

THE BAIL PROJECT

2019 Annual Report



**Freedom
should be
free.**

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Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Report



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Dear Supporter,

I was a public defender in New York City for most of my career. And I loved it. Defending the rights and humanity of another person, as the terrifying power of the criminal legal system bore down on them, was a privilege. But it was also heartbreaking and infuriating. Late at night, I would lay awake, trying to come to terms with what I saw. A system that marginalized entire neighborhoods and devastated communities of color. A system that destroyed low-income families under the pretense of law and order. A system that denied the humanity of those ensnared in it. A system that was vengeful, rather than restorative, and that privileged power over justice. A system where freedom was for sale.

Perhaps nothing exemplified these injustices more than when my clients were hauled off to jail – without having been convicted of anything – just because they couldn't pay bail.

We started The Bail Project with a bold promise – that we would fight tooth and nail until no person in America sits in a jail cell before being convicted, solely because of poverty. In our short history, this promise has fueled an unprecedented mobilization of passionate people, ideas, and resources. Our goal is to secure freedom for tens of thousands of people over the next few years

while working to transform our country's system of pretrial justice for generations of Americans to come.

Since launching through TED's Audacious Project last year, we are proud of what we have accomplished with your support – and I'm delighted to share The Bail Project's first Annual Report. In the following pages, you'll find a powerful reminder of what is possible when we work together to fight for justice and reimagine the world we want to live in.

I know that together, we will usher in a day when freedom is truly free.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Steinberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

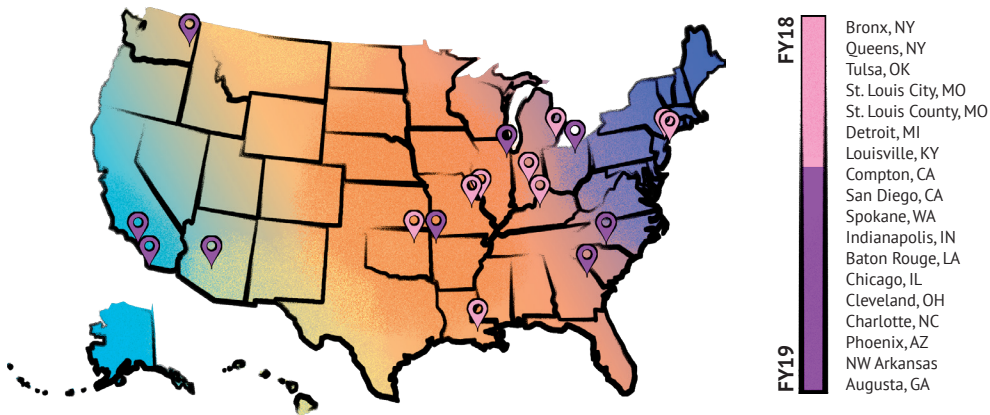
Robin Steinberg
CEO and Founder



Impact at a Glance

Since the launch of our first site in 2018, The Bail Project has already secured freedom for over **6,965 people**¹, reuniting thousands of families and fueling an unprecedented decarceration effort.

As of today, we have teams paying bails and supporting clients in the following locations:



With your support, in fiscal year 2019² alone, we paid bail for **4,689** people, working alongside dozens of amazing local organizations to support our clients throughout their pretrial process.



Our **National Revolving Bail Fund**³ is powered by thousands of individual contributions. To date¹:

We have posted **\$14.8 million** in bail
Preventing **86,040** days of incarceration

1. All figures as of September 30, 2019

2. Fiscal year-end June 30, 2019

3. Donated dollars revolve in our fund at an average of twice per year as bail payments come back at the end of a case.

Our Team

We're on a mission to secure freedom for an unprecedented number of people and transform pretrial justice for generations to come. With a wide network of community partners, supporters, and over a dozen Bail Project teams spread out across the country, we are making a difference every single day. Our dedicated teams of Bail Disruptors are paying bails, supporting clients, and demonstrating that our model, **Community Release with Support**, works. In addition to expanding our field operations, this fiscal year, we grew our data, policy, and operations teams at The Bail Project's central office, allowing us to accelerate our programmatic reach, sharpen our strategy, and better support Bail Disruptors at our local sites across America.



Strategic Plan

The U.S. jail population has grown dramatically in recent decades. This increase is due almost entirely to the rise of pretrial detention, the practice of holding a person in jail, before conviction, while they are presumed innocent.

Pretrial detention, driven by unaffordable cash bail, upends the presumption of innocence, tears families apart, and perpetuates racial and economic disparities. We are determined to end this injustice. Systemic change is not only possible, but necessary, and we believe deeply that such an effort must be accompanied and informed by the direct action of paying bail for those most impacted by the criminal legal system. This dual approach informs The Bail Project's mission to combat mass incarceration and the bail crisis, with the ultimate goal of putting ourselves out of business.

Over the years to come, we will:

- **Build and support** the leadership of our teams in the field and continue to serve our clients with compassion, diligence, and humility.
- **Reduce** pretrial detention directly by bailing out thousands of people every year in diverse cities and towns across America.
- **Forge** partnerships with grassroots advocacy campaigns and arm them with data and stories in support of community release and community investment.
- **Demonstrate**, with local and national data from The Bail Project's portfolio of sites, that cash bail is not necessary to ensure that people return to court, and that our **Community Release with Support** model succeeds across diverse contexts.
- **Influence** systemic change at the regional and national levels by leveraging our data, elevating our clients' stories, and framing the policy conversation around bail and what comes after.

In the Field

Day in and day out, in cities and towns across America, our local teams pay bail for low-income clients, thus reuniting families and restoring the presumption of innocence. We then support them with our **Community Release with Support** model, which consists of court notifications, transportation assistance, and voluntary referrals to local partner organizations for additional services, including housing, drug treatment, mental health care, and job readiness.

In fiscal year 2019 (July 2018 – June 2019), we launched six additional sites and forged new local partnerships, expanding our ability to bail out thousands more people every year. In the following pages, we celebrate some of the many milestones we've collectively achieved.



Quarter 1: July - September 2018

San Diego

After building our initial cohort of 2018 sites in St. Louis City and County, Tulsa, Detroit, and Louisville, we partnered with the Federal Defenders of San Diego to launch a specialized Bail Project site that provides bail assistance to immigrants at the mercy of Operation Streamline.

Operation Streamline is a policy mandating that all people accused of crossing the border without authorization be prosecuted in criminal rather than civil court. The result is a system that criminalizes migration and guts due process protections for immigrants through mass prosecutions, unaffordable cash bail, and coerced guilty pleas.

Within its first two months, our San Diego team paid bail for over 700 immigrants, allowing most to avoid criminal records and be in a better position to seek asylum and other immigration relief. The high case-dismissal rates frustrated the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy and soon prosecutors began using new tactics to use bail as a coercive lever. We continue to work with the Federal Defenders of San Diego to support our immigrant clients.



Thomas

At the heart of The Bail Project is our commitment to our clients, the thousands of people we've had the honor of meeting and serving as we expand The Bail Project across the country.

This year, Louisville Site Manager Shameka Parrish-Wright marked the inaugural anniversary of her team's work in the Derby City, by catching up with her very first client, Thomas, a retiree and grandfather who spent several days in jail without his medications because he could not afford an \$800 bail.

"One year later, I continue to be inspired by clients like Mr. Gibbs and the overwhelming community support we have received. From our amazing partners at the Louisville Metro Public Defenders to the Louisville chapter of Showing Up For Racial Justice (LSURJ) and the Presbyterian Church (USA), there's a strong community behind this movement in Kentucky. Together, we are paving the way for real, long-lasting change."

Shameka Parrish-Wright, TBP – Louisville



Quarter 2: October - December 2018

Compton, Indianapolis, and Spokane

California has some of the highest bail amounts of any state in the country. In Los Angeles County, bail for misdemeanors averages about \$20,000. Last fall, we brought our model to the county with a pilot site in Compton that works in partnership with the UCLA School of Law and the Compton Public Defender's Office.

The site partners law students with public defenders; together they file bail reduction motions so clients can be released on their own recognizance or The Bail Project can intervene. In addition to helping the community, our clients' successes have also provided strong evidence that **Community Release with Support** works: members of the L.A. Board of Supervisors cited our program in a motion to develop local bail reforms. In fall 2019, this pilot site will expand to the Van Nuys neighborhood in Los Angeles.

As winter came, our Operations Team raced to the finish line and launched Bail Disruptor teams in Indianapolis and Spokane, surpassing our goal of eight new sites in 2018.

“You encouraged me. You talked to me. You inspired me. You lifted me up without a doubt. You really showed you cared. That’s something that... something I hadn’t had in a long time, somebody who actually cared.”

Rudy, client from Spokane

Kathleen

Partnerships make us stronger. It is thanks to our incredible community partners that we're able to best support our clients after release.

Indianapolis Bail Disruptors, Devi Davis and April Angermeier, saw the power of partnership firsthand with their client Kathleen, who spent nearly a month in jail because she could not afford a \$500 bail. At the time, Kathleen was homeless and unemployed. After posting her bail, our team connected Kathleen to Project Lia, a visionary local nonprofit that supports women in rebuilding their lives after incarceration. Kathleen now has a home, a job (at Project Lia!), and her case was dismissed.

"When I hear Kathleen tell her story it truly touches my heart. We feel honored to have had the opportunity to post Kathleen's bail. She is amazing! Kathleen reminds me of why we do what we do and why we cannot stop!"

Devi Davis, TBP – Indianapolis



Quarter 3: January - March 2019

The Bail Project's National Convening

In January, we celebrated The Bail Project's first anniversary by gathering all our teams from across the country. We had reached a major milestone, reaching 3,500 people, while building the foundation for a lean and nimble organization that has the potential to drive systemic change and improve the lives of thousands of people each year.

During this time, our local partners ArchCity Defenders, along with other civil rights groups, filed a legal challenge to St. Louis's bail system, and were able to use data from The Bail Project – St. Louis, our inaugural site, to bolster their arguments. Real, systemic change takes time and a variety of strategies, from litigation and community organizing to bailouts. We're thrilled to be working alongside inspiring partners and bringing all tools to the table.



Eddie

Freedom means everything.

For Eddie, one of our clients in Compton, freedom meant joining his wife as they welcomed their son into the world.

“The moment of him being born was breathtaking. I just remember tears running down my face because I anticipated this moment... to finally get to meet my bundle of joy after a wait of 9 months was a great blessing.”

Eddie



Quarter 4: April - June 2019

Chicago and Baton Rouge

With the largest single-site jail in the United States, the possibility of statewide reform, and pretrial electronic surveillance on the rise, Chicago is a key battleground for the future of pretrial justice in America. In May, we launched **The Bail Project – Chicago** to assist low-income residents trapped by bail and support existing grassroots efforts.

By Father's Day, we were reuniting families in Baton Rouge, where we launched our first site in the Deep South. In Baton Rouge, we have partnered with the public defender's new bond team, the Capital Area ReEntry Coalition, the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison Reform Coalition, and VOTE, a grassroots organization founded and run by formerly incarcerated people. By early summer, we were preparing to launch five new sites: **Cleveland, Charlotte, Northwest Arkansas, Phoenix, and Augusta.**



Celebrating The Bronx Freedom Fund

The seed for The Bail Project was planted in 2007 when The Bronx Freedom Fund launched in New York City, as the first revolving bail fund of its kind. BFF, as we affectionately call it, was co-founded by our CEO Robin Steinberg and her husband, fellow public defender David Feige. Since then, BFF has secured freedom for thousands of low-income New Yorkers, inspired the creation of other community bail funds, generated a decade of data showing that cash bail is not necessary, and provided the proof of concept for what is now The Bail Project. Just like The Bail Project, BFF began with the goal of bailing people out of jail while driving long-term systemic change that would make future bailouts unnecessary.

We are thrilled that in January 2020, impactful state-wide bail reform will finally go into effect in New York State. The new law is not perfect, but it is arguably the best piece of bail legislation to be passed in the U.S. to date. The reform eliminates cash bail in most cases and promises to significantly downsize the number of people who can be held in jail before conviction. So, starting in January, BFF will begin the process of downsizing its operations. After a dozen years, we can finally put ourselves out of business in New York City. The fight to decarcerate New York will continue, but it is now time to pass the baton to organizations with different tools at their disposal.

Those who worked at BFF over the years – funders, advocacy and service partners, and the Board of Directors – have all played a critical role in making this wave of reform in New York possible. We couldn't be prouder. For us at The Bail Project, BFF's work over these past 12 years is not only our proof of concept, but a reminder that the road to change is long and full of ups and downs. But victory is possible. BFF came under attack many times, but it prevailed. As we continue to scale across the country – bringing people home to their communities and continuing to build momentum for meaningful bail reform – we will remember BFF as our shining lodestar of what is possible.





'It always comes down to money': How a nonprofit is changing lives by paying bail

Bail fund aims to disrupt 'a two-tier system of justice'



Robin Steinberg: How Can We End The Injustice Of Bail?

Re-making bail: Nearly half a million Americans are in jail who haven't been convicted of anything



**LA
Times**

With California's cash bail system in limbo, Compton pilot program serves as a 'petri dish'

The Bail Project helps people in Indy who can't afford their bail pretrial

FOX 59

INLANDER

A national program seeks to prove in Spokane that you don't need to lock up defendants to get them to court

The Bail Project – National Nonprofit Organization that provides free bail to the incarcerated opens Chicago office

Illinois Bar Journal

Looking Ahead

At its heart, The Bail Project is about a belief in the dignity and equality of all people, and the absolute need to defend against one of the government's most fearsome powers – the power to take away our liberty. In 2020 we will continue our national expansion to new locations, with a focus on assisting communities in the South and Mountain regions, as well as in rural counties around our existing urban sites. By scaling The Bail Project across a portfolio of demographically, geographically, and politically diverse jurisdictions with varying momentum for statewide reform, we will build our capacity to bail out thousands of people every year, while making the case for ending cash bail and investing in our communities, not jails.

Now more than ever, we believe that ending cash bail is possible. But we also know that doing so is only a first step on a much longer road to real change.

Unless we focus on the larger systemic problems of which bail was a symptom – structural racism, economic inequality, and mass incarceration – reform can re-create the disparities and harms of the current system in a different form. Some of the leading alternatives to cash bail, such as



“You can’t tell someone’s whole life story through a number or an allegation.”

Denise, Chicago Client



the adoption of big data algorithms (“risk assessment” tools) to decide a person’s pretrial liberty, appear to attack the economic injustice of bail, but can instead codify biases and disparities. Meanwhile, surveillance technologies such as ankle monitors are gaining new traction as a default for pretrial confinement. We need to end cash bail, but we must also stay vigilant and challenge any new pretrial practices that re-create injustice and abuse.

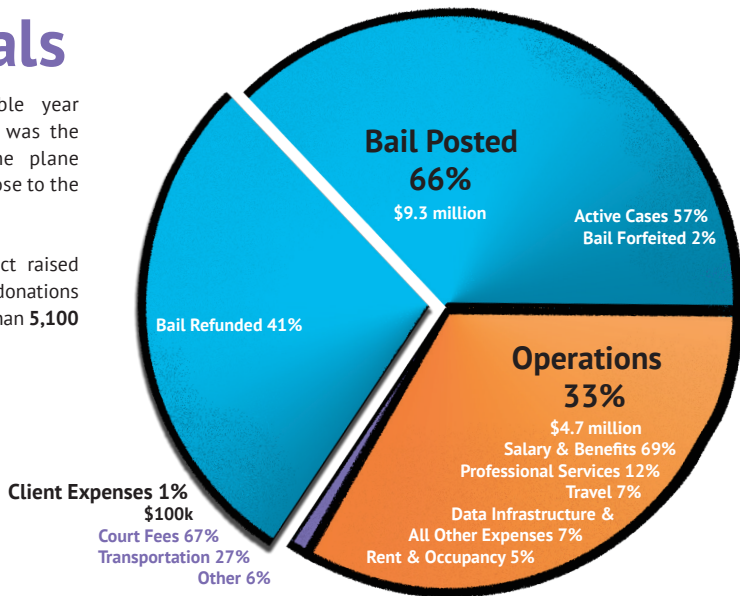
As we look to a future after cash bail, The Bail Project will arm local movements and policy makers with the data-driven arguments, legislative frameworks, and tools needed to advance systemic change that is grounded in a presumption of release. With your support, we will secure freedom and transform the pretrial experience not only for the tens of thousands of people we will serve directly in the coming years, but for generations of Americans to come.



Financials

FY19 was an incredible year for The Bail Project. It was the proverbial “building the plane while flying it” and we rose to the challenge.

In FY19, The Bail Project raised over **\$14.9 million** in donations and pledges from more than **5,100** individual donors.





“You move mountains.”

Thomas, client from Louisville



Our Partners

Our work would not be possible without the power of partnership and community. From community coalitions and direct services to advocacy and storytelling, these are the partners that make our work possible.

TED / The Audacious Project [Still She Rises](#) [Tulsa](#) [UCLA Law](#) [Californians United for a Responsible Budget \(CURB\)](#) [Just Leadership USA](#) [Getting Out](#) [Staying Out](#) [American Indian Community Center](#) [Revive Reentry Homes and Services](#) [Decarceration Project](#) [Close the Workhouse](#) [The Bronx Defenders](#) [Compton Public Defender](#) [Louisville Showing Up for Racial Justice](#) [Louisville Public Defender](#) [Louisville Family Justice Advocates](#) [University of Louisville](#) [Anne Braden Institute](#) [For Social Justice Research](#) [Indianapolis Urban League](#) [The HOPE Foundation](#) [Step Up Inc](#) [Marion County Re-entry Coalition](#) [Marion County Public Defender](#) [Fathers & Families Center](#) [Adult and Child Health WIR](#) [Tulsa County Public Defenders](#) [St. Louis Public Defender](#) [Midwest Innocence Project](#) [Mission: St. Louis](#) [St. Louis County Public Defender](#) [ACLU Oklahoma](#) [ArchCity Defenders](#) [Action St. Louis](#) [Kingdom House](#) [Clark Fox Family Foundation](#) [Spokane County Public Defender](#) [City of Spokane Public Defender](#) [Northwest Justice Project](#) [NAACP Spokane](#) [Spokane EnVision Center](#) [Empire Health Foundation](#) [Consistent Care](#) [Federal Defenders of San Diego](#) [The Fortune Society](#) [STRIVE](#) [New York Queens Connect](#) [Michigan Liberation](#) [Detroit Justice Center](#) [Dress for Success](#) [St. John's Well Child and Family Center](#) [Compton Public Defender](#) [JusticeLA](#) [Westside Justice Center](#) [Voters Organized to Educate](#) [East Baton Rouge Public Defenders Office](#) [East Baton Rouge Parish Prison Reform Coalition](#) [Capital Area Reentry Coalition](#) [ACLU Ohio](#) [Cuyahoga County Office of the Public Defender](#) [The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland](#) [North Star Neighborhood](#) [Reentry Resource Center](#) [JCPA](#) [Jewish Council for Public Affairs](#)



TBP Staff at the #FreeHer conference in Montgomery, AL, hosted by the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls (NCIFIWG).

Thank you!



