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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Close the Workhouse Campaign Launches Detailed Plan to Shutter St. Louis City's Hellish Jail and Receives Growing Support from Public Officials, including New Resolution at the Board of Aldermen

St. Louis, Mo. -- At a press conference in City Hall, members of the Close the Workhouse (CtW) campaign shared details of a new report outlining a plan to permanently shutter the City's Medium Security Institution, commonly known as the Workhouse. A growing number of local officials publicly expressed their support for closing the notorious jail and reallocating taxpayer dollars to fund resources which combat the effects of poverty and systemic racism. This wide spectrum of public officials now includes Treasurer Tishaura Jones, Comptroller Darlene Green, Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner, State Senator Jamilah Nasheed, members of the Board of Aldermen Dan Guenther, Cara Spencer, Jesse Todd, Megan Green, Annie Rice, Heather Navarro, Christine Ingrassia, and Brandon Bosley, as well as current candidate for Circuit Attorney Mary Pat Carl, and the Democratic Central Committee for the City of St. Louis.

As an indication of this political will, St. Louis Alders Guenther, Spencer, and Todd announced a Resolution to initiate the jail's closure and re-appropriate the \$16 million to community supports such as mental healthcare, jobs, and pretrial and victims' services. The campaign reiterated its call for these supports and services to be rooted in community, beyond the reach of the criminal legal system.

Speakers at the press conference included Callion Barnes, a Member of the Close the Workhouse Campaign, Kayla Reed, Director and Founder of Action St. Louis, Keith Rose, Member of CAPCR, Alders Guenther, Spencer, and Todd, Jae Shepherd, Organizer with Action St. Louis, and Inez Bordeaux, Manager of Community Collaborations at ArchCity Defenders and Organizer with the Close the Workhouse Campaign.

"I have over two decades of experience dealing with the Workhouse and from the beginning to the end, the conditions were the same. The conditions were very horrific: rodents, bugs, smell of black mold, not enough hot water, no air in the summer, no heat in the winter, and poor medical attention," said Callion Barnes, a member of the Close the Workhouse campaign. "I believe in the urgency of the Workhouse needing to be closed so much that I am a canvasser for Action St. Louis working on the Close the Workhouse Campaign. My experience being a canvasser out in the community is that the majority of the community want it closed."

“The city has an opportunity to lead the nation on a new vision for public safety. Too many families have been destroyed, and too many loved ones lost to the Workhouse, and the hopelessness it represents,” said Kayla Reed, Co-Founder and Director of Action St. Louis. “The Workhouse is a symbol of a failed strategy that relies on policing and incarceration. Closing the jail and using those funds to invest in our communities is the right thing to do and we need to do it right now.”

“We have arrived at this moment because the status quo continues to harm the people of this City and this region--not just the most marginalized populations hit hardest by policies that criminalize and cage them, but all those who understand that the real answer to crime is investment in communities that are safe, healthy, and fully supported,” said Blake Strode, Executive Director of ArchCity Defenders. “The City’s attempts to contain the problem with police and jails has been an utter failure. This new plan and the support behind it shows that there is an appetite for a new, people-centered approach.”

Since 2013, the number of people caged in the two City jails has decreased by 50%. The steady decrease is a result of community organizing, political pressure, community and Bail Project bailouts, litigation and prosecutorial reforms. On January 1, 2020, City data cites 870 people were confined in the two jails, and with CJC having a capacity of 860, the campaign's timely plan strikes not only a moral but fiscal imperative.

A link to the plan can be found on the CtW’s website [here](#). The resolution will be available on the City of St. Louis website on Wednesday, January 15.

“We are in an important moment in St. Louis history where the community gets to re-envision the city they want to live in. They want a city that doesn’t address social problems with pretrial incarceration and broken facilities. Instead they want access to housing, healthcare, and employment opportunities,” said Mike Milton, Site Manager of the Bail Project in St. Louis. “The report is a clear plan of how we can divest from systems and facilities that cause harm and investment into the things that makes communities well.”

At 12 pages in length, CtW’s 2020 plan provides compelling evidence, answers to frequently asked questions, and a timeline for the City to close the doors of its de-facto pretrial detention center. The plan also outlines examples of how the City can reappropriate funds away from its failed arrest-and-incarcerate model, and into basic services suggested by community members through a participatory budgeting process. The new report published by CtW provides a blueprint for the City, and complements the campaign’s first report (published in September 2018) which documented the Workhouse’s history of abuses, shed light on an unconstitutional money bail system that forces people who are mainly Black and poor to languish there pretrial, and encouraged readers to re-imagine public safety in St. Louis.

For decades, the Workhouse has been at the center of public scrutiny and litigation. In 2017, ArchCity Defenders filed a federal, class-action lawsuit challenging inhumane conditions and

inadequate medical care; the case is still pending. In the past 5 years, 7 deaths have been reported in the Workhouse. Thousands of people, the vast majority of whom are Black men, have been forced to survive rodent and insect infestations, black mold, extreme temperatures, and violence, while awaiting a court date.

The Close the Workhouse campaign, launched in April 2018, is a growing grassroots movement made up of directly impacted people and allied organizations working to permanently close the jail and ensure another is not built in its place. The campaign's core organizations are Action St. Louis, the Bail Project, and ArchCity Defenders. CtW receives broad support from regional and national stakeholders such as the Advancement Project (National Office). In 2019, Ben & Jerry's added their name to the list of the campaign's supporters.

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A list of active Close the Workhouse partners includes:

ACLU
ARC (The Anti Racism Organizing Collective)
CAPCR
Deaconess Foundation
Destiny STL
Empower Missouri
Forward thru Ferguson
Missouri Jobs with Justice - St. Louis
MacArthur Justice Center
MADP (Missourians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty)
MICA (Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project)
Missouri Faith Voices
Missouri State Public Defender
National Lawyers Guild - STL
SEIU Healthcare MO
Second Chance Freedom Foundation
Solidarity Economy
Organization for Black Struggle
We Power

Visit the campaign's website, ClosetheWorkhouse.org for the 2020 Report, background information, a listing of partnered organizations, news clips, and the campaign's first report published in 2018. Follow Close the Workhouse on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for regular updates, events, and news, and by using #closetheworkhouse. Additional hashtags for the report include: #CTW2020 and #AJustSTL.