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CLOSE THE WORKHOUSE CAMPAIGN RELEASES PLAN TO PERMANENTLY CLOSE THE CITY'S INFAMOUS MEDIUM SECURITY JAIL

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI – SEPTEMBER 13, 2018 - Today a [report](#) titled “CLOSE THE WORKHOUSE: A PLAN TO CLOSE THE WORKHOUSE & PROMOTE A NEW VISION FOR ST. LOUIS” by the campaign also called “Close the Workhouse”. Led by survivors of the infamous St. Louis City Medium Security jail launched the campaign in the spring of 2018.

Blake Strode, Executive Director of ArchCity Defenders stated “This report highlights the systemic disparities and structural racism which has plagued our region for decades. The Workhouse in many ways symbolizes these destructive forces. Last year, ArchCity Defenders filed a class action lawsuit against the city for inhumane conditions at the Workhouse and we are thrilled to be in this campaign with our partners, calling for its permanent closure”.

The report is an indictment of the conditions inflicted on people held at the Workhouse, mostly before their cases have been adjudicated and paints a stunning portrait of the facility's history. The key findings of the report show:

- **Nearly everyone incarcerated in the Workhouse has not been convicted of a crime and is legally presumed innocent.** The Workhouse almost exclusively confines individuals awaiting trial. Many people are incarcerated in cages because they are poor. Most are charged with non-serious crimes also related to poverty. Over 10% of those awaiting trial ultimately have their charges dismissed after spending an average of 291 days in jail.
- **Individuals remain incarcerated in the Workhouse solely because they cannot afford bond.** Cash bail allows wealthy individuals to be released while confining the poor simply because they cannot pay. Unlike similar cities, St. Louis allows only 4% of individuals to be released on a promise to appear, instead setting a median bond of \$25,000. This is completely unaffordable to the average St. Louisan who has a per capita income of \$25,434.
- **Nearly 90% of the individuals in the Workhouse are Black though only half of St. Louis's population is Black.** This outcome reflects the targeted policing and criminalization of segregated Black communities, especially communities in North St. Louis. Poor and homeless individuals and those facing mental illness are also disproportionately impacted.
- **The inhumane and abusive conditions in the Workhouse violate the Constitution.** Since opening in 1966, there has been a well-documented history of inhumane conditions at the Workhouse, continuing to today. In the last 5 years, there have been 6 documented

deaths. Individuals incarcerated there endure extreme temperatures, inadequate sanitation, vermin infestations, and violence. These conditions violate the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

Regarding the findings, Tia Byrd, Executive Director of Missourians for Reform and Empowerment stated “For the past several years, MORE and it's Decarcerate St. Louis Campaign have continued to expose the human rights violations within the workhouse. We know that if those appointed to city government and public service want to see change and growth in this city it can no longer violate human and constitutional rights of its residents. Stop the practice of holding people for minor offenses in a disgusting facility, with little access to necessary services in an effort to make profit and punish those without financial means to be released - we must close the Workhouse and not replace it,”

“US jails inflict severe, long-term devastation on the mostly Black and Brown people our society chooses to cage. The Workhouse is a prime example: it has a well-documented history of gladiator fights, sexual assaults, and unexplained deaths. In addition, it primarily serves as a warehouse for pretrial detainees languishing there solely because of the unconstitutional use of cash bail. The Workhouse must be permanently closed.” Thomas Harvey, Justice Project program director, Advancement Project, DC.

The campaign targets the Mayor, the Circuit Attorney, and the Board of Aldermen stating that each has the power to close the facility. The Campaign to Close the Workhouse is led by people directly impacted by the St. Louis criminal legal system, with support from Action-St. Louis, ArchCity Defenders, MORE/Decarcerate STL, the Bail Project, and more than 25 organizations across St. Louis. In November 2017, ArchCity Defenders filed a class action lawsuit against the City over the unconstitutional conditions at the jail. The case is still pending and can be found [here](#).

For more information on the campaign to Close the Workhouse, visit www.closetheworkhouse.org.

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