

Floyd Bledsoe
Testimony Supporting House Bill 2544
Preventing Wrongful Convictions Based on Jailhouse Witnesses
House Judiciary Committee Hearing
February 6th 3:30 p.m.

My name is Floyd Bledsoe and I live in Hutchinson, Kansas. I want to thank the lawmakers here for working so hard on innocence issues in the last couple of years. It means a lot to me that my wrongful conviction has inspired change in Kansas. This bill would be another important step in preventing innocent people like me from being wrongfully convicted.

In the 16 years I spent in prison for a crime I didn't commit, I learned how easy it is for jailhouse witnesses to game the system. People will say anything to avoid incarceration. While I was in jail waiting for my trial, a cop who had been arrested was placed in my pod. I was really suspicious and told my defense attorney. Soon after he was moved to another part of the jail.

It was easy for inmates to get details about other people's cases from the law library, and then contact the district attorney's office to try to get deals in their own cases. They always claimed that no one else was around when the person confessed, so the story could never be corroborated. I can tell you that no one is going around prison talking about their crimes. But somehow jailhouse witnesses keep testifying about hearing other inmates confess.

Everyone knows how the incentivized system works except the jury. Inmates know that they can have charges dropped or sentences reduced by testifying for the state. Prosecutors know how to imply that leniency is on the table without making a formal agreement or notifying the defense.

There needs to be more transparency and oversight when jailhouse witnesses are used. This bill is just common sense. A judge understands how jailhouse witness deals actually work and should be able to screen out the most unreliable testimony. Prosecutors and defense attorneys should have the full background on jailhouse witnesses before they contaminate a case.

Nothing in this bill would put jailhouse witnesses in danger. Everyone in jail and prison already knows who these witnesses are. I've never seen them intimidated or targeted in prison. When prosecutors really want to be extra safe, they send their witnesses to administrative segregation, and most don't stay long because they are released as part of cooperation agreement.

Jailhouse witnesses put the truth at risk and I've seen them send innocent people to prison. They shouldn't be used at all, but if we can't ban them, the least we can do is put in safeguards.