The cover grid features clients of The Bail Project. From top left to bottom right:
Kamren from Austin, TX;
Sie and Christin from Chicago, IL (pp. 32-35);
David from Charlotte, NC;
Letitia from Baton Rouge, LA (pp. 22-25);
Sarah from Detroit, MI (pp. 52-55);
Robert from Chicago, IL (pp. 28-31);
Nala from Los Angeles, CA (pp. 42-45);
Michaela from Augusta, GA;
and Esteban from San Marcos, TX.
Several of these clients are also featured at bailoutthesouth.org.
The Bail Project combats mass incarceration by disrupting the money bail system — one person at a time. We restore the presumption of innocence, reunite families, and challenge a system that criminalizes race and poverty. We’re on a mission to end cash bail and create a more just, equitable, and humane pretrial system.
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It’s hard to believe it’s been four years since we launched The Bail Project, but thanks to your support, here we are: stronger than ever for the work ahead. Together we took a bold idea, and we brought it to life. Today, nearly 18,000 people have received help because of you. We have teams in 28 cities, and we are fighting for bail reform at the federal, state, and local levels.

People often ask me what we have found most inspiring and most challenging during this journey. The first one is easy. It is the stories of the people we bring home every day. Their resilience and hope inspire us to continue fighting for change. In the following pages, we share stories that capture the heart and soul of our effort better than I ever could. As for the challenges, where to begin ...

I could tell you that I never expected the attacks from the bail bond industry to be so concerted or that I did not anticipate just how difficult it would be to build the plane while flying the plane. Those are true, but the biggest challenge has been encountering the deep fear that runs in our society — our collective fear of change and our personal fear of each other.

Fear blinds us to the humanity of those ensnared in the criminal legal system. Fear is the most effective tool at the hands of those seeking to maintain the status quo. To overcome fear, we must empower ourselves with facts and evidence, but we must also tap into our inner sense of compassion. If the last four years have taught me anything, it is that meaningful reform will take more than new policies. It will require a commitment from each of us to reimagine justice as something other than retribution and isolation. It will require the power of compassion.

The fight to end cash bail is one of the defining civil rights and racial justice struggles of our time. And it is only getting started. With you by our side, I am confident we will prevail.

Thank you for your support,

Robin Steinberg
CEO and Founder
Since 2018, The Bail Project has mounted a strategic attack on cash bail, the single biggest driver of mass incarceration in America and the linchpin of a system that criminalizes race and poverty. With local teams on the ground and a growing network of community partners, we provide free bail assistance and support to thousands of people every year.

Our ultimate goal is to put ourselves out of business, so we also work at the policy level to advance a model without cash bail: Community Release with Support.
Cash bail is not just a criminal justice issue. Walk into any courthouse in America, and you will see it unmasked for what it is — a deeply entrenched system of injustice that perpetuates racial and economic disparities and upends the presumption of innocence.
To affect real and lasting change, The Bail Project works on multiple fronts:

**HUMAN** | Mass incarceration is first and foremost a human crisis. Your support powers our National Revolving Bail Fund allowing us to help people right now. To date, we have posted over $46 million in bail for nearly 18,000 people, preventing approximately 784,845 days of incarceration and saving local jurisdictions roughly $61 million in taxpayer dollars.¹ In fiscal year 2021, we launched nine new sites to expand these immediate relief efforts.

**STRUCTURAL** | We don’t stop at paying bail. We connect those we help to voluntary services based on their needs and provide them with court reminders and free transportation for the duration of their cases. To date, we’ve supported our clients’ return to 54,266 court dates while connecting them to voluntary services, including housing, substance use treatment, and mental health care.² Through these efforts, we’re building an infrastructure for Community Release with Support.

**NARRATIVE** | Stories change hearts and minds. Data can deepen how we understand an issue. The Bail Project combines the power of both to make the case for bail reform indisputable. To date, our clients’ stories have reached over 1,189,715 people through our social media channels, humanizing the incarcerated, while our data challenges the narrative that without cash bail people will not return to court.³

**SYSTEMIC** | Change happens when we come together to demand a better, more just America. To build momentum, our Policy Team works at the federal, state, and local levels to amplify calls for bail reform, counter the influence of entrenched interests, and equip decision makers with evidence.⁴ In fiscal year 2021, we worked with allies in nine states and Washington, D.C., to defend against regressive legislation and advance our policy objectives.⁵

1. All figures as of June 30, 2021
2. All figures as of June 30, 2021
3. Cash bail rests on the false assumption that people will not return to court if they don’t have “skin in the game.” Yet, our clients return to 93% of their court dates without a financial obligation to us or the courts.
4. Learn more at aftercashbail.org.
5. Fiscal Year 2021 = July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021
“I’M NOT GOING TO GIVE UP … SHE’S GOING TO GET MY KIDNEY. NO MATTER WHAT.”

- LOUIS, LOS ANGELES
There is always more to a person than a charge. That’s where our work begins.

We met Louis at the height of the pandemic when he was being held at the men’s jail in Los Angeles on $100,000 bail. He shared that his family was going through a tough time. His wife, Lupe, had been diagnosed with kidney failure and they were struggling financially. One day, during a heated argument with his adult stepson, the police were called and Louis was arrested.

Trapped in jail because he could not afford bail, Louis could only think about Lupe. Who would accompany her to dialysis? Who would help her when she felt weak?

“My stepfather set an example of what a husband should be. I follow his footsteps daily,” he told us. Louis knew he needed to be there for Lupe and resume his role as provider for his family.

We posted Louis’s bail and reunited the couple. Unfortunately, life had a new challenge in store. A week before Christmas, their house burnt to the ground. They lost everything and had to move into a small trailer. Overwhelmed by medical appointments and their financial situation, Louis missed a court date and was remanded back to jail.

We knew we had to help, so we posted bail a second time. Louis and Lupe are now working to rebuild their lives. They recently got encouraging news. He is a compatible kidney donor for her and the court dismissed the case against him. Louis feels like they have a new lease on life. With love and resilience, they’ll make the most of it.
“[PEOPLE] CHOOSE GUILTY TO GO HOME ... I DID IT BEFORE. YOU KNOW YOU DIDN’T DO IT, YOU KNOW YOU CAN BEAT THE CHARGE, BUT YOU WANT TO GO HOME.”

- VITA, NEW ORLEANS
We go where need and potential for change are greatest. This year we set out to double our reach in the American South. Here’s why:

- The South has the highest jail incarceration rates in the country. Seven of the 10 states with the highest incarceration rates in the United States are in the South.
- The region is ground zero for the devastating impact of mass incarceration on Black Americans. Of all Black Americans in jail, nearly half are in southern jails.
- On top of cash bail, predatory systems of fines and fees rendered by the criminal legal system also penalize people living in poverty. Southern states can impose a total of 625 different fines and fees — more than any other region — and these are in addition to the fines and fees levied by counties, parishes, and municipalities. Failure to pay these fines can lead to incarceration.

We are well underway. This summer we launched our Mississippi site in partnership with the Mississippi Bail Fund Collective, and we’re gearing up to launch in Florida, South Carolina, and Alabama in the coming months.
“I WAS TAKEN AWAY FROM MY FAMILY. I WAS TAKEN AWAY FROM MY JOB. I LOST MY CAR... IF IT WEREN’T FOR YOU ALL, I’D PROBABLY STILL BE THERE.”

- LETITIA, BATON ROUGE
Letitia loves her community. A proud and life-long resident of Baton Rouge, she enjoys going to the zoo and sitting with her friends to share her favorite dish: crawfish and red beans.

Then one day her life was turned upside down. Police officers arrested her for allegedly interfering in a custody dispute involving her grandchild. Bail was set at $5,000, far more than she or her family could afford. Trapped in jail as COVID-19 cases were spreading, Letitia was denied insulin for her diabetes and medication for her blood pressure. She also lost her job at an adult group home where she had been the site supervisor for over a decade.

Thanks to The Bail Project, Letitia was able to walk free and reunite with her family, but the trauma she experienced still haunts her. Leaning on therapy and her community, she's determined to recover and build back her life.
“IT WAS TERRIFYING. WE WERE EATING, SLEEPING, AND LIVING ON TOP OF OTHER WOMEN.”

- LISA, BATON ROUGE
“PEOPLE IN CHICAGO NEED SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN ... BECAUSE FREEDOM IS EVERYTHING.”

- ROBERT, CHICAGO

AFTER CASH BAIL
We will end cash bail.

It’s not a matter of if, but when. The key question is what comes after. The Bail Project’s answer is our model: Community Release with Support, a community-based approach to ensure that clients return to court and meet the basic needs that drive so many people into the criminal legal system in the first place.

In 2021, Illinois became the first state to eliminate cash bail entirely. The reform goes into effect in 2023. Using the lessons learned from two years of impact in Chicago, we are expanding our program in this jurisdiction to support people released without bail. Implementing this version of our model will provide invaluable guidance to the State of Illinois as it builds an alternative pretrial system without cash bail.

Impact: The Bail Project – Chicago

Since 2019, our Chicago team has posted bail for more than 1,200 low-income people in Cook County, including over 500 at the height of the pandemic. We have supported these clients in more than 6,300 court dates for a 96% return to court rate. As we ask our clients about their needs, the most common request we get is for employment referrals. Consequently, we work closely with Safer Foundation which provides job training and placement. Unemployment, however, is far from the only need. Nearly 40% of our Chicago clients report a history of substance use and over 30% report mental health needs. To support these clients, we work in partnership with TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities). By connecting people to resources based on their needs, we are modeling a new way to approach the pretrial process after the elimination of cash bail.

1 In After Cash Bail, our policy road map, we outline five principles that are essential to evaluate the merit of any legislative proposal to end cash bail. See aftercashbail.org.
“WE NEED TO NOT ONLY OVERHAUL THE SYSTEM BUT REBUILD IT FROM THE GROUND UP. WE NEED TO THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT CRIMINAL JUSTICE.”

- CHRISTIN, CHICAGO
The day began with a medical emergency, but soon cash bail turned it into a nightmare.

Sie had lost his job at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that cost him his health insurance. Not able to afford insulin, Sie, a type 1 diabetic, struggled with high blood sugar. Little did he know that he was experiencing diabetic ketoacidosis, a condition that can lead to a diabetic coma and even death if not treated.

Feeling sick and disoriented, he ended up wandering around the city in a haze as he looked for help. At one point, he opened a car door and the person inside called 911. Police arrested him, a judge set bail, and Sie ended up in Cook County Jail.

Meanwhile at home, his partner, Christin, paced around in desperation, not knowing where to look for Sie. When they finally located him at the jail, Christin's relief was quickly overcome with panic — they would need $10,000 to free Sie. The couple was already behind in rent and barely able to put food on the table. But with COVID-19 rampant inside the jail and Sie on the verge of a medical crisis, Christin knew time was of the essence. They took to TikTok to ask for help and that's where our Chicago team learned about their situation. We quickly sprang into action and posted Sie’s bail.

Reflecting on how he was treated, Christin said, "We just want to be able to live our lives. We want to be able to work. We want to be able to be happy and be safe and secure ... We need to not only overhaul the system but rebuild it from the ground up. We need to think differently about criminal justice."
San Antonio client Jeremy (left), and his mother, Jerri

“There is no pain like the pain of a mother who is powerless to help her child,” wrote Jerri in an op-ed this year describing her experience not having the funds to post bail for her son.

Jeremy suffers from schizophrenia. One day, he began acting erratically and Jerri thought he could harm himself. With no one else to call for help, she dialed 911. “Looking back I don’t know what I could have done differently, but I do know that it made matters worse.”

She never expected her son would be arrested, charged with making “terroristic threats” to a family member, and interfering with an emergency call. The judge set bail at $500 and Jeremy was sent to jail to await the next court hearing.

Not able to afford the bail amount, Jerri was worried sick about her son. “Putting someone who is having a mental health crisis in an institution where they are subject to being harmed is wrong,” she said, reflecting on the experience months later.

Jeremy is also Jerri’s main support around the house. She struggles with mobility issues and he took care of most chores. While he was in jail, there was no one to help her. Fortunately, The Bail Project was able to intervene and reunite mother and son.”

He’s my sweet young man again,” she said recently, proud of the work he is doing to maintain his health and plan for his future. He wants to attend a local college and hone his skills building things with his hands. “I want him to find what makes him happy and do it. I want him to live a life with freedom and happiness.”
“BLACK PEOPLE ARE ENTITLED TO FREEDOM AND JOY. WE DESERVE TO PLAY IN THE STREETS AGAIN. WE DESERVE STRUCTURES THAT ARE HEALTHY AND ROOTED IN BLACK SAFETY AND PROGRESS, NOT PUNISHMENT AND ISOLATION.”

- MIKE MILTON, ST. LOUIS CITY
The Bail Project is unique in that we work to put ourselves out of business.

Sometimes we get there through legislative reforms that end cash bail, sometimes through court decisions or changes in prosecutorial practice, and sometimes we exit because there has been significant progress and a new organization is ready to take up the baton and dig deeper.

This year, we closed our inaugural site in St. Louis City after nearly four years of impact, including nearly 4,000 people helped, fewer people being assigned cash bail, and a community partnership that fueled the movement to Close the Workhouse, a local jail that was infamous for its inhumane conditions.

Over the years, we shared the urgency of the bail crisis in St. Louis with the public, gathered human stories to highlight our clients’ voices, and collected evidence to support ending cash bail. The data spoke for itself: People returned to 86% of their court dates and nearly 50% of them had their cases dismissed. This data supported civil rights litigation challenging the bail system in St. Louis, while our immediate relief efforts helped decarcerate and close the Workhouse.

We are proud to say that our exit from St. Louis also marks a new beginning. None of these successes would have been possible without the vision and leadership of Mike Milton who joined The Bail Project in 2018 as one of our very first Bail Disruptors. Mike, a longtime community organizer, quickly rose to leadership and built our St. Louis site into one of our biggest. Now Mike has founded his own organization, Freedom Community Center, to offer St. Louis City a new model of restorative justice and to continue fighting for lasting pretrial reform. We are proud to be Freedom Community Center’s inaugural funder and pass the baton to Mike and his new team.
"IF I COULD CHANGE ANYTHING ABOUT THE SYSTEM, IT WOULD BE THAT THEY DON'T HOLD YOUR PAST AGAINST YOU."

- NALA, LOS ANGELES
More than one quarter of the nation’s homeless population lives in California, and nearly 60,000 of them live in Los Angeles.

Our client, Nala, a Latina trans woman, was one of those struggling to find safe housing in Los Angeles during the pandemic, when she was accused of stealing a bicycle.

A judge set her bail at $7,500 and Nala endured nearly four months at the Men’s Central Jail, waiting for her court dates as COVID-19 was spreading inside the facility. Fortunately, we received a referral from the public defender’s office. Our Los Angeles team was able to step in and pay Nala’s bail. After her release, we connected her to People Assisting The Homeless, which helped her find temporary housing.

Since then, Nala has moved into her own apartment. She believes in herself and knows there are better days ahead. She dreams of reuniting with her boyfriend, who is incarcerated. She practices modern and contemporary dance and aspires to one day become a professional dancer.
When Lisa was convicted of receiving stolen property and sentenced to probation, she hoped she’d be able to put her mistake behind her by repairing the harm she’d caused.

As part of her probation, she was required to make monthly court appearances to show she was paying her restitution. Everything was going well until the pandemic hit. Then she lost her job and her children tested positive for COVID-19. Her family had to quarantine and she missed a court appearance as a result. Lisa called the court and faxed documentation to explain her situation, but a warrant was still issued for failure to appear.

Lisa was ready to face the warrant but she learned there was a $5,000 bond attached to it, an amount well beyond her reach. She knew that unless she could pay the bond, she would be taken into custody and separated from her children, so she decided to wait for her tax return so she could pay the bond. One day she was driving with her elderly mother when a police officer pulled her over. She disclosed that she had an outstanding warrant and the officer placed her under arrest.

For two weeks, Lisa sat in jail, wondering how long it would be before she saw her children again. Thankfully, she learned about The Bail Project. She contacted us, and within hours, her bail was paid and she was released.

With our help, Lisa found a new job as an assistant manager at a restaurant. “My children are everything to me and I will work as hard as I can to provide for them,” she shared. She is also passionate about sports and now manages a semi-professional football team during her free time. One day she hopes to study sports medicine and physical therapy and start a nonprofit to help people overcome the barriers that come with a criminal record.
“THE JUSTICE SYSTEM ISN’T EQUAL. WE SHOULD BE TREATED EQUALLY. WE SHOULD BE TREATED WITH DECENCY. WE SHOULD BE TREATED AS INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY.”

- DION, LOS ANGELES

SYSTEMS DON’T GO DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT.
Cash bail is an entrenched part of the criminal legal system. It enables prosecutors to coerce guilty pleas and to discriminate.

Fines and fees deducted from bail often supplement municipal budgets. And the $2 billion bail bond industry, backed by large insurance companies, uses its influence to preserve the status quo. To drive momentum for change and take on these entrenched interests, The Bail Project combines direct services with policy work on multiple fronts.

Our strategy focuses on advancing major overhauls of the bail system, but also works to make incremental reforms that pave the way for bigger change. At the same time, we are warding off attacks on charitable bail funds and attempts to expand cash bail. In the fiscal year 2021, we saw the full gamut of battles — from a referendum to overturn a California law that sought to replace cash bail with pretrial algorithms, to the elimination of cash bail in Illinois, the introduction of bipartisan bail reform in Ohio, and legislative efforts in several states to limit our ability to post bail for people.¹

Reform can come in many ways, including from newly elected prosecutors who see the injustice of cash bail and decide to do the right thing. This fiscal year we had the opportunity to advise the transition teams of George Gascón in Los Angeles, CA, and Eli Savit in Washtenaw County, MI, who have committed to eliminating cash bail for most cases.

And while bail policies are state-based, there is a lot of work we can do at the federal level to encourage local change. Through our participation in the Justice Roundtable, we provided recommendations on bail for the Biden-Harris Transition Team and began working with federal lawmakers to prepare legislation with incentives for states to adopt bail reform.

All these efforts continue full steam ahead and we look forward to sharing new updates with you in the coming year.

¹ Fiscal Year 2021 = July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021
“I HAD NEVER FELT SO LONELY.”

- SARAH, DETROIT
It’s been a difficult journey since the day Sarah found herself in a solitary confinement cell with $75,000 bail standing between her and freedom.

“I had never felt so lonely,” she told us. For three months her family struggled to come up with the money for her bail. She was 17 at the time.

“My mother went through a lot,” Sarah said recently through tears. “She probably won’t ever be the same. I don’t think any mother wants to watch their daughter go to jail or even worse, watch their daughter sit in jail because you can’t afford to get her out.”

Fortunately, Sarah’s mom learned about The Bail Project and contacted us for help. Our local team jumped into action and within days Sarah was released.

While incarcerated, Sarah had been under tremendous pressure to take a guilty plea that carried prison time. Freedom meant she was able to reunite with her family, finish her senior year of high school, and work with her public defender to fight her case, ultimately receiving a sentence of probation. She did not serve even a single day of jail time once The Bail Project intervened.

Now 18 years old, Sarah is hopeful about her future. She is fiercely independent and willing to put in the hard work to achieve her dreams. To make ends meet, she paints houses and does landscaping work. She’s also saving money to get her own apartment. This year she starts college where she will be studying child psychology.
Support for our mission comes in all shapes and forms — from monthly donors in our “Freedom Funders” program to celebrities lending their voices, supporters pledging their birthdays and weddings, and more. Here’s just a few of them for our Supporter Spotlight for Fiscal Year 2021.
The creative power couple has developed award-winning campaigns for brands, agencies, and nonprofit organizations. This year, they volunteered their talents to help take our public education efforts to a whole new level.

After the tragic death of George Floyd, Karabi Sen, a lifelong educator, committed herself to learn more about the criminal legal system and find ways to create positive change. She came across the issue of cash bail and, shocked by what she learned, decided to join “Freedom Funders” — our community of monthly donors. For Karabi, her monthly donation serves as a reminder that cash bail harms people every month and that changing it will take all of us.

Miss USA Asya Branch
The Mississippi native is passionate about the plight of children with incarcerated parents. She grew up with her father behind bars and knows firsthand the pain and hardship incarceration brings to a family. “It truly is a shared family sentence,” she shared. This year, Asya became our first Bail Project Ambassador to help us raise awareness about the impact of bail on families.

Doreen Fox & Eric Steinhauser
The creative power couple has developed award-winning campaigns for brands, agencies, and nonprofit organizations. This year, they volunteered their talents to help take our public education efforts to a whole new level.

Lil Nas X
The trailblazing rapper and icon joined forces with The Bail Project to launch the Bail X Fund. “This isn’t just theoretical for me,” he shared. “It’s personal. I know the pain that incarceration brings to a family. And I know the disproportionate impact that cash bail has on Black Americans.” Through the Bail X Fund, Nas is encouraging his fans and other celebrities to join us in this fight for freedom and equality.

Karabi Sen
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When Terry Maguire asked his sixth-grade class at The Philadelphia School to create a project about an issue that mattered to them, the students didn’t hesitate to identify racial justice. After watching people being arrested for protesting, they decided to raise money for The Bail Project to help those who couldn’t afford bail. For their fundraiser, student Tristyn Howard organized her classmates to create Black Lives Matter kits that included masks, buttons, stickers, and posters. They also took over their school’s social media to raise awareness!

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide uprisings for racial justice, Kevin Chenault, along with his brother, Kenneth, and four of their friends — Sesana Allen, Lindsey Ferguson, Carter Lewis, and Nicolle Mora — sought to raise awareness and resources for causes that directly impact the Black community. And with that, the Anti Racism Fund (ARF) was born. Over the past 18 months, ARF has raised nearly $1 million and supported 12 organizations, including The Bail Project.

Augusta Powell and Harrison Silver married during the pandemic, so they had to think outside the box for a lot of their wedding — including their wedding registry. Instead of a gift registry, they had a giving registry where they invited guests to donate to The Bail Project. Augusta and Harrison raised so much in donations for The Bail Project that they had to increase their goal — three times!

After hearing a radio interview with our CEO Robin Steinberg, Susan Carns Curtiss was inspired to join our mission. Susan, who is an attorney in Oklahoma, leads GIRL ATTORNEY, a network of over 18,000 women attorneys across the country. Seeking to motivate this community into action, Susan hosted a Facebook Live event, set up a peer-to-peer fundraiser, and collectively raised thousands of dollars to support our work.

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While online donations power our National Revolving Bail Fund, the support of foundations, philanthropic collaboratives, and private donors funds our growing team and operational expenses. Thanks to this support, this year we added Client Support Specialists to several of our teams across the country, giving us even more capacity to support clients with referrals to housing, treatment, and other services. We also expanded our Support Hub to include a team dedicated exclusively to policy efforts recognizing the need to engage in advocacy at all levels, from city councils to the federal government.

Today, The Bail Project’s team is over one hundred strong. 60% of our staff identify as women, 70% identify as people of color, and 20% are formerly incarcerated and have been directly impacted by the criminal legal system.
The Bail Project’s National Revolving Bail Fund is a powerful tool to combat mass incarceration. **100% of donations** made through our website go directly into the fund to provide free bail assistance to thousands of people every year.

Since 2018, we’ve used $46.5 million to pay bail for nearly 18,000 people. Of that $46.5 million, $23.7 million has already been returned to the fund after people’s cases closed and recycled to pay new bails.¹

¹ All figures as of June 30, 2021 and include bail posted by partnership sites.
In FY21, The Bail Project raised over $33 million in donations and pledges from more than 65,000 individual donors.
THANK YOU