



70 Million S2 E4 Transcript:

The Work of Closing a Notorious Jail

Five years after Michael Brown’s death at the hands of a police officer galvanized criminal justice reform activists in St. Louis, they’re gaining serious momentum to shut down the city’s notorious Workhouse jail. Reporter Carolina Hidalgo spent time with the Close the Workhouse campaign and Arch City Defenders, their supporters, and detractors.

Dive deeper into reform efforts in Missouri and beyond in our [episode toolkit](#).

Mitzi Miller:

70 million adults in the United States have a criminal record.

This is season two of [70 Million](#), an open source podcast about how people, neighborhoods, counties, and cities are breaking cycles of incarceration—starting with the local jail.

I’m your host, Mitzi Miller.

“So I got to experience the uncomfortability of just being stuffed in a cage and all of that. It was really scary.”

“We’re keeping people down there with rats, roaches, they’ve got black mold. And we spend \$16 million on it every year.”

“We eliminated cash bail bonds in the city of Atlanta.”

“There’s no one who has been incarcerated, including myself, who has been helped by incarceration.”

Like most summers in St. Louis, [the summer of 2017](#) was humid and sticky and pretty much unbearable. That July, there was a heatwave, and on the hottest day, it was [108 degrees outside](#). It was even hotter inside the city jail, which is known by its nickname, The Workhouse. The brick building has no air conditioning. [People stuck their arms out the windows and screamed for help](#).

Sounds from the jail

Conditions at The Workhouse had been notoriously bad for years, but this time, they made the evening news...

Clip (news tape): *...Inmates at the Workhouse calling out for help...rodent infestations, mold in the dining area and extreme heat, sounds pretty unbearable for someone's living conditions....*

Miller: Protesters showed up with pots and pans and signs that said: "[We treat animals better.](#)" When it got dark, police in riot gear showed up with pepper spray.

Police officer speaking

The protesters came prepared for the militarized police response. They've gotten used to it in the five years since a [Ferguson police officer killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown](#). You probably know about the uprising that started in Ferguson that summer; it led to a national conversation on race and policing and sparked a modern-day civil rights movement.

What you maybe haven't heard is that the uprising is still happening, but its focus has broadened. Activists, advocates and policymakers are now looking beyond policing reform to changing how the whole criminal legal system operates. And, they've set their sights on closing The Workhouse.

Today, Carolina Hidalgo takes us to St. Louis, Missouri to meet someone who spent time in the notorious jail—and is now fighting to shut it down.

Inez Bordeaux: Close The Workhouse.

Carolina Hidalgo: Inez Bordeaux is standing in traffic at a busy St. Louis intersection, handing out fliers. She just got off an eight-hour nursing shift, and she's sweating and running from car to car.

Bordeaux: Spread the word. We're trying to close The Workhouse. You know, we spend \$16 million a year on The Workhouse.

Hidalgo: Some people ask her why she wants to close the jail.

Bordeaux: We're keeping people down there with rats, roaches...they got black mold. And, we spend 16 million dollars on it every year.

Hidalgo: Other people ask if she's collecting signatures or if there's an election

coming up. But, Inez is just trying to get people involved in an advocacy campaign called “Close The Workhouse.”

Bordeaux: Ya’ll, come to a meeting next month... Ya’ll know somebody that’s been to The Workhouse?

Man: I been there plenty of times.

Bordeaux: You been there plenty of times? Our meetings are the first Thursday of every month...

Hidalgo: The Workhouse is on the edge of the city. It’s been there for more than 50 years. It’s a sprawling brick building on a 30-acre lot in between a junkyard and the Mississippi River.

It has an official name: the Medium-Security Institution. It was built in the ‘60s after the city tore down its original Workhouse to make way for a highway. That Workhouse was a literal debtor’s prison next to a limestone quarry. People there spent their days hammering big pieces of rock into tiny, little pieces of rock. And, those rocks were used to pave the streets of St. Louis.

Bordeaux: Hi! We’re trying to close The Workhouse. Have you heard of it?

Man: No?

Hidalgo: Inez says she won’t be happy until every single person in St. Louis knows about the Close The Workhouse campaign. And for her, it’s personal; three years ago she spent a month in The Workhouse waiting for a court date.

Bordeaux: It’s a terrible, terrible, terrible jail that’s down on Hall Street.

Man: Oh, yeah.

Bordeaux: It’s been sued a bunch of times. Our organization is suing it right now.
Take
a card...

Hidalgo: St. Louis has faced multiple lawsuits over conditions inside its jails. And, in 2009, [the local ACLU released a report](#) with allegations of physical and sexual abuse in city jails, including The Workhouse. A few years later, two guards there pleaded guilty to [forcing incarcerated people to fight each other gladiator-style](#).

Inez says her time in The Workhouse was the worst experience of her life. But, to understand how she ended up there, we have to back up. I met up with her at her house one day to talk about what happened...

Bordeaux: Hi!

Hidalgo: Hi, how are you?

[Inez starts the story 10 years ago](#). She was working as a nurse and living with her husband and their four children. Their youngest son was just six months old.

She says her husband had been hitting her for a while. And, one day, he went too far, so she took their children and left.

Bordeaux: And, after I left, I just could not afford to pay my daycare bill and my rent in the same month.

Hidalgo: And, when she didn't have money for daycare, she had to call out of work to stay home with her kids. She lost a couple jobs that way and started collecting unemployment benefits.

And, when she did find a new, steady job, she still couldn't pay her daycare bill. So, she kept collecting the unemployment.

Bordeaux: I don't know if people understand, like, it's a vicious cycle: If I can't pay my daycare, then I can't go to work. If I can't go to work, I can't take care of my kids. But, there's no reason I should not have been able to. Um, it's just, the way the state of Missouri is set up, when I went and applied for child care benefits, I made \$57 too much. Fifty-seven, not \$157, not \$257. \$57.

Hidalgo: Inez was charged with a felony—with larceny—for stealing the unemployment money.

She actually should've been charged with a misdemeanor, but she didn't know that at the time, and she was facing a seven-year prison sentence. So, she took a deal...

Bordeaux: If I completed my probation, then the whole thing would fall off my record like it never happened, and I could just go on with my life. Only, it's just not that simple.

Music break

Hidalgo: Part of the deal was that she'd pay back the unemployment money, but then, the charge showed up on a background check.

Bordeaux: You can't be a nurse and have a felony. So, I was asked to resign from my job, which I did. Um, because I now had a felony record, I couldn't get another job.

Hidalgo: And without a job, she couldn't stick to her payment plan.

So, she fell out of compliance with the terms of her probation, and a warrant was issued for her arrest. That's how she ended up in The Workhouse.

Bordeaux: If you're black in this city, you've either been to The Workhouse, or you know someone that's been to The Workhouse. And so, I had heard the stories about it, but I kinda thought that it was like exaggeration. You know what I'm saying? That people tend to exaggerate. Um, but the first night there, I knew that all of the stories that I had heard over the years were true.

Hidalgo: Inez had been inside several jails; she'd worked in some as a nurse. She also had some trouble paying traffic tickets when she was in her twenties. And, [in the small cities](#) that [make up the St. Louis suburbs](#), not being able to pay traffic tickets [means you've probably spent a few nights in a few different jails](#). But, The Workhouse was different.

Music break

Inez remembers her first night there. It was a Friday.

Bordeaux: I was sad. I didn't know what was going on. I was being held on a probation violation. I had never been to The Workhouse.

Hidalgo: As part of the intake process, she sat down with a nurse, and as the nurse asked questions, Inez started crying.

Bordeaux: And she said I was a suicide risk, because I was emotional and crying.

Hidalgo: Inez says, instead of putting her in an open pod with all the other women, they took her clothes, gave her a smock, and put her inside a cell.

Bordeaux: I've been a nurse for a long time. I know what mental health services and an assessment looks like. And, it's not taking a person's clothes away, giving them a smock to wear, and leaving them in a cell for three days alone without any human contact, without being able to call and reach out to their family, without being able to take a shower. That's not what what mental health services looks like.

Hidalgo: After a weekend in the cell, Inez joined the other women. She says she remembers rats and mold and water pouring from the ceiling. She watched people pick roaches out of their food.

A judge eventually set her bail at \$25,000, but she couldn't afford that.

Bordeaux: That 30 days showed me that the city and the state does not care. They do not care. And I can only assume that they do not care about black people because The Workhouse is 90% black. 90% of the people that you see in there are black, and they're all poor, because if they weren't poor, they would be able to buy their freedom.

Hidalgo: By the time Inez ended up in The Workhouse, she was working two minimum-wage jobs and making about \$250 a week. Her kids had gone to live with their dad, and she'd lost her apartment.

Bordeaux: All of those things, all of those things... I never gave up hope. I always knew that I was going to be okay, that I was going to come out on the other side, and everything was going to be fine. That 30 days in the workhouse: that was the first time I ever thought that I'm not going to be okay. I'm not going to survive this, not gonna make it through. That's what...That's what The Workhouse does to people. It changes you.

Hidalgo: Inez cries every time she talks about this. She says it's re-traumatizing. But, she also wants people to understand something.

Bordeaux: While I'm crying and I'm tearful, it's not sadness, it's anger.....Like, I'm mad as hell. I'm mad as hell, and angry gets shit done.....it, it gets things done.

Hidalgo: She's putting all that anger to use now as an organizer for the campaign to close The Workhouse.

Bordeaux: It makes me feel strong, like I'm part of a unstoppable force. That's is the Close the Workhouse campaign and the organizations that are behind the Close the Workhouse campaign.

Music break

Hidalgo: [The Close The Workhouse campaign](#) is mostly led by black women from St. Louis. Many of them got their start as activists five years ago after a Ferguson police officer killed [Michael Brown](#) on August 9, 2014.

That day changed everything in the St. Louis region.

Michelle Higgins: When Michael Brown was murdered, and the world turned its eyes to Ferguson, Missouri, we felt a deep call, a deep sense of connection, and a deep sense of grief that propelled us into saying he must be the last.

Hidalgo: This is Michelle Higgins, the campaign's lead organizer.

Higgins: We knew at that moment that there was something being unearthed by the ground where his blood was crying out.

Hidalgo: Michelle is the director of worship at a local church here and a well-known faith leader.

Higgins: I was four and a half years old when my great grandmother pointed up the trees lining the highways on the road from St. Louis to Troy, Missouri for a family reunion. And, she pointed some of the trees and say that's where my uncle was hung. That's where my daddy's best friend was hung. That's where... And she would name all the different people who were lynched on different trees.

Hidalgo: And, Michelle thought about those trees when Michael Brown was killed.

Higgins: Thirty years after I learned about lynching trees, I stood on the ground where a precious black boy was murdered by law, and that was a symbol of terror. Michael Brown's body became a symbol of legalized racial terror.

Hidalgo: After that day, Michelle says she dedicated herself to fighting for black liberation.

Singing

She helps lead the monthly Close The Workhouse campaign meetings, which sometimes means calling on her church background to lead people in song.

Singing

She also co-directs a group of black millennial activists called Action St. Louis. They're one of the main partners in the Close The Workhouse campaign, and they've been building political power here for the past few years.

Higgins: We started with policing, and we went straight to politics.

Hidalgo: Their biggest win came in 2018. [They helped unseat the prosecutor who'd refused to bring charges against the officer who killed Michael Brown.](#)

That same year, Michelle launched a local office for [The Bail Project](#), a national nonprofit that posts bail for people who can't afford it. She visited The Workhouse multiple times a week to interview people before posting bail for them.

Higgins: And, they would launch into stories of how awful just their one day, just that day had been. And I... we had one client tell us, "I feel like I was fighting rats for food." We've had people say they decided to stop eating for a while, and...these are stories that continue.

Hidalgo: Close The Workhouse is [an abolitionist campaign](#), which means its organizers want to abolish all jails and all prisons. And, instead, they want us as a society to invest money in jobs, education, housing and healthcare.

Higgins: Freeing people from cages means they must have resources to assist them in the ways that will help them to thrive.

Hidalgo: Michelle says what organizers definitely don't want to see is any money poured into trying to fix The Workhouse.

Higgins: I believe that we would hear from the mayor's office, "Let's make the cages cleaner. Let's buy better food. Let's fix the plumbing and let's keep those people in cages."

And, that will always be something that we disagree with.

Singing

Tour sounds.

Hidalgo: In March 2018, St. Louis Public Safety Director Jimmie Edwards invited

local media outlets on a tour of the Workhouse.

Jimmie Edwards: *This tour is the result of a request a long standing request both nationally as well as locally to visit the Medium Security Institution.*

Hidalgo: Edwards is not giving media tours anymore, but this is some tape from a [St. Louis Public Radio](#) reporter who took the tour back then.

You can hear the jail commissioner describe the layout of the building as the group walks through the kitchen, the medical unit, and the gym.

Jail Commissioner: *This portion here that gets a lot of the attention about its age and infrastructure and all those things... It's a common structure or building or format that was used across the country...*

Hidalgo: The local journalists did not report seeing any roaches or rats. One of them asked Edwards if what they were shown was representative of the usual conditions at the jail.

Edwards: *Certainly, the infrastructure is the infrastructure, and that's what we're dealing with. I'm not suggesting that we don't have problems in this building. This is an old building, and sometimes the toilets don't work, but maintenance is here and they, they work. There are sections of our building that has air conditioning, and there are some sections—for example the gym—where you had an opportunity to visit, that does not. And so, this building operates extremely well.*

Hidalgo: Although Edwards didn't agree to give [70 Million](#) a tour of the jail, he did agree to talk to me at his office in City Hall. As director of public safety, he works for the mayor; he's in charge of the police, the fire department, and the city's two jails.

Edwards: Well, I have a long history with the jails in the city of St. Louis. For 25 years, I was a judge on the circuit bench in the city of St. Louis. So, I remember a time when our combined jails had over 3,000 people locked up.

Today, while our Medium Security Institution, our Workhouse, houses a little over 1,100, we have about 350 people locked up in the facility today. A lot of that has been an effort in the last two or three years or so to reduce the population in The Workhouse. It is important that people that are locked up in our facilities are people that need to be locked up.

Hidalgo: In addition to the Workhouse, Edwards is in charge of the [City Justice](#)

[Center, a newer maximum-security jail with 860 beds.](#) Lately, it holds about [seven hundred people on an average day.](#)

But, most of those people wouldn't be in there if they could afford to post bail. So, Close The Workhouse organizers are also pushing for an end to cash bail. They say even just reducing its use would lead to a dramatic drop in the city's jail population. And then, with The Workhouse closed, the court would still have the Justice Center for anyone it deems a danger to the community.

But, Edwards says even though the jail population continues to drop, the crime rate hasn't dropped. Most people in jail, he says, are charged with serious felony offenses, and diversion programs and bail funds, he adds, might not always be around.

Edwards: It would be, it would be a travesty if I close our facilities in the city of St. Louis, and these programs that have been pushing my numbers down go away. These programs are simply not sustainable, and if they go away, and I find myself with 200 or 300 people walking our streets, and we all agree should not be walking our streets, and I have nowhere to put them, it would be irresponsible of me. It would be irresponsible of the city if that happens.

Hidalgo: Edwards has said before that he's concerned about activists who've never been inside The Workhouse talking about the conditions.

I ask him what he would say to someone like Inez who actually did spend time there and found the conditions to be inhumane.

Edwards: Well, you know what, I hear this word "inhumane" a lot. You know, and I think that, quite frankly, I think it's embellished. When we start talking about inhumane, uh... or, are you talking about cleanliness? Yes, it's clean. Or, are we talking about the opportunity for people to walk in and about and around, in and out of a gym, whatever they want? Yes, they can do that. Are they talking about movie night? Yes, they have a movie night.

Hidalgo: He says people in the jail can also go into the kitchen and bake, and if they have money, they can call friends and family.

Edwards: There is no harm inflicted upon people because they're locked up.

Hidalgo: I ask specifically about certain conditions I've heard about: the stories

about roaches and water leaking from the ceilings.

Edwards: The local paper reported none of those things existed, yet those that are in the media like the fact that they can continue with this narrative when it's been debunked. And so, when will the media trust what the media sees? When will you trust your own eyes or your own smell? Or, when will you trust the people that, that are your colleagues that have had an opportunity to go in, and they say, "You know what, none of those things exist"?

Music break

Hidalgo: And yet, reports of jail conditions in St. Louis have been consistent for decades. In 2017, a nonprofit law firm called [ArchCity Defenders filed a lawsuit over conditions at The Workhouse](#). It cites an older class-action lawsuit from 1974.

Back then, people held in an old city jail also sued over conditions. They also described mice, insects, broken toilets, and a lack of medical care.

A judge at the time told city officials [to fix that jail or shut it down](#).

They did eventually shut it down—twenty five years later, after appeals, litigation, and a long period of court supervision. When that jail closed, they moved everyone to The Workhouse.

Today, there are about 300 people in the jail on an average day. More than 80 percent of them are black even though St. Louis is only 49 percent black. Most are not serving sentences; they're waiting for a court date. If they could afford their bail, they'd be able to go home.

Clip: *My name is Rodney Brown and I'm with St. Louis Action Council.*
[Clapping]

We're here tonight to close the Workhouse. [Cheers] Come on guys, give it up for Close the Workhouse! [Cheers]

Hidalgo: A month after Public Safety Director Edwards gave reporters a tour, Close the Workhouse held its first fundraiser, which doubled as a sort of launch party.

Activists, lawyers, and people previously incarcerated in The Workhouse packed into a small music venue in south St. Louis.

Clip: *Next up we have Inez. Will everyone give Inez a warm welcome.*

Hidalgo: It was the first time Inez shared her story publicly in front of a crowd. She was nervous. She looked down at her phone and read from some notes.

Bordeaux: *My name is Inez Bordeaux, and I'm here because I want to close down The Workhouse. [Clapping] When I think about it, that's not entirely accurate. I wanna burn The Workhouse down and salt the earth, but I was told that shutting it down will have to do.*

Hidalgo: As organizers started to raise money, they also put together [a report outlining their demands and their strategy](#). They released it five months later in September 2018.

Inside the [44-page booklet](#), they lay out their vision: closing The Workhouse, spending its \$16 million budget on community programs, and ending cash bail.

There's also a list of their three main targets: the mayor's office, the prosecutor's office, and the Board of Aldermen, which is St. Louis' city council.

The Aldermen approve the city budget each year. So, the campaign is asking them to defund The Workhouse by refusing to approve the existing budget.

Clip: *The public safety committee is now called to order. Madam clerk, would you please call the roll? Alderman Boyd, Alderman Vacarro...*

Hidalgo: In November, two months after the report came out, the campaign was invited to speak in front of a group of aldermen.

By this time, Inez was much more comfortable sharing her story.

Bordeaux: *I know some of you and your colleagues here on the board of aldermen have been on VIP tours of the workhouse, and some of your colleagues are quoted as saying, "It's not that bad."*

Public Safety Director Jimmie Edwards is also quoted as saying, "Don't believe the hype. Don't believe the things that you've heard in the workhouse." I dare Jimmie Edwards, you, or any of your colleagues to say it to my face. Tell me to my face that the things that I saw, the things that I experienced in The Workhouse, aren't that bad, that they aren't true, that they're hyped up. I dare any of you to tell me that my lived experience of

watching 50 women languish in a pod, in a facility not fit for human habitation, is hype.

Hidalgo: Some of the aldermen were fully in support of closing the Workhouse, like John Collins-Muhammad, one of the city's newer aldermen. He represents a mostly black ward on the city's north side.

John Collins-Muhammed: I support this call 100%. I was in our city jails not too long ago. Here I am, a sitting alderman in the city jail. And, I've seen the way, I was treated a little nicely more than others, but I've seen the way people were treated...

Hidalgo: [Collins-Muhammad ended up in The Workhouse after a traffic accident.](#) When police responded, they arrested him. He'd missed some court dates related to traffic and ordinance violations.

Collins-Muhammad: I actually believe that as the legislative body for this city, there are things that we can do and steps we can take to close The Workhouse. I think it's all about if we're willing to do it and if we're willing to take the heat for doing it. Hell, if it was up to me, I'd just burn the thing down and tell everybody to go home.

Hidalgo: But, most alders were a little more cautious.

Alderman Jack Coatar wanted to know if organizers were having conversations with judges and state representatives.

Jack Coatar: We fund the facility. We fund the Department of Public Safety. We have nothing to do with how a state circuit court judge sets a bond, what the prosecutor asks for. So, that's going to be my next line of questioning... I'm all for getting rid of this building.

I think it would be great if we could shift these resources elsewhere, but until there's a plan in place with the judges and the legislature, I don't, I don't see how we can do that, because what we'll be doing is... we could close the building. It doesn't mean the judges are going to stop ordering bail, and then we'll just be overcrowding the Justice Center.

Hidalgo: Coatar directed his questions to Blake Strode, an attorney who's part of the campaign.

Blake Strode: Some of what we've seen in this city is that when we talk to the mayor's

office about this issue, they want to talk about the circuit attorney's office, and we talked to circuit attorney, they want to talk about the Board of Aldermen. Everyone wants to talk about the judges. The truth is all of those pieces are important here, and all of those institutions have a critical role to play in fixing this.

I think part of what we're saying here is, like, somebody has got to be first, and everyone can look at another piece of this system and say, "Well, if they don't do x, it won't have the ultimate result." And, that's true, but the full scope of political history shows that once some pressure is applied in one part of the system, it tends to impact another part of the system.

Hidalgo: Blake Strode directs [ArchCity Defenders](#), the nonprofit law firm suing the city over conditions in The Workhouse. He grew up in St. Louis County right near Ferguson. Then, he left for a while to go to college, play professional tennis, and attend Harvard Law School.

But, just like campaign leader Michelle Higgins, he says Michael Brown's death was a turning point. From Harvard's campus in Massachusetts, Blake watched as activists led an uprising in his hometown.

Strode: The young people, black people mostly led by women and Queer folks in Ferguson... that put their bodies on the line and stood down in front of tanks. They changed everything in this region and very much changed the trajectory of my life and, and professional path.

Hidalgo: Blake came home, joined ArchCity, and helped start its civil rights litigation unit. Now, the firm is of the key partners in the Close The Workhouse campaign.

Strode: We all have been sort of socialized to think that the thing that's standing between us and utter chaos and anarchy is police and jails, and it's just a total fallacy. And yet, we keep sort of doubling down on this approach which is not working. It's certainly not working here in St. Louis where we have one of the highest violent crime rates anywhere in the country. We have very high homicide rates. So, this idea that we'll just get harsher and harsher and lock more people up has failed miserably. And yet, we keep sort of coming back to it.

Hidalgo: Blake believes most people agree that the current system is not working. He says what the Close the Workhouse campaign can do is help people start to think about what else might be possible.

Strode: We get the same question every time, which is, “Well, if you close The Workhouse, where are you going to put those people?” Same question every time, which on one level seems logical at first. But, the answer is also pretty obvious, which is, for the vast majority of people: home. They’re going to go home. [Laughs] And, that’s such a, you know, uh, it’s so outside the norm of how we think about who the people are that are in The Workhouse, why they’re there, and what the alternative should be.

And, what we’ve said is we’re not talking about another jail you should use. We’re talking about putting far, far, far fewer people in jail. And, we are an abolitionist movement at heart and in our, in our sort of foundational principles, which means that we don’t actually believe cages are the right answer for anybody.

But, at least as a starting point, surely we can agree that we have way, way, way too many people in jail right now. Right?

Hidalgo: Though the mayor’s office has brought in two fellows to find ways to reduce the jail population and reform the bail system, [Mayor Lyda Krewson has not expressed any support for the campaign](#), and [Public Safety Director Jimmie Edwards says they’re not going to close The Workhouse](#). But, the jail population keeps declining.

And, in the campaign’s first year, it has successfully pushed the idea of closing The Workhouse into the public conversation.

There’ve been op-eds and news coverage and even [a partnership with Ben & Jerry’s to do an ice cream and education tour across the city](#).

Earlier in the year, city prosecutor Kim Gardner attended a campaign meeting. She [sat on a panel](#) with the city’s chief public defender, Mary Fox, and they talked about cash bail reform.

More recently, [comptroller Darlene Green—one of three people who approves the city’s budget each year—very publicly expressed her support](#). Blake says her endorsement was the most important one yet.

Strode: And so, there are really high profile voices in St. Louis that have gotten behind the campaign, and I think at this moment that we see that sort of groundswell building up, um, it feels closer and closer every day. You know, you never want to sorta jinx it, but, um, I think those who are defending its continued operation just don’t have good arguments behind

it. You know, they don't have a good reason for it, except "This is the way we're doing it and we don't want to change."

Bordeaux: Aye! Yall wanna close the workhouse? Hey! You live on the southside?

Man: Yep.

Bordeaux: What would you do on the southside with \$16 million dollars?

Man: A lot.

Bordeaux: A lot.

Man: I would renovate...

Bordeaux: We're asking close down The Workhouse, take that \$16 million dollars, and let's reinvest it in our communities. A million dollars on the southside could change a whole lot of people's lives

Man: A lot of lives, a lot of lives.

Bordeaux: I hope when it's time, we have your support. We're gonna ask you to call your alderperson, were gonna ask you to call the mayor and we're gonna shut it down. Period.

Hidalgo: For Inez Bordeaux, closing The Workhouse really does feel inevitable, and she's waiting for that day partly because she thinks it'll help her move on from the worst chapter of her life.

Because, even though her life is back on track, she's having trouble moving forward. She's back to nursing, but she still lives in the crowded apartment she moved into while working two minimum-wage jobs. She still feels like everything might be taken from her again at any moment.

Bordeaux: And, I'm just trying to recover from the trauma of being chewed up and spit out of the criminal justice system, and then being in a facility to where I lost all hope for myself, for my future, really, for my city.

Hidalgo: But she says working on the campaign has made her feel hopeful again, like she can finally believe she's gonna come out on the other side of all this.

Hidalgo: I ask her what she thinks she would do the day the last person walks out

of The Workhouse.

Bordeaux:
then

I don't know. I would probably cry, if I'm being honest. I would cry, and

I don't know. I told you I wanna burn it down, but I can't burn it down. So, I would say... we should have a party. No, you know what: the day the last person walks out of The Workhouse, I will cry. We definitely... we should have a party, but I would encourage every citizen of St. Louis to dream big. That's \$16 million that would now be free to make our city better.

Miller:

Carolina Hidalgo is a reporter based in St. Louis, Missouri. Special thanks to St. Louis Public Radio.

Music break

We'd love to hear about reform efforts in your communities, so please email us at hello@70millionpod.com. For more information, our episode toolkit, and to download the transcript for this episode, visit 70millionpod.com.

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