



**Freedom  
should be  
free.**

**THE BAIL PRO<sup>2</sup>JECT**



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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## FAREWELL FROM ROBIN

Five years ago, I stood on the TED stage to issue an urgent call to action: It was time to reduce America's reliance on cash bail, restore the presumption of innocence, and work towards innovative solutions that would prioritize freedom while strengthening public safety and the well-being of our communities.

You, our loyal supporters, were among the first to answer this call. Thanks to you, The Bail Project is at the forefront of an unstoppable movement for change today.

Our work remains as critical as ever. Nearly half a million Americans sit in jail on any given night because they don't have enough money to pay bail. Cash bail means automatic jail time for people who can't afford it, even if they end up being found innocent. This injustice upends the presumption of innocence, entrenches racial and economic disparities in the criminal justice system, and leads to the unnecessary incarceration of millions of Americans every year.

While we have helped tens of thousands of people with bail assistance, and made essential advancements toward progress, cash bail remains the norm in courthouses across the United States and opposition to change is growing stronger as entrenched interests fight to maintain the status quo. There is still so much to do.

The Bail Project is now entering a new, second phase. By building on our experience after freeing tens of thousands of individuals, hearing their stories, and identifying best practices for pretrial support, we are well positioned to advocate for full-scale systemic changes in cities and counties across the country.

We are steadfast in our belief that America's criminal justice system can do better, and look forward to the day that we can close our doors because our work is no longer necessary.

The beginning of this new chapter at The Bail Project also marks the end of my tenure as CEO. As I shared with you earlier this year, after more than four decades of working in the criminal justice system, first as a public defender and then as a founder and leader of impactful organizations like The Bail Project, I am stepping aside to make room for a new generation of leaders. At The Bail Project, I am passing the baton to David Gaspar, whom our Board of Directors selected as our new CEO. David's trajectory at The Bail Project, from Bail Disruptor to Operations Manager to National Director of Operations and now CEO, is a testament to his abilities, vision, and dedication. He is beloved by our staff and external partners alike and will guide The Bail Project with integrity, credibility, and laser-like focus. I have complete confidence in his leadership.

While it is always hard to leave something you love, I do so filled with optimism and gratitude. I am excited to now join you as one of a growing list of supporters of this amazing organization, committed to creating a better future where justice is equal and freedom is truly free.

Onward,

Robin Steinberg, Founder



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW CEO

Nearly thirty years ago, I sat behind bars in despair like so many of the people our Bail Project staff meet in jails across the United States every single day. Reduced to a six-digit number, I learned then never to judge a person without knowing their whole story. I learned about the transformative power of simple acts of kindness when hope is nearly lost. And I learned that treasured rights such as the presumption of innocence are only meaningful when we protect them for everyone.

These lessons guide the vision and commitment I have poured into The Bail Project's mission since the first day I signed my name to post someone's bail. They are the same lessons that ground me today as I dream about the future and promise of this organization.

It is my great honor to be leading The Bail Project into its second phase. We set out to build an organization that could harness the power of direct action to help those in need right now. But we also set out to gather indisputable evidence that bail is not necessary and that an alternative – a more humane, productive, and equitable approach – is possible. With your support these past five years, we have done just that. We have provided supportive services to and helped secure the freedom of over 30,000 people and counting. We have collected evidence from our work in more than two dozen jurisdictions where we have supported clients to return to more than 111,000 court dates. And we have built an alternative to cash bail: Community Release with Support, a model that delivers a return to court rate of over

92% while helping clients connect with treatment for addiction and mental health issues, housing, and other services.

In the following pages, you'll learn more about the incredible impact we've had this past fiscal year. You'll hear about our legislative advocacy and principal research conducted to inform policymaking. You'll learn about our efforts to educate the public about the human cost of bail and to grow the movement for reform. And, most importantly, you'll hear from our clients whose experiences speak to the urgency of this issue and the power of your support.

Together, we are doing more than leveling the playing field for thousands of people every year – we're striving for a society that lives up to the promise of equal justice under U.S. law. None of this would be possible without you. Thank you for believing in our mission.



David Gaspar, Chief Executive Officer





*Compared to people who are released, people who are detained pretrial are more likely to accept plea bargains even when innocent. They are also less likely to have their cases dismissed or to be able to negotiate for more favorable plea bargains and diversion opportunities.*



## EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER THE LAW

"Equal Justice Under the Law" – these words are etched into the marble entrance of the United States Supreme Court, the highest court of the land. Set in stone because they are immutable. Permanent. Sacred. Indisputable. A promise we must honor.

Cash bail corrupts this promise – it creates a two-tiered system, one where people who have financial resources to pay bail are released, and another where those without money are forced to remain incarcerated pretrial. When courts tie freedom to money, they upend the fundamental rights that are the cornerstone of the U.S. legal system.

The results of this inequality under the law are well documented. Each day, more than half a million people are detained in our nation's jails, the majority because they cannot afford bail. Black and brown Americans bear the brunt. Most people in pretrial detention are accused of non-violent offenses for crimes that most Americans understand to be matters of public health, not safety. In recent decades, U.S. jails have become the nation's largest psychiatric institutions, housing more people with serious mental illnesses than anywhere else in the country.

*Nearly half of those in jail have received some mental health care in the past. Nearly three-quarters meet the diagnostic criteria for substance dependence or substance use disorder.*

When people who are sick have to be charged with crimes to receive treatment, we are misusing our courts and fighting systemic problems with bad social policies.

Here's what people who are detained pretrial stand to lose: They are more likely to lose their jobs and their homes; custody of their children; be deprived of medication and treatment; and wind up incarcerated again after their lives are destabilized.

*Incarceration creates a vicious cycle: Being held in custody even for just two or three days increases one's likelihood of being charged with a new crime in the future.*

They are also more likely to accept a guilty plea, even when innocent. These criminal convictions will follow them for the rest of their lives, limiting employment options and preventing them from accessing crucial social services like public housing.

Our justice system is founded on the promise that a person is presumed innocent until they are proven otherwise. However, when those who are poor are treated as if they were presumed guilty before trial, justice is not being meted out fairly.

Rich or poor, we are all entitled to equal justice.



# OUR IMPACT: BY THE NUMBERS

Our stories and data, gathered from thousands of bailouts across the country, tell an indisputable and positive story: Bail is not what makes people return to court.<sup>1</sup> Knowing this, we focus on five key goals: **Extending** a helping hand to those in need right now. **Advocating** for evidence-based policies and practices. **Demonstrating** an alternative to bail: Community Release with Support. **Elevating** human stories to educate the public. **Identifying** root causes of client criminal justice involvement.



30,553

people helped through free bail assistance and supportive services



111,284

successful court dates



\$92 MILLION

taxpayer dollars saved

20 coalitions joined/formed\*

\$81 MILLION

philanthropic dollars posted in free bail




1,184,048

days of pretrial incarceration prevented



2,472,969

people reached through social media with client stories and education content



92%

court appearance rate

6 states where testimony or written letters of support provided\*

35%

case dismissal rate



91%

of bail capital revolved



17,277

free rides to court\*

6 pieces of legislation drafted/introduced\*



4,555

referrals to voluntary supportive services\*

38% reported history of substance use

29% reported history of mental health conditions

## CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

58% Black | 29% white | 10% Hispanic  
2% Native American | 1% Asian or Pacific Islander  
1% Other | 77% Male | 23% Female

7% reported no stable housing at release, 33x the rate of homelessness in the general population



# WHERE WE WORK

The Bail Project has provided a lifeline in dozens of jurisdictions across the United States. From rural counties to large cities, thousands of Americans who would have been incarcerated otherwise have successfully returned to court with our assistance, lending ample evidence that a world without cash bail is possible.

Our reach in Fiscal Year 2023:

- AR - Bentonville

AR - Fayetteville

AZ - Phoenix

CA - Los Angeles

FL - Jacksonville

FL - Orlando

FL - Pensacola

GA - Atlanta

GA - Augusta

IL - Chicago

IN - Gary

IN - Indianapolis

KY - Louisville

LA - Baton Rouge

LA - New Orleans\*

MI - Ann Arbor
- MI - Detroit

MO - St. Louis

MS - Jackson\*

MT - Flathead Reservation

NC - Charlotte

NC - New Bern\*

NV - Las Vegas

OH - Cincinnati

OH - Cleveland

OK - Oklahoma City

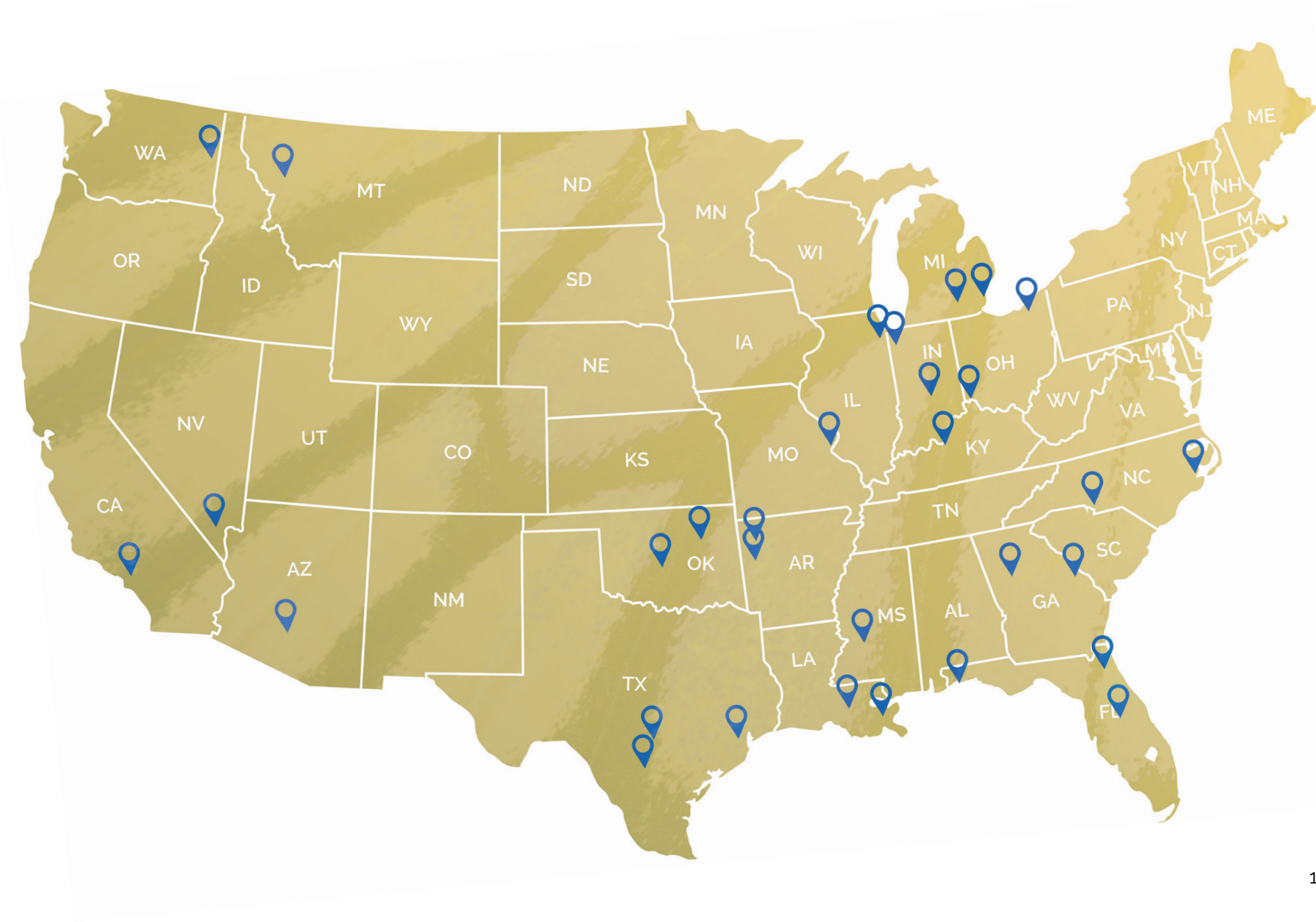
OK - Tulsa

TX - Houston

TX - San Antonio\*

TX - San Marcos

WA - Spokane







## STORIES FROM THE FIELD



# ASHLEY

Ashley, 39, was nearly eight months pregnant when the Oklahoma City police approached her in early June 2021 while she withdrew cash from an ATM. The police asked her for ID and then told her there was an outstanding warrant for her arrest. Caught off guard, Ashley asked what charges had been filed against her. The police refused to answer, forcing her into handcuffs instead.

"They just threw me on the ground," Ashley said. "They didn't care that I was pregnant."

The police took Ashley to jail, where she learned that charges had been filed against her for failing to appear in court on an open nonviolent misdemeanor charge. She had no idea she had missed her court date – she was just like the countless people who miss appointments because of scheduling mishaps. She was fingerprinted, booked into jail, and bail was set at \$11,500, which she couldn't afford. "I [was] on fixed income, I didn't have the ability to pay," she said.

Ashley was placed in a cell on the jail's medical floor with two other women – one who was pregnant and another who was visibly bleeding. Their cell was covered in feces. Ashley wasn't given a mattress when she arrived. She was forced to sleep for several nights on the concrete floor even though she was pregnant.

Ashley's experience in Oklahoma County jail is not a one-off case. Health and safety problems have been ongoing at the facility for years. Since 2021, at least 30 people have died there, making it one of the deadliest jails in the country.

Prior to being incarcerated, Ashley had an apartment, was enrolled in school, and worked a steady job as a manager at a liquor store. Ashley had been incarcerated for three weeks when The Bail Project received a referral for her. We interviewed her and paid her bail so she could be released. Thanks to our intervention, Ashley was able to have her child in a hospital rather than in jail.

For people living paycheck to paycheck, pretrial detention can lead to homelessness, and that's exactly what happened to Ashley. Often, transitional housing is unavailable due to inadequate funding and extremely high demand. It took weeks for Ashley and her baby to get a placement in a shelter. During that time, they slept in her car. The stress and hardship took a toll on Ashley's emotional well-being, but she knew she had to be strong for her child. She is now seeing a therapist and slowly rebuilding her life.

*Women are the fastest-growing segment of the incarcerated population in the United States, having increased by 475% in the last 40 years. As the population of incarcerated women skyrockets, so does the number of incarcerated pregnant women. Childbirth in jail can be horrifying: During labor, women are sometimes shackled or placed in solitary confinement. Labor complaints are ignored. For Ashley, unaffordable bail meant she nearly delivered her baby inside a jail cell.*







## SANDRA

At first glance, the room at the homeless shelter in Los Angeles looks mundane. It's spacious enough to fit three beds and some personal belongings. Not much else. But for Sandra and her three young children, that room is sacred. It's where, for the first time in years, the 39-year-old single mother and her kids feel safe. To them, that room is home.

Although Sandra's current living situation may seem less than ideal, it has played a critical role in getting her life back on track. It's also a far cry from what life was like for her in early December 2021. Back then, tension between Sandra and her landlord had been brewing. Her landlord's daughter

called 911, accusing Sandra of trespassing – in her own home. The next day, the landlord's daughter entered Sandra's bedroom, and an argument led to a physical altercation. When police arrived, the landlord's daughter accused Sandra of hitting her. Police handcuffed Sandra, placed her in the back of the patrol car, and drove her to the station, where she was booked and taken into custody.

Prosecutors filed severe charges against Sandra. California notoriously sets high bail amounts compared to the rest of the country. The median bail amount in California is \$50,000, which is more than five times the median amount in the rest of the nation. The judge set Sandra's bail at \$150,000 – an amount seven times her annual income. Unable to afford bail, Sandra had no choice but to languish

behind bars at the Los Angeles County women's jail in Lynwood. She struggled with the deplorable living conditions. "I found dried-up blood on the walls," Sandra said. She worried about her kids, ages 3, 5, and 7. She missed everything about them. She tried remembering as many physical details as she could, starting from their facial expressions down to their little toes.

If the stress of losing her children to foster care wasn't enough, Sandra's life began to unravel in other ways while in jail. She lost her job, her car was repossessed, and she had thousands of dollars in credit card debt.

Sandra's public defender advocated strongly on her behalf, telling the judge that she was a single mother and sole provider for her kids. When the judge agreed to lower bail to \$50,000, The Bail Project stepped in and paid. After two months in jail, Sandra was released.

Sandra's life quickly improved. Within a month, she found a job, moved into the Riverside shelter, bought a new car, and began working with her public defender to gather evidence ahead of her trial. She credits much of her success to the one-on-one help she received from friends, caseworkers, and community-based groups like The Bail Project and People Assisting The Homeless.

As a second-generation American whose parents emigrated from Honduras, Sandra said she wants to set an example for her children. "I don't want my children to feel limited in what they can accomplish because of where we were at," she said. "My kids are everything to me."

*Thousands of mothers are held in pretrial detention each day. Many, like Sandra, are single parents and the sole breadwinners for their family. Needlessly incarcerating mothers who simply cannot afford to pay bail amounts set against them perpetuates a cycle of intergenerational harm. Their children experience economic insecurity, worsened educational outcomes, increased likelihood of being placed into foster care, and adverse health symptoms, including many related to post-traumatic stress disorder.*







# MIKE

Powderly, Kentucky, is the place Mike calls home. Although classified as a city, it has a population of less than 1,000 people. "I am as country as country can be," Mike says. "And I'm proud of it."

Mike has seen a lot of change over the fifty years he's lived there. Coal money flooded into Kentucky, and with that, ordinary people were able to afford new houses and cars. Then, the industry dried up. Mike watched the new cars get towed away, and foreclosure notices appear on the front doors of houses across the city. "It's been pretty much poverty-stricken ever since," Mike said.

Many residents of Powderly, including Mike, live below the poverty line. More than half of Kentuckians who are detained pretrial are there because they cannot afford to post bail. The state has one of the highest pretrial incarceration rates in the country.

One night, after taking an accidental turn down a one-way street while driving near his home, Mike found himself subject to an intense traffic stop. Four or five police cars arrived at the scene. The police slammed Mike down on the ground. Residents milled about nearby, their faces aglow in red and blue police lights. His vehicle was eventually towed and ripped apart, ostensibly as part of a search for illegal substances – none of which were found. The local police took no responsibility for the damages done. Mike felt humiliated.

The police accused Mike of driving while intoxicated, which he disputes. He had little recourse. An

arresting officer suggested to him that if he wanted to, he could go to the hospital to have blood drawn to test his blood alcohol levels, but to do so, he would have to cover the cost. He didn't have the money for the lab test. "We live rough around here," Mike said. "I'll be honest with you – I ain't got \$10 in my pocket." With no options, Mike was arrested, and bail was set at \$6,000, which he couldn't afford. He was incarcerated.

"Guilty, innocent, don't matter," Mike said, thinking about his circumstances. "I was wondering how in the world I was going to come up with \$6,000. It could be a million, it wouldn't make no difference. If you haven't got it, you haven't got it." Across the country, many people in similar situations to Mike simply accept plea deals in exchange for time served just so they can go home.

After about 10 or 11 days behind bars, Mike called The Bail Project. He was surprised to learn that an organization like ours existed. He had been spending the days before he contacted us wondering how he would be able to find his way out. "I thought, this is unbelievable," he recalled, referring to the free bail assistance and voluntary supportive services provided by The Bail Project. We posted his bail the day after we received his call.

Since his release, Mike has been able to return to his life in the quiet, rural town. His mind often turns to his son and grandson, hoping they have better opportunities than he did.

*Poverty rates in rural U.S. counties are 50% higher than they are in urban areas. When people living in rural communities are swept into the criminal justice system, the imposition of cash bail often means automatic jail time. As a result, despite low crime rates, rural areas have the highest jail incarceration rates in the United States.*







## NICOLE

It was a chilly spring day in early April when Nicole, a 31-year-old medical social worker in Tulsa, saw the letter sitting in her mailbox. It was an advertisement from a criminal defense attorney promoting his services. Nicole figured it was junk mail. After all, she never had any run-ins with the law and spent much of her free time helping people of color impacted by the criminal justice system.

But as she continued reading it, she came across a startling sentence: "...It has come to my attention that you have been recently charged with a felony criminal offense. This means that you may have a warrant for your arrest!"

The letter didn't include any additional information about the alleged charge. Stunned and confused, the single mother of three wondered if it was sent by mistake or was maybe a scam. Worst case scenario, she figured, this was just a big misunderstanding that could easily be resolved. She was wrong.

Unbeknownst to Nicole, the state of Oklahoma had been building a case against her after an eyewitness said she fit the description of a woman who allegedly robbed a store employee at knife point.

Less than seven months later, prosecutors charged Nicole with robbery, and a judge issued a warrant for her arrest. The judge set her bail at \$50,000. Nicole was shocked and confused at the high amount. It was not affordable for her. She had no prior arrests.

Much was at stake if she couldn't afford to post bond. Nicole risked losing the opportunity to complete an internship for her master's degree program, the house she was trying to buy, her job, and custody over her son. Languishing behind bars for an uncertain amount of time for a crime she did not commit was unfathomable. That her freedom was dependent on whether she could afford bail made it worse. "I was presumed guilty, rather than innocent," Nicole said.

It took the courthouse social worker, The Bail Project, and a public defender to successfully convince a judge to lower Nicole's bond from \$50,000 to \$10,000, at which point The Bail Project posted her bail.

After her release, Nicole's charges were dismissed. She often thinks that if The Bail Project had not stepped in to help lower her bail and post her bond, she would have spent three months behind bars while waiting for a resolution.

The impacts of her arrest have shaken her. "I save all receipts including grocery or gas receipts – not to manage money, but in case I have to prove my whereabouts. I now take a picture of the receipt, scan the copy, and email them to myself for additional storage," she said, adding: "I'm nervous when I see an unmarked police car, fearing they're watching me or there to arrest me again."

Despite it all, she says her experience has reaffirmed her passion for helping women impacted by the justice system, especially when it comes to issues related to probable cause and cash bail reforms. "No way you can fight for yourself when you're sitting in jail," she said. "Even if you're innocent."

*Imagine being incarcerated for weeks or months on end only to hear that the charges against you were unsubstantiated. Nearly one-third of The Bail Project clients have their cases completely dismissed. Sometimes, like in Nicole's case, charges are dropped because the initial arrest is the result of mistaken identity or what is commonly known as a "false arrest." Even in instances where that case is ultimately dismissed, the harm from a false arrest and the subsequent period of incarceration can be profound and lasting.*







# MARCELLA

Marcella stood outside watching as the orange glow from the Houston sunrise pierced the sky. "I never thought anything like this could happen to me," she said, reflecting on her experience spending several months in jail because she could not afford bail.

She took a few sips of coffee and closed her eyes. The cold December wind stung her cheeks like a million little needles. She let out a long sigh before walking back inside her friend's home, where she's been living since her release. Marcella has always enjoyed contemplating nature during the morning's early hours. It's her favorite time of day. But after enduring incarceration, and the better part of last year living outside on the streets, she appreciates these simple moments of peace and freedom even more. "When I lived on the streets, I didn't feel safe. I was scared," Marcella said. "Nobody hurt me. I've been blessed to learn survival skills, but I feel safer when I'm inside."

After growing up in Houston, Marcella followed her wanderlust after graduating from high school. She moved to Ohio, Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama. With time, Marcella grew more independent and self-sufficient. She enjoyed the outdoors and designing jewelry. "I've always held my own and paid my own way," she said.

Her life took a negative turn when coworkers at a restaurant where she was a waitress introduced her to recreational drugs. Experimental use escalated into a debilitating addiction. Just as her addiction

spiraled, she received devastating news that she had kidney cancer. To make matters worse, Marcella got into an altercation and was accused of assault. She would end up spending three months in jail before the judge decided to release her while her case was pending. In a state of crisis and with little support, Marcella unintentionally missed a court date and was remanded back to jail.

She was behind bars for another four months before a mental health caseworker referred her to The Bail Project. A member of our Houston team reached out to her, and soon after, we paid her bail. We kept in touch with her to ensure she had support and information on accessing healthcare and mental health resources while her case was pending. We also provided Marcella with court notifications and free Lyft rides to and from court hearings. Eventually, a judge dismissed her case due to lack of evidence.

Soon after, a friend of Marcella offered her a place to stay while she got back on her feet. It was just the new beginning she needed. Now that she has a warm bed to sleep in at night and a safe place to shower in the morning, she is rebuilding her life. She signed up for counseling and healthcare and is applying for jobs. Marcella knows it won't be easy, but she has rediscovered her self-confidence.

"I don't know how I found that strength, but I did," she said. "I've gotten in touch with my inner self, and I lean on my faith as I have done my whole life."



*Unhoused people are more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population. Many struggle to achieve the economic stability they need to break free from a period of long-term homelessness. Many who are unhoused also have untreated physical and mental health issues that can lead to justice-system involvement. When cash bail is a part of the equation, those who are unhoused are far more likely to end up incarcerated, fueling a vicious cycle of homelessness and jail. Middle-aged women, like Marcella, represent one of the fastest-growing populations of Americans experiencing homelessness.*





*Incarcerating someone seriously impacts their physical health. In some cases, it's lethal. According to recent reports, the U.S. life expectancy would be five years higher if not for incarceration. Each year, incarcerated people, like Christopher, experience inadequate medical care that threatens their health and safety.*

## CHRISTOPHER

For almost a year, Christopher had been struggling to maintain his battle with sarcoidosis, an autoimmune disorder that attacks the lungs and can lead to memory loss and blindness. His vision was getting worse. The headaches were unbearable. As his health deteriorated, his everyday life began to fall apart.

There is treatment for this condition, but it would take months before Christopher could get access to it. Unfortunately, just as he was starting to regain his health, he was arrested for an alleged altercation with another patient at a medical center.

The police grabbed him from behind and threw him to the ground. "I was in a state of confusion, and I'm screaming, 'Hey, I'm a patient!'" he shared with us. "I'm still bruised from the handcuffs."

Christopher was booked into the Maricopa County Jail. A judge set Christopher's bail at \$750. Christopher did not have the money. Not even close. He was struggling with homelessness. His family didn't have the resources to help. He felt his only option was to stay behind bars and fight for his innocence despite the toll it would take on his health.

His medical treatment came to a sudden halt the day he was incarcerated. Christopher sought the help of medical providers inside the jail but was unable to receive the care he needed because he did not have \$20 for the copay. After about two weeks, Christopher could barely see. The harsh living conditions inside the jail were accelerating his decline. He began to

lose his appetite. He struggled to find the strength to eat or even drink water. "If you guys didn't bail me out, I probably would've died in that place," Christopher said.

Christopher had nearly lost all hope when, after three months behind bars, his son told him that he had heard about an organization called The Bail Project. They decided to contact us. Our local staff interviewed Christopher. The next day, we posted bail, and he was released.

Christopher had to be hospitalized soon after his release. Because of his time in jail and away from treatment, he was nearly blind, the headaches were debilitating, and he was beginning to lose hearing. The doctors worked to ease his pain and stabilize his condition.

Despite this setback, Christopher feels grateful that he can finally get the care he needs. Christopher was offered a plea bargain, but he refused to take it. Instead, he intends to fight his pending case by going to trial. He is confident that the footage of his arrest will show his innocence. It will be a long process. "Without you guys, I wouldn't have made it. I believe I would still be in jail," he said.

In addition to focusing on his health, Christopher is looking forward to reconnecting with his family. He is keeping up with his court dates, doctor's appointments, and medication. He is also eager to return to work and hopes to open his own security company in the future.

"I just want to become more successful and help people," he said. "That's the biggest thing."



# SHERRY

When Sherry, a 59-year-old Atlanta resident, was arrested and booked into the DeKalb County jail, her main concern was for her blind 14-year-old shih tzu, Onyx. Sherry didn't know where the police had taken Onyx and she was worried about whether her dog was safe. The pair had been inseparable.

"I'm not married, and I don't have any kids, so Onyx became a part of me," Sherry said. "I put off buying food for myself so I could take care of her. She was my baby."

The years preceding Sherry's incarceration were marked by indelible loss. Her house was foreclosed upon during the 2008 financial crisis. Her two brothers and mother passed away. Amidst so much change, Onyx's calm presence helped Sherry feel grounded.

In June 2022, Sherry, a part-time limo driver, was pulled over by police while taking a passenger to the airport. Onyx was riding with her in the front passenger seat. The officers who stopped her claimed there were drugs in the limo, which Sherry denies any knowledge of. It was her first time being accused of a crime. She was placed under arrest.

Sherry's bail was set at \$11,200, an amount neither she nor her friends or family could afford. Before she was taken to jail, an animal enforcement officer arrived at the scene to take custody of her dog. As she sat in her cell, Sherry wondered how long she would have to stay behind bars.

"They took her," Sherry said of Onyx. "I didn't know what to do with myself."

One of the first things Sherry did after The Bail Project paid her bail and she was released from jail was check her cell phone messages. She saw several missed calls and voicemails from the county animal shelter and The Humane Society, but they were more than a month old.

Eventually, Sherry discovered that Onyx had been put up for adoption by a nonprofit animal rescue group. Although the rescue group hadn't found a permanent home for Onyx yet, they refused to return her to Sherry, claiming she had been negligent.

Sherry tried everything she could to get Onyx back. She tried to fight the negligence claims by producing records showing consistent visits to the veterinarian. She called The Humane Society. She monitored their website to see if Onyx had found some other permanent home. Then one day Onyx's picture was no longer online: She had been adopted.

Sherry tries not to blame herself for losing Onyx, but she can't help but wonder whether there was more she could have done. Sherry keeps Onyx's food bowl and leash in the same place in her apartment as a reminder of the time they shared together. Sometimes she picks up Onyx's squeaky toys and looks at them. It reminds her of better days.



*There are few policies or guidelines for how the government should intervene when an incarcerated person is the sole caregiver for a pet. Oftentimes, after arrest, pets are placed in the temporary care of animal shelters. However, those shelters often lack contact information or key details for a pet owner, like their expected release date. Without knowing how long a case may go on for or whether a person is likely to be released from jail, shelters are forced to prematurely classify pets as abandoned, initiating an adoption process. Pets adopted in this way could be lost to their original owners forever.*







*Jails and prisons have become the largest psychiatric institutions in the United States. Despite the fact that incarceration is known to worsen symptoms associated with mental illness, people with these health conditions are regularly incarcerated. Unfortunately, a person's wealth often dictates whether someone can access timely and adequate mental health treatment. Families who cannot afford private psychiatric treatment facilities often feel hopeless. With nowhere to turn, many people with mental illness, like Jaylen, often end up cycling in and out of jail.*



## JAYLEN

Mrs. Elfreda, Jaylen's grandmother, began to notice that something was not quite right with Jaylen. She was used to him being a soft-spoken and humble young man who went to church, wrote poetry, and skateboarded in his free time. Suddenly, Jaylen stopped attending college and broke up with his girlfriend. He was quick to anger and yelled often. This was a far cry from the kind, sweet, and respectful young man his grandmother helped raise.

"Something is wrong with my grandson," Mrs. Elfreda would tell people. "This isn't him." When doctors finally diagnosed Jaylen, 23, with schizophrenia, Mrs. Elfreda wasn't surprised. Mental illness runs in their family: Mrs. Elfreda had been diagnosed with schizophrenia

herself three decades ago. She was shuffled in and out of different psychiatric hospitals until doctors found the right combination of medications for her. Like so many who are experiencing the devastating symptoms of mental illness, Jaylen initially struggled to come to terms with his condition. He refused to take medication and had been growing increasingly more agitated and frustrated. For the next year and a half, Mrs. Elfreda directed all her energy towards helping her grandson get his life back on track.

"You never take your hand away from a person with mental illness," she said. "You hold their hand until they realize they have a problem. When I went through my mental illness, my mother didn't give up on me."

As a result of his worsening symptoms, Jaylen was arrested one evening and a judge set bail for him at \$3,000, which neither he nor his grandmother could afford. He was detained at the St. Charles County Jail for nearly two weeks until Mrs. Elfreda learned that The Bail Project might be able to help. She contacted us and we posted Jaylen's bail.

After his release, Jaylen was hospitalized, which helped stabilize him. Clinicians spent a month caring for Jaylen's mental health and he was placed on medications that treated his symptoms. When Jaylen returned home from the hospital, everyone was astonished by how much he had improved. He was back to his former self, chatting with his grandmother

about the bible, playing music, and skateboarding. "I'm proud of my grandson," Mrs. Elfreda said.

Although so much of what happened while Jaylen was sick was outside of his control, he was still required to spend four months in prison for the crimes that he was ultimately convicted of. He took it in stride. He now has plans to move with his mother to Texas where he'll go to college.

"I'm a person who has a heart," Jaylen said. "For so long I wasn't aware I had a mental illness. Everyone has obstacles in life. This is just another challenge I faced."





# CHANGING HEARTS AND MINDS

A 2020 AP-NORC poll<sup>2</sup> found that most Americans (69%) agree the criminal justice system requires significant changes. Many say it needs a complete overhaul. Nearly all (95%) say the criminal justice system needs at least some change. Removing money from the pretrial system is an essential step in changing criminal justice for the better. However, there's a lot of misinformation about the purpose of bail and the potential impacts of bail reform. The issue has become politicized to the detriment of creating better policies.

To combat misinformation, The Bail Project uses a wide range of platforms to engage different audiences with the facts about bail, human stories, and our research.

This year, we:

Launched a **billboard campaign** in Kentucky to raise awareness about the moral, social, and economic costs of cash bail. Our billboards appeared in multiple locations throughout the state and our posters were placed in highly visible bus stations.

Produced several **educational videos**, including "Person on the Street" interviews, showing how most people agree that money isn't aligned with the ideas of equal justice, freedom, and due process.

Unveiled our **brand new website** featuring tons of client stories, explainers, and ways to support our mission.

**Engaged with reporters** in dozens of media outlets to make sure they had the facts and access to people whose experiences exemplify the injustice of cash bail. Our outreach resulted in stories and commentary published in the Associated Press, The Washington Post, Bloomberg, The Appeal, LAW360, as well as many local outlets.

<sup>2</sup> Colleen Long and Hannah Fingerhut, "AP-NORC poll: Nearly all in US back criminal justice reform," The Associated Press, June 23, 2023.





## GATHERING EVIDENCE

The Bail Project is a data-driven organization that sees value in both conducting original research as well as interpreting, synthesizing, and analyzing crucial data to inform better policymaking. Highlights from this year include:

**Los Angeles, CA** - The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors commissioned a study to examine the effectiveness of various pretrial service interventions. The study found that people helped by The Bail Project had the highest rate of court appearance and the lowest rate of rearrest among the pretrial programs included in the study. The study also showed that Black people were less likely to be released through other programs and more likely to receive assistance from The Bail Project.

**Tulsa, OK** - To better understand The Bail Project's intervention within the larger pretrial context, we conducted an analysis to compare court return outcomes for people released through different mechanisms. This study used jail booking data from the Tulsa County Jail and court data from the Oklahoma State Courts Network.

Amongst the key findings, the analysis showed that people released through bail assistance from The Bail Project return to court at a higher rate than people who are released after paying a bail bonds agent.

**Chicago, IL** - With the passage of the landmark Pretrial Fairness Act in Illinois, which eliminates the use of cash bail throughout the state, The Bail Project partnered with the Lawndale Christian Legal Center to implement our Community Release with Support model. The early data is promising: Our clients returned to 98% of their court dates and 70% of these cases were dismissed. With Illinois pivoting away from reliance on a cash bail system, this innovative program lends critical evidence to policymakers that The Bail Project's customary suite of interventions – court notifications, travel assistance, and voluntary referrals to supportive services – is an effective alternative to bail that can and should be scaled.



# WORKING FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

While our work to post bail for people in need is critical, we know it is not a permanent solution. That is why The Bail Project also engages in legislative advocacy to advance bail reform and protect against regressive measures.

Our policy staff regularly meet with lawmakers and government officials to advocate for better policies. We also participate in diverse coalitions to create conditions for lasting change. This fiscal year, we engaged in both affirmative and defensive advocacy across multiple states, including:

## ✗ DEFENSIVE

**Texas:** The Bail Project worked in coalition to defeat a regressive constitutional amendment, **SJR 44**, and bill, **SB 1318**, that together would have expanded pretrial detention and further codified the use of cash bail.

**Indiana:** We provided critical support to partner efforts to stop a constitutional amendment, **SJR 1**, that would have vastly expanded pretrial detention in the state.

**Georgia:** We advocated against two regressive bills, **SB 63** and **SB 44**, which would ban judges from not requiring bail in certain cases.



## ✓ AFFIRMATIVE

**Texas:** Good data is essential to create good policy. In Texas, we authored and moved a pretrial data collection and reporting bill, **HB 2043**, through the House Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence Committee with unanimous support and commitments from stakeholders to help improve the bill for another legislative run in 2025.

**Oklahoma:** After two years of advocacy from The Bail Project, Gov. Stitt (R) issued **Executive Order 2023-19**, which establishes a jail study task force, which will provide critical, unprecedented data on the pretrial system and the pretrial population and make needed recommendations for reform in advance of the next legislative session.

**Michigan:** The Bail Project has been instrumental in a bipartisan coalition of advocacy organizations that have worked to craft, introduce, and champion eight bills that will vastly improve Michigan's pretrial system. The package would strengthen due process protections; establish a statutory right to a speedy trial; limit the use of cash bail and pretrial electronic surveillance; increase release for people accused of low-level offenses; and expand the use of court notifications, transportation assistance, and referrals to supportive services.

**Florida:** Cash bail is not a financial penalty. In fact, it is supposed to be returned at the end of a case, whether the person is found guilty or innocent, so long as they have returned to court. Current practice in Florida allows for the deduction of fines and fees, however, even if they make all of their required court dates. In 2023, The Bail Project continued working with lawmakers to pass **HB 65**, a bill that would ensure third parties like family members and charitable bail organizations get their full money back after posting bail if the person returns to court.

**California:** We know that effective court notifications make a big difference. This year, The Bail Project led an effort to advance **SB 255**, a state-wide court notification bill, including drafting the language, securing a powerful sponsor in Sen. Umberg, and negotiating with stakeholders to strengthen the bill's privacy protections.





# OUR SUPPORTERS

The Bail Project would not be possible without your support. With our deepest gratitude, thank you for joining our mission and extending a helping hand to families in need of bail. Thank you for taking action to protect the presumption of innocence. Thank you for taking a stand in the name of equal justice!



## Wanda Sykes

As a featured host of the Daily Show in 2023, Wanda Sykes tackled some of our country's most pressing issues, including over-policing and the growing prison-industrial complex. Before she signed off for the final time, Wanda Sykes had a very special request for viewers – that they support The Bail Project! Bail reform is an issue near and dear to Wanda Sykes, and we are grateful for her support.

## James Wedgwood

Like James, many Bail Project supporters come to us through personal experience. James is a Bail Project Freedom Funder – our monthly donor program. "Shortly after graduating from college, I found myself in jail, unable to afford my \$10,000 bail. I was struck by the injustice of the system I suddenly found myself in. Had my parents not had the means to pay my bail, I could have remained in jail pretrial for over a year. I set up a monthly recurring donation to The Bail Project so I can prevent others who find themselves in a similar situation to my own. I am proud of the small part I play in fixing what I believe to be one of the most broken systems in our country."



## Carolyn McClanahan

Carolyn's work as a physician in clinics serving people experiencing homelessness or poverty introduced her to the cruelty of cash bail and pretrial incarceration. "Through the years, I saw cases where minor events set off a cascade of destruction in a person's life, leading to unemployment and housing loss. It was amazing to me how many people were kept in a cycle of poverty because of a mistake. I support The Bail Project because they are making a difference for people caught in the unfair cash bail system." Freedom Funders like Carolyn make it possible to secure freedom for thousands of Americans experiencing poverty each year.

## Tom and Jackie Zenger

As two people dedicated to justice, it makes sense that Tom and Jackie wanted to incorporate that into their wedding day. Instead of a gift registry, Tom and Jackie asked their guests to donate to The Bail Project. "We came together as a couple late in life, through common values of peace and justice. When we were married in 2022, we wanted to celebrate not only our romantic love, but our love for our community. In lieu of gifts, we asked guests to donate to The Bail Project because it has a meaningful and lasting impact on people's lives and advocacy to change the policies of the criminal justice system. We are honored to include The Bail Project in our community of love."



## Ali Sabra

Every day, Bail Project supporters engage their communities to grow the movement to end cash bail. As a high school student, 17-year-old Ali knew he had to do his part. "Once I learned of the inequities of the bail system in our country, I was determined to find a way to help. I did some research online and found The Bail Project, which I felt was a serious and impactful organization helping so many people unable to afford bail. I'm really glad that I was able to do my part through this amazing organization." Through his efforts, Ali was able to raise over \$3,000 for The Bail Project.







**Dominic Fike**

Just before heading out on his world tour to promote his second studio album “Sunburn,” the talented musician and actor Dominic Fike traveled to his hometown of Naples, Florida, with The Bail Project to bail people out of the Collier County Jail, where earlier in his life, he had been held pretrial.

Freedom  
should be  
free.

Freedom  
should  
be free.



## OUR TEAM

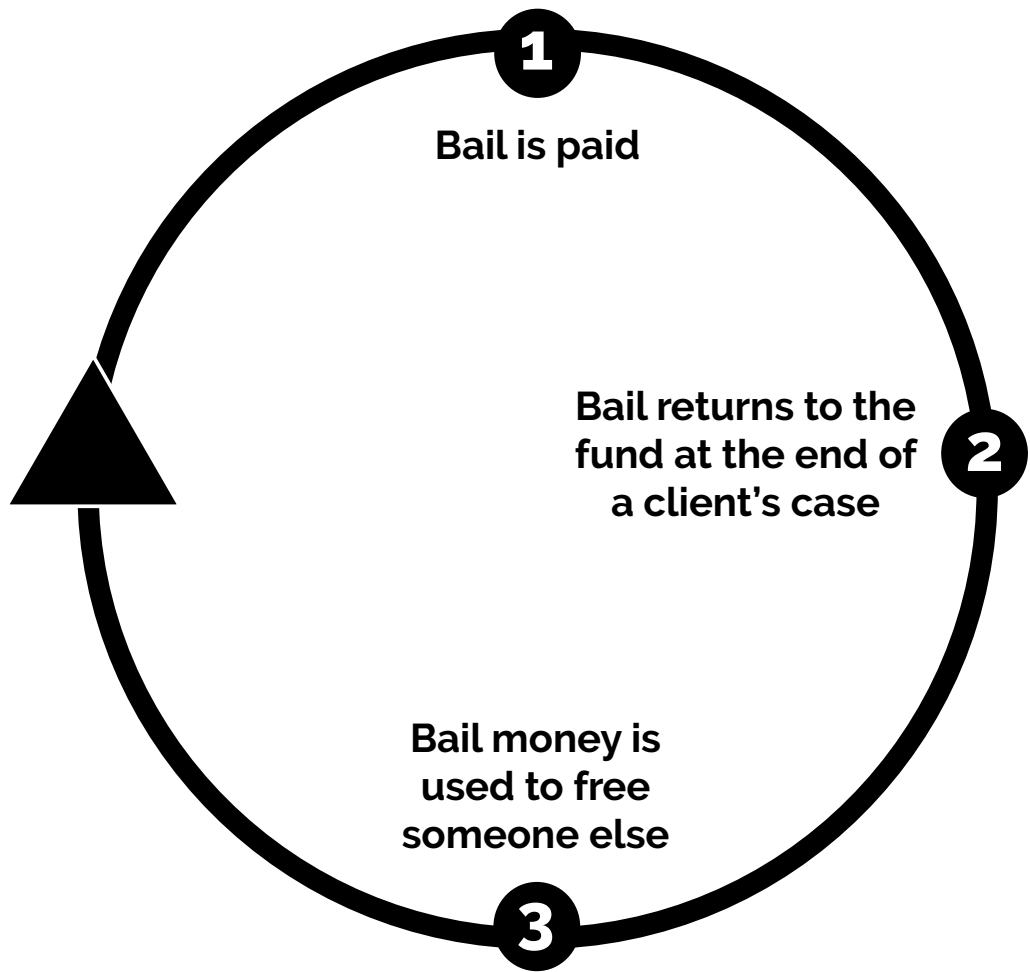
Our dedicated staff is the secret to our success, from our Bail Disruptors and Client Advocates across the country to our Storytellers, Data Scientists, Policy Advocates, and more. The majority of our staff (65%) identify as people of color. More than half (63%) are women. We also prioritize hiring people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system – most of our staff have either been incarcerated themselves or had a family member who was incarcerated. Our diversity of perspectives and experiences makes us stronger and more innovative.





# THE REVOLVING BAIL FUND

The Bail Project's revolving bail fund is a powerful force multiplier for direct action. To date, we have used it to provide free bail assistance and supportive services to more than 30,000 people. Of cases that have closed, 91% of bail capital has been returned to the fund, allowing us to recycle donations to pay bail for more people and support them during their cases. Our funds revolve at a high rate for a simple reason: It's not bail that makes people come back to court – it's support!



# FINANCIALS

## CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

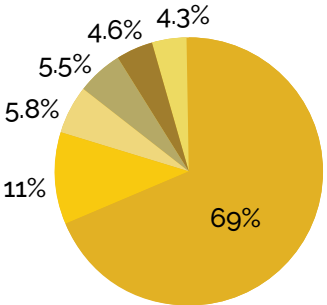
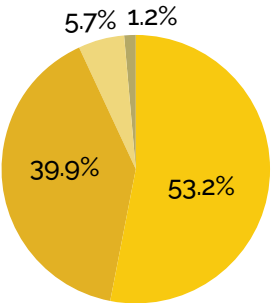
Year Ended June 30, 2023

### OPERATING REVENUES

Individual Contributions	\$5,544,518
Foundation Grants	\$7,391,871
Corporate Contributions	\$164,148
Other Income	\$786,084
<b>Total Operating Revenues</b>	<b>\$13,886,621</b>

### OPERATING EXPENSES

<b>Program Services</b>	
Bail Assistance & Client Support	\$14,825,357
Policy Advocacy	\$1,177,197
Public Education	\$979,675
Research & Evaluation	\$1,235,856
<b>Total Program Services</b>	<b>\$18,218,084</b>
<b>Supporting Services</b>	
Management and General	\$2,352,846
Fundraising	\$915,232
<b>Total Supporting Services</b>	<b>\$3,268,078</b>
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$21,486,162</b>
<b>Excess of Operating Revenues Over Operating Expenses</b>	<b>-\$7,599,541</b>
<b>Net Assets at Beginning of Year</b>	<b>\$79,432,033</b>
<b>NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR</b>	<b>\$71,832,492</b>





**THANK YOU!**

**Freedom  
Should be  
free.**

**THE BAIL PROJECT**