



2020

IN REVIEW

JULY 2021



Philadelphia Bail Fund

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friend,

Over the past year, a global pandemic and a national reckoning with police and state violence illustrated the structural oppression that continues to plague our society. The pain of 2020 exposed the shaky foundations on which our institutions stand, and the dramatic ways in which racism inflicts lasting harm on Black and brown bodies.

The pandemic not only claimed the lives of over half a million people across the country, it posed a particularly grave threat to our neighbors in jails and prisons, where social distancing is impossible and health care is routinely neglected. The stark reality of a world in which one more day spent in jail could mean the difference between life and death forced the Philadelphia Bail Fund to redouble our efforts and greatly expand our work.

If there is any silver lining for me as the Executive Director, it is that this year we did not back down from the fight for our community. Reflecting on 2020, I am struck by the incredible resilience, perseverance, and dedication of the justice-involved people we serve, as well as our board, staff, volunteers, and supporters. This year, the Philadelphia Bail Fund met the challenges of this difficult moment in three important ways:

- **We freed 401 of our neighbors**, releasing those most vulnerable to COVID-19 and those arrested during uprisings in response to the killing of George Floyd and Walter Wallace—a **400% increase from the year prior, thanks to an outpouring of donations**;
- **We expanded our advocacy efforts** and put pressure on local officials to act in response to COVID-19 in our jails through direct action, advocacy events, media engagement, and litigation;

- **We developed public education tools** so that our community could know what was happening in the jails—painstakingly coordinating weekly briefings on jail conditions in Philadelphia, issuing reports on bail practices, and collecting data.

We know that bail outs, however critical, are a form of harm reduction. We therefore remain steadfast in our ultimate goal: ending wealth-based detention for good. Our work going forward must continue to center on building a grassroots movement to end bail. This work requires complex movement infrastructure and a robust support system for those we bail out. We are pleased to have made enormous progress by adding three new staff positions in 2021. This critical growth makes Philadelphia Bail Fund ready for the challenges ahead.

Four years ago, my co-founders and I set out to buy back the freedom of our neighbors who could not afford their own bail as quickly as possible, while also working to end cash bail in Philadelphia, the poorest large city in America. We are now well on our way towards achieving that goal. We are proud to share with you all that we've accomplished in this fraught and challenging year. Thank you for your commitment that has made all of this possible.

Onward,



Malik Neal,
Executive Director

Our Team



Malik Neal, Executive Director



Fred Ginyard, Community Organizing Coordinator



Eli Plenk, Operations Coordinator



Sara Joseph, Support Coordinator

PBF Board of Directors

Maia Jachimowicz, Board President

Arjun Malik

Cal Barnett-Mayotte

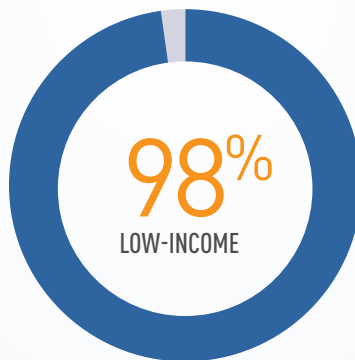
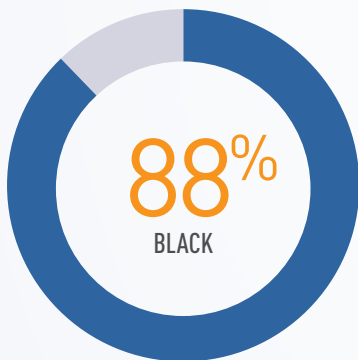
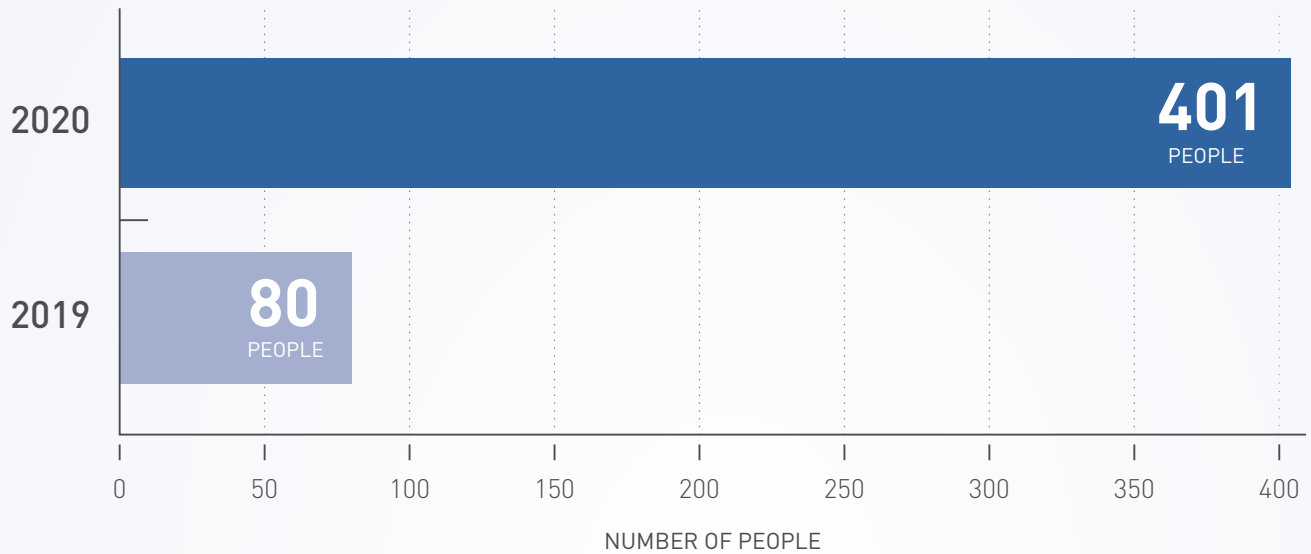
Christina Matthias

Zoe Goldberg

Malik Neal, ex officio

PBF dramatically scaled up our bailout work in 2020

We paid approximately **\$2 MILLION** to free 401 people—an increase of over **400%** from 2019.

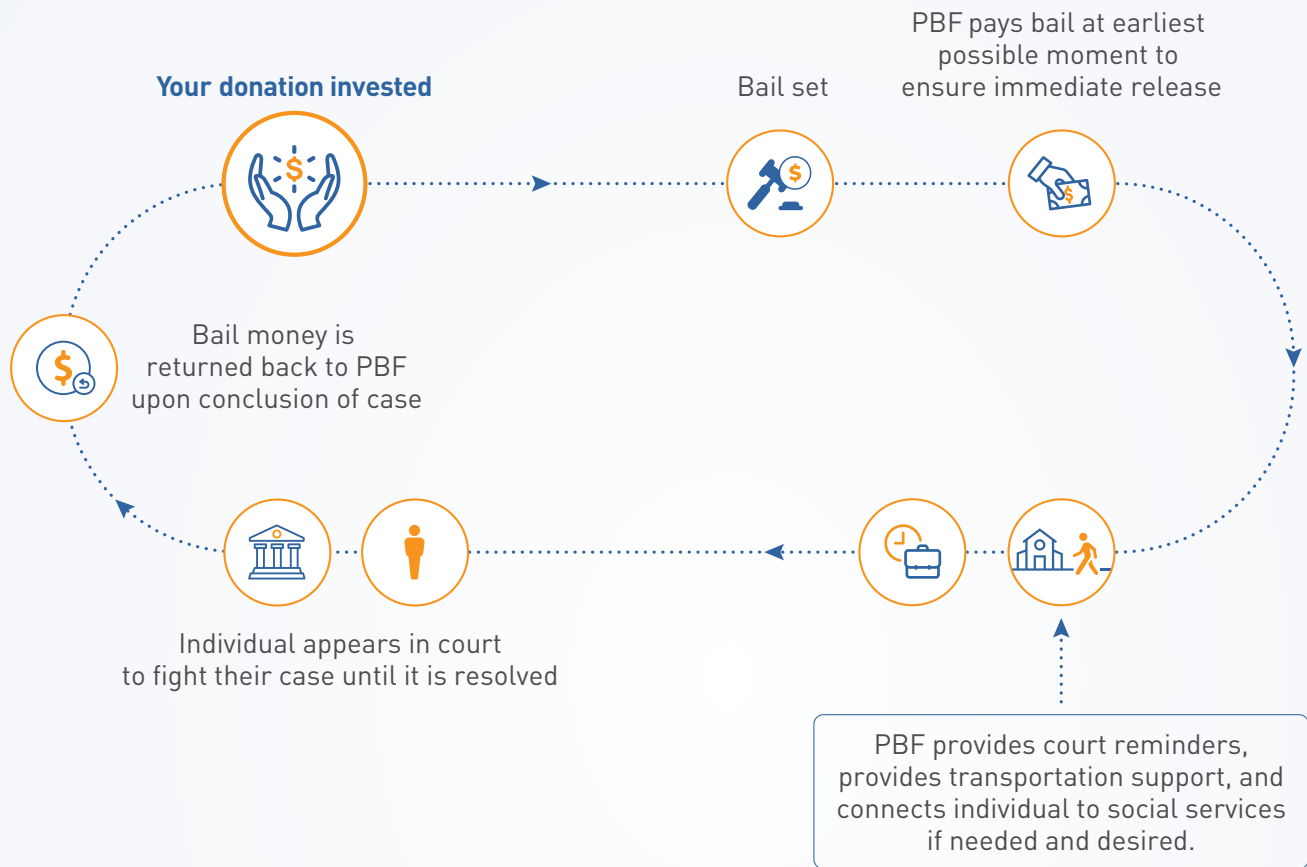


> 40,000
DAYS OF
INCARCERATION SAVED

\$2,500
MEDIAN BAIL

\$30
LOWEST BAIL

How We Work: Revolving Model



In 2020, we also coordinated large-scale bailout of people involved in uprisings against police violence

Since May, we have posted roughly **\$1 MILLION IN BAIL** for hundreds of our neighbors arrested protesting the murders of George Floyd, Walter Wallace Jr, and countless others.



Advocacy—COVID-19

As COVID-19 ravaged the Philadelphia jails, we ramped up our advocacy work, organizing alongside local partners to co-sponsor over 20 events to demand the city release people detained pretrial and end cash bail. This coalitional advocacy resulted in one of the largest decreases in Philadelphia’s jail population since 1985. Since last year, however, the jail population has unfortunately returned to pre-pandemic levels.

In March, PBF and our partners organized a massive car caravan to demand the release of people held in the city’s COVID-infested jails. With hundreds of cars, we shut down traffic throughout Center City, while broadcasting the voices of incarcerated people for all to hear.



Car caravan.



Speaking at protest.

In April, PBF kept the pressure on the city to release our loved ones. We continued to sponsor weekly protests and car caravans outside the city courts after judges there refused to release immunocompromised people from the city’s jails.

Advocacy—COVID-19 (Con't)

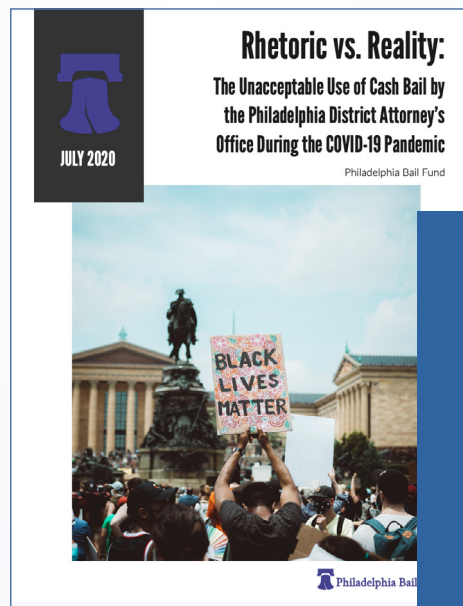
In the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, we engaged in strategic research, which revealed a pattern of high bails being set behind closed doors. We also posted weekly breakdowns of bail in the city, so the public could access this key information.



Di, a PBF client, testified before the Philadelphia City Council on the need to release people incarcerated during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Ajourdi testifying in front of city council.

In 2020, we published “*Rhetoric vs. Reality: The Unacceptable Use of Cash Bail by the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office*”. The report, based on docket scraping and data provided by the Defender Association of Philadelphia, highlighted the widespread use of exorbitantly high bails by the DA’s office in the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis.



The report found that the DA requested \$999,999, a de-facto detention order, for over 50% of all cases. 80% of the accused were Black and over 90% were deemed indigent by the courts.

PBF In The Community

People's Hearing on Bail

In January, PBF co-sponsored a citywide People's Hearing on the impact of cash bail in Philadelphia. Attended by hundreds of community members, as well as city and state officials, the hearing centered the voices of justice-involved individuals, including several of our clients.

Community Expungement Clinic

In February, PBF partnered with Community Legal Services of Philadelphia to offer an expungement clinic at St. Martin de Porres Church in North Philly. The event was wildly popular, and we were able to clear over 100 records that day alone.

Eastern State Penitentiary Searchlight Series on issues of incarceration

PBF Executive Director Malik Neal and PBF client Dante Jones co-hosted an event entitled *Supporting Philadelphians Caught in the Cash Bail System* about the harmful effects of pre-trial incarceration.

Hosted virtual community briefings to provide updates on jail conditions and hear from incarcerated people and their families

In order to ensure our community received accurate information on the virus, we co-hosted weekly online People's Briefings on jail conditions, reaching over 3,000 people. In these, we presented statistics on COVID in the city's jails, ways to take action, and testimonials from people locked up and their families.



Patricia, a family member of two clients, speaking at the People's Hearing.



Expungement Clinic at St. Martin De Porres.



Searchlight Series at Eastern State Penitentiary.

PBF won a groundbreaking lawsuit designed to ensure accountability and transparency in bail hearings



Swarthmore College court watchers in 2018.

Thanks to our victory in federal court, all bail hearings in Philadelphia must now be on record.

After magistrates barred us from recording the city's off-the-record arraignments, we partnered with the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown University to challenge this practice on 1st Amendment grounds. After arguments in both federal district court and United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, PBF prevailed. Thanks to our victory, all bail hearings in Philadelphia must now be on record.

PBF assisted partners in bringing a lawsuit for release during pandemic

In addition, in 2020 we worked with the ACLU of Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, & Kairys, Rudovsky, Messing, Feinberg & Lin LLP to bring a lawsuit designed to ensure the release of people with complex health needs from the city's jails and the provision of basic health services to those the city refused to release.

PBF awarded ACLU PA Torchbearer Award

PBF, along with the Philadelphia Community Bail Fund—a separate bail fund with whom we work—was awarded the 2020 ACLU PA Torchbearer Award in recognition of the work we do to protect civil rights.

Our work was featured in dozens of publications this year:

The New York Times

The Philadelphia Inquirer

SLATE

WHYY

Rolling Stone

BAZAAR

ESSENCE

The Philadelphia Tribune

Community Voices: Dante Jones

By Dante Jones December 29, 2020



Dante Jones speaking at the People's Hearing at Bible Way Baptist Church in January. (Hannah Yoon)

Reprinted from WHYY, December 29, 2020.

Homeless. It's a very simple word to describe a huge problem.

I thought it was just a problem for philosophical debate until my longtime girlfriend and I wound up living in a tent under a bridge in Kensington. As someone who never thought I'd wind up there, I was amazed to learn how deep the sense of community ran among my homeless neighbors, who worked together to protect each other, and how many people from across Philadelphia were there to help us. But the police were not among them.

We are taught from childhood that police are there to protect us. All of us, even those without a home. But they had no interest in keeping homeless people safe—they saw us only as a danger, a threat to be eradicated. Even worse, in many ways they saw themselves as warriors, and us as the enemy.

Growing up Black in South Philly, I had no misconceptions about how the police could treat some people unfairly.

I was a good kid who stayed out of trouble. But still I wound up being targeted by police as a teenager, dragged into the system as a witness in a way I barely understood at the time.

But nothing prepared for me what it would be like when I wound up living rough. In August of 2017, I was unemployed and lost my sublet when my landlord moved. My options for housing were all unacceptable—either a dirty room crawling with bedbugs or a shelter that would separate me from the love of my life.

At the time, the encampments in Kensington were just beginning to attract the attention of news organizations around the country. I already had a friend living there, so my girlfriend and I decided to try it for a week. It was our way of staying together. Then it became a life.

Community Voices: Dante Jones (Con't)

As lives go, it had advantages. I'm good at talking to people and soon I became a leader in the community. I helped the health care and social service workers find who was in need. I brought the concerns of my neighbors to people who could help us. I had a big tent and a little bit of cash.

But that life also had its problems—chief among them the police. They came through often, forcing us to move out from under the bridge for no apparent reason. If it was raining out, that meant a lot of folks got very wet and cold. They didn't seem to care.

It got personal for me in December, when one officer came by looking for a Black man wanted on drug crimes. He wanted my tent out of the way and so he threw all of my possessions into the street. I objected and soon after he declared that I was the guy he was looking for.

With no drugs found, I was arrested on the spot.

I was released shortly after, but the next night the officer was back and locked me up again on the same charges, again with no drugs on me. This time my bail was set at \$10,000, meaning I had to pay \$1,000 for my freedom.

It might as well have been \$10 million. It was inconceivable for me to have that money. This was a system that was supposed to ensure that I would make my next court date, but what it really did was sentence me to prison before I'd had a single day of trial.

But I was blessed. A few of my family members heard about the Philadelphia Bail Fund, which posted bail on my behalf and helped me get to each of my court hearings. That changed my life.

The charges I was being held on were eventually withdrawn—over a year later. I continue to battle in court over the first charges I was arrested on.

If I were still in jail, I would have long since broken and taken a plea deal, pretending I was guilty even though I wasn't. Only being free has given me the strength to keep fighting for what's right.

Now I'm living in an apartment. I have a job helping to deliver services to people experiencing homelessness and recently began working also with the Bail Fund. I help people and am a credit to my community.

If the police and our bail system had their way, I would still be locked up. I would be costing this city money instead of helping feed it.

We need to put less money into greater numbers of police and jails and more money into supporting the "uns" of our city—the unemployed, the unfed, the unhealthy, the uninsured, the unhoused.

People who are experiencing homelessness are just that, people, just like you and me. Some of them are the brightest, most innovative people you could meet. Some are people with addictions who had everything and lost it all. Some are people who fled abusive situations, while others are people who simply lost or couldn't find work. Police respond to the consequences of this neglect. They do not—and cannot—address the root of the neglect itself.

Addressing this neglect means investing fully in our communities, not in police and law enforcement. Only then, we will have a truly safe and healthy city—where everyone's needs are met.

Dante Jones lives in North Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia Bail Fund would like to thank all of our volunteers, individual donors, and the following foundations who generously support our work:



Bread & Roses Community Fund

Claneil Foundation

Community Justice Exchange, a project of The Tides Center

Entertainment Industry Foundation

Nararo Foundation

Philadelphia Black Giving Circle

Philadelphia Eagles Social Justice Fund

Scattergood Foundation

Spring Point Partners

Tuttleman Foundation



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