate opioid addiction. I'm using Shatterproof as my vehicle to advance the treatment option and advancing the treatment option is going to be drug treatment as opposed to incarcerating so many people that are in need of drug treatment.

And, tying them all together. And I'm working with all of these groups to try and bring all of these groups together to do that — to help people that are victims of human trafficking and sexual slavery because of the experience I had to go through, so I know what human trafficking and sexual slavery is all about. Those issues — from an LGBT, mental health, substance abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence, human trafficking — are the areas that I'm focusing on and that I'm working on right now. I've organized a very, very vast network of people that are willing to work with me now. I'll be meeting with Senator Whitmire's Chief of Staff on the thirtieth of this month, who's expressed wide interest in working with me to advance LGBT issues and protection, and to start making some reforms within our criminal justice system. So he's going to be a perfect ally because Senator Whitmire is a strong person and a strong advocate for prison reform. I'm reaching out to a bunch of policy makers to try and reform prisons, jails, and eventually have my own mother released due to her plight. And I'll start working on a more national platform to do that, but right now I'm still working under the context of helping veterans that are in the community with mental health issues.

I'm on the Mental Health Forum Planning Council here in Dallas, that's providing — we're trying to get comprehensive mental health care for all veterans in the North Texas area. So being a veteran myself I'm working on veteran issues. Because I understand also how veterans suffer just as much as anyone else. And those are the primary — the things that I want to do and those things that I want to see changed within the justice system and I think attacking those issues — I'm going across the board working with a lot of people on a lot of even small fires, like bail reform, immigrant rights, reproductive rights — just bringing a lot of issues that has to be addressed. That if we can start addressing that along with the homelessness problem, then the system — because no prison system is going to open the door and let everybody out. No prison is going to do that, nowhere in the country. So the only way you can reduce mass incarceration is you're going to have to do it to where there is going to have to be some prevention from the front end, and there's going to have to be services from the back end. Because if these people can come out of prison into the services they need, they can be successful. If these people can get the help that they need before they get into the system, then that prevents it so then that's what reduces mass incarceration, but pushing to say reducing mass incarceration is just going to be some magic pill — no, it's not going to happen. As long as we got crime in society, then it's always going to be people that feels like the criminal justice system is what we rely on. But the criminal justice system has become our de facto insane asylums, drug treatment centers, homeless shelters, and those things have to change in order for the society to change.

EMSWILER: What does justice look like, for you?

JOHNSON: Justice, to me, looks like those that want an opportunity — those opportunities be provided. Those that choose to prey against society — we have to strengthen the criminal justice system to protect society, because it works both ways. I'm an advocate for those that are marginalized — those that have been targeted for marginalization, which are people of color, homeless, LGBT, substance abusers, mentally ill people. Those people have been pushed into the criminal justice system because of their illnesses, and justice for them is what I'm fighting for. But I'm also fighting for a just society also. And fighting for a just society means that, if we can get these people stabilized, we can keep the community safe. And we can focus on the problems that are in society that makes it look like these people are also criminals, because the unsolved cases are this high, but the prison population is this high with all of the non-violent cases. And none of these cases — the robberies, the murders, the rapes — they're not solved. Those are the

issues that we should be focusing on. We shouldn't be focusing on how many mentally ill people we can put behind bars. How many gay people we can lock up because we discriminate against them. How many drug addicts we can lock up simply because they don't have a way to get no help, but they're using drugs and they're running out stealing and robbing from people.

And then people have mental illness and they have nowhere to go because their people don't want nothing to do with them. Those are people that — that's what justice looks like to me. Justice to me looks like fairness. And it's only fair that the people that can be helped, get helped. People can't be helped, the criminal justice system needs to be strengthened, that maybe they can be reformed. And put programs in there that may reform them.

EMSWILER: Jane, do you want to ask any questions before we end?

FIELD: Yeah, I do. I was wondering if — because you do work for NAMI now and you mentioned earlier on that after the litigation started at your first time in prison, or the first stretch, you received psychological evaluations as part of the litigation, both sides. I was wondering beyond that if there was any mental health support for you while you were incarcerated at any point — any point in the times in which you were —

JOHNSON: Yes.

FIELD: and what that looked like for you.

JOHNSON: Yes. The public has taken a very proactive approach to criminal justice reform. Criminal justice reform right now is front and center. It's actually — the people are are looking at the approaches, people see problems. And yes, has the criminal justice system improved? Of course. But it's only improved by the number of people it's put there. When I was in prison for the past ten years, yeah, I got psychological counseling. You know, I got mental health counseling. If a person now is being sexually abused, oh that victim is going to be cared for, and that victimizer is going to be locked up. But the prison system is dealing with that problem now, simply because that's what the prison system has become, so it's not like the prison system has improved it's that the access to those services are more available now. And they were available then it's just that during the litigation part of my case they were trying to make it a blanket denial that it never happened. So that's why they weren't provided mental health care. But yes mental

health care has been in the system for a long time — they've been locking the mentally ill up for a long time — but they're just now addressing the problem due to criminal justice reform. These drug crimes — they're seeing this now and they're seeing that people behind bars are substance abusers, but nobody's wanting — the treatment it's so astronomical, with the treatment centers out there being so controlled by the insurance companies, that it's hard to find indigent treatment, and most drugs addicts ain't got no money. You know if a drug addict had money he wouldn't have to rob nobody.

So the prison system still hadn't addressed those issues and that's why now they're trying to say, "Hey put them back on the streets." It's because they don't want the public to start getting in an uproar about drug treatment, because they can't even afford to help the mentally ill, less known to have to help people that are substance abusers. So these issues have become national spot light issues, and become national spotlight issues, these issues are being recognized and they're being addressed. And being recognized and being addressed is a great thing for everybody. And that's the reason that, yes, I was able to access the mental health care that I needed the last ten years, because there was no litigation, and on top of there being no litigation, they know there's a lot of people that are mentally ill. So they addressed that issue because the last thing they want in the prison system is a mentally ill person going off. And half the mentally ill persons they have to put in solitary confinement. Because they flip out, they jump on guards, they do all these other things. And they're not doing it because they're violent offenders — they're doing it because they don't have proper mental health care. And that's the reason that I think that I received care, and I think that's the reason that prison rape it's such a huge focus — simply because these issues are beginning to become front and center now.

They're no longer hidden. The public is no longer for it, and that's not a Democrat or a Republican issue. Just like Democrats supposed to be the quote "progressives", the progressives, I think are making strides in the pre-prison area. But I think that Republicans are making more efforts in the post-release efforts. And I don't — the thing about that is pre and post doesn't address the middle. It doesn't address the system itself. They're attacking — one of them says, "Well, let's bail reform, let's get drug treatment, let's get better mental health care before they get to the system." And that's what you're liberals and Democrats want, that people don't get targeted because they're Black or they're Hispanic, or getting beat up and shot down in the streets. That's what your liberals are fighting for. But, your Republicans are fighting for post-release. They're

looking to making — strengthen services for people that's coming out of these jails and prisons that don't have homes, that don't have access to mental health care. You know, giving programs and services to people that are coming out of prisons to keep the recidivism rate down. So it goes hand in hand it's just being done in two different areas, when you have to attack the system itself because that's the thing that's happening everybody — even Republicans and Democrats both — are ignoring the system, because the last thing the Democrats want to do is attack the system. And the last thing Republicans want to do is attack the system, so what they do is they basically attack issues that surround the system. And you can't surround — fight things that surround the issue without attacking the problem. And the problem is the criminal justice system.

The courts, the district attorneys, the prison officials that are running these places. That's what the problem is. Because you wouldn't have to deal with the pre-issues if the district attorney was fair. If the district attorney wasn't extorting people, and he sits there and he goes in and he locks this poor man up that can't make bail. And if you can't make bail, that means you sit in jail for six months waiting on a court date, but the whole six months that you're sitting in their waiting on a court date — you know what I'm saying? — your wife is hungry, you're about to lose your apartment, if you ain't lost it and she got to move out and move in with her momma, and then when you come out you can't live there, so ain't no sense in getting out of jail no way because you ain't got nowhere to go. The only option that you're going to have in six months when he comes to you — you've got to get out and you've got to make a living for your family, by that time you've sobered up off drugs, your mental health is stabilized, and now you have a new outlook on life. Having that new outlook on life, the first thing you do is you go in there, and he says, "Hey, well I'll give you ten years probation." And first thing you do is take ten years probation. That's a form of extortion. And then he takes ten years probation and he comes out because he sat in jail and he's basically — there's a thing we call in recovery — you can stay dry or you can recover.

Staying dry means you're not using drugs. Recovering means you're working everyday to change your way of living so you don't have to rely on drugs. And they're not providing the recovery, they're just providing the dry. So yeah, when a person dries out and stabilizes, then he comes back out and there's no services to keep him recovered or stabilized, then basically he then goes back on the probation violation, and then he becomes in front of the judges and the courts that are also elected, and the juries that are picked that comes from basically mostly conservative lock

'em up throw away the key areas. Because they're not going to put anybody that come in there and say, "Oh yeah, well I don't believe in the death penalty." They're not going to put nobody in there that says, "Oh, well I don't think that — these people got drugs problems—" They're not going to put them on a jury. And so that's where the problem is. And then the court says, "Oh okay, send him on to the system." Then when he gets to the system, there ain't nothing in the system, because once he gets to the prison, there ain't nothing in the prison at all for him, but sitting around and watching TV and playing dominoes all day. Then he come back out the same way he went in, you know it's the difference between recovery and dry. And you can stay dry but can you come out here and stay dry in society? A true addict, a true alcoholic — no.

You can do it as a recovering addict and alcoholic. But you can't do it as a true addict. Because a true addict has to have a change of living. His change of attitude, life, everything that he sees — but the only thing they send in there is a whole bunch of church people. Then when he come out here the doors of the church don't stand open. All of the churches, they want the rich people to come in. But none of them — yeah, they may load up some wagons and go down there to the corner and serve some food — but I guarantee you, you go in there dressing like a bum and go into one of them churches, and you're not going to be welcome. And the only way you're going to stay in there is you're going to get up at the end and go up there and say, "Oh yeah, I want to be saved." And how many people in that audience you think going to take him home and give him a place to live? How many of those people you think going to take him home and give him a bath? How many of them people you think, are going to take him home and help him get recovery? How many people are going to deal with his mental health issues because his family can't deal with him? Like I hear calls from NAMI all the time, a woman says, "Oh yeah, my son flips out and he's schizophrenic and the other day he just started punching holes in walls and then he hit me and we had to call the police on him and they only kept him down there at the hospital for three hours and eventually he just keeps going off like this and we had to tell him he couldn't come here no more."

You know, so we have to work on the issues, and we'll get there. And that's what I do is I'm an action person, I'm not the type of person that cares about sitting around eating steak and sitting up talking about it and coming up with all these different studies and all these different policies, and all of these different ways that it can be done. Well now, okay you've talked about, now go put your hands out there on somebody and go help them. Take the message to the person that's

suffering. Not many people want to take the message to the person being suffering, and that's where Republicans have been good at. They say, "Hey" — they let you know — "I'm not going to go out there and do it. But I don't mind giving you a little money if you will do it. But I want to make sure that you're doing the right thing with my money when I give it to you." You know because Republicans they are, they're trying to give their money away. They're trying to. And they'd only give it to people that they know that's working together to get it done. You put the right coalition together and them Republicans, they don't mind coming out to give money. I'm non-partisan, I'm just for whoever is going to get the job done. Because there's a lot of Democrats that sit up and talk about how they want to give all of these people these opportunities, but they're not going to go out and there and put their hands on nobody and they're not even going to give no money [laughter]. You know the Republicans they'll at least tell you where they're hand is. They say, "Hey I'm not going to get my hand dirty, but I'll give you money." A Democrat says, "I'm not going to get my hand dirty and I ain't going to give you no money." So, I mean, you know — it just goes who's going to get the job done. That's like with this DA race.

I'm not for conservative issues because they have, pro-safe — you know these issues of protecting society that I think are over extravagant. So I can't support conservatives due to their position. And you can't also at the same time be too soft on crime. I mean, you don't have a heavy-handed tactic, then people don't get the message. Now, does it require the death penalty? No. Life sentences? Life without parole? But if you're going to get a life sentence for killing a police officer, then you should be getting a life sentence also for killing an innocent person, that didn't do nothing. But that person may have been saved had we had some proper treatment before he had to go out there and kill them and rob them — before.

EMSWILER: Is there any last thing we haven't addressed that you'd like to say before we close?

JOHNSON: I think that the issues have been addressed.

EMSWILER: Alright.

JOHNSON: I think that things that needs to be said, that needs to be understood — has happened. And it takes a community approach. That's what it takes, is a community approach. It takes everybody working together. It takes students going out there, doing volunteer work. It

takes students going out there and organizing these rallies. It takes people going to these urban areas that are just drug infested and making awareness in those areas that they need to clean up these areas — stand up and pick their pants up and go fight, for what's right. Instead of letting these people use their political issues and platforms as a means of getting elected and still don't do shit in the — in the end. And that's all it does. That's why we're setting up there with a damn president now that's a lunatic. But, his presidency may have been the best blessing that we've ever had in this country. Simply because, it has called more people to action than under any president we've had. He has galvanized people to stand up, protest, fight, come together, recognize the problem, and fight to find the solution for the problem before this fool lets everything go. So he's actually, you know, really one of the most slickest presidents and that may be his strategy. His strategy may be, "You can't go make these people get up and do nothing, but if you give them this message maybe they'll get up and do it for themselves." Because a lot of things are going to improve under him that he'll be able to take credit for, in the end. All he had to do was go out there and give this terrible message, and make — come up with these terrible ideas and policies that hadn't got passed, and will never pass.

Half the things he's saying and he's doing he'll never do. Just like he's saying with North Korea. He wasn't going to go over there and invade North Korea or do nothing else. But, their fixing to go sit down in Singapore and talk. You see, so he scared people into action. And when you scare people into action — that's what it takes because people are driven by fear. That's what people are driven by. People are driven by fear, people are not driven by everything's okay. People are not driven by everything's alright. People are driven by fear. And that's what makes people stand up and take action. You know, maybe North Korea really feared that he would come. But guess what? They're going to the bargaining table. Now it's going to be peace in North Korea because they sat down together and talked to each other. And he's sitting here saying, "Oh, I'm going to cut welfare and I'm going to cut food stamps and I'm stopping public housing" and this and that — that'll never pass. That'll never happen. Any person that follows politics knows that these laws are embedded — they're embedded in the Constitution — that's how they got passed in the first place [laughter]. They're not going to stop. And when these things are not going to stop but the regular person that don't understand that says, "Oh man, we better galvanize— [knocking at the door] Well, good thing we were stopping now [laughter].

[END OF CLIP 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]