

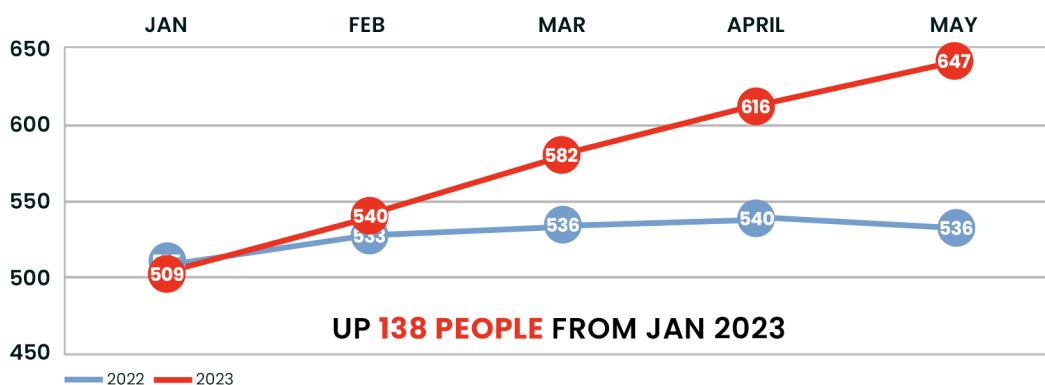
COURT WATCH

JAN - MAY 2023

FREEDOM COMMUNITY CENTER

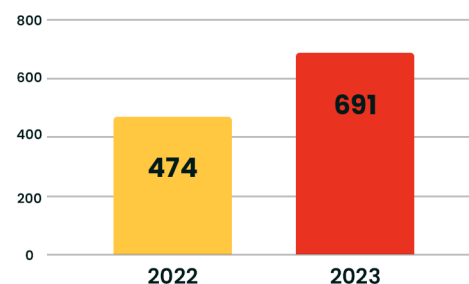
SINCE JUNE 2021, MEMBERS OF FCC COURTWATCH HAVE BORNE WITNESS TO THE SYSTEMIC INJUSTICES OF THE PRETRIAL PROCESS, ARBITRARY BAIL REQUESTS, AND THE UNJUST PRETRIAL DETENTION OF PEOPLE LEGALLY PRESUMED INNOCENT IN THE 22ND JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.

ST. LOUIS CITY JAIL POPULATION



INDIVIDUALS IN BAIL HEARINGS

43% INCREASE



WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

AN INCREASE IN ARRESTS BY SLMPD

Although the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department (SLMPD) does not publish arrest data, we know that an increase in hearings is caused by an increase in arrests. Officers are becoming even more punitive towards those, for example, with past convictions who are believed to be in possession of a gun despite Missouri's otherwise pro-gun legislation.

PUNITIVE BOND DECISIONS BY JUDGES

In light of the injury of Janae Edmondson and the media frenzy that followed, judges reacted by denying bond at staggering rates out of fear that they might be blamed in another high-profile case. Judges have since begun revoking bonds in cases with even fewer alleged violations including when all violations are only technical.

PUNITIVE PRETRIAL POLICY BY CIRCUIT ATTORNEY

We routinely observe the Circuit Attorney argue against release including through disclosing confidential information, conflating the charges against one person with another's, and using people's alleged histories of substance use or homelessness as evidence that they are not responsible enough to live outside of jail.

86% OF THE TIME PROSECUTORS SEEK TO DETAIN PEOPLE WITHOUT BOND

61% OF THE TIME JUDGES HOLD PEOPLE WITHOUT BOND

82% OF THE ACCUSED ARE BLACK

JAIL HARMS OUR COMMUNITY...

Jail is being used as a catchall solution to the City's diverse array of social, economic and political problems. It is marketed as a "safe solution." In fact, **jail strips people who are supposedly presumed innocent of their autonomy and alienates them from their communities.** Research affirms what we observe firsthand, which is that incarceration disables or further disables people, damaging their lives and our community. One year in jail decreases one's life expectancy by 2 years. Furthermore, a stay in jail dramatically impacts the health and wellbeing of a person's loved ones creating greater health disparities in Black and poor communities who are disproportionately targeted by police and incarceration. That is not public safety.

“LEGAL” VIOLENCE

The average length of stay for an individual pretrial is **325 days**.

During this five-month period, **174 more people** would have been incarcerated without bond if the Circuit Attorney’s Office had their way.

We observed **3x as many black women** being detained as white women and **6x as many black men** as white men.

People presenting a housing, medical, mental health or substance use need were held without bond **67% of the time**.

WE DEMAND...

- ☀ We demand that Judges Perkins and Woodiest **dramatically** increase their use of personal and sponsored recognizance.
- ☀ We demand the Circuit Attorney’s Office increase recommendations for **personal and sponsored recognizance**, which are forms of pretrial engagement that do not involve incarceration and other onerous conditions of bond like electronic monitoring and house arrest.
- ☀ We demand **speedy trials** and more streamlined processes so people **don’t wait in jail** before trial for an average of 300+ days.

PRETRIAL DETENTION DESPITE HEALTH + HOUSING NEEDS

Jails damage people’s mental, emotional, and economic health. When people enter jail with existing medical or social needs, jail does nothing but exacerbate those needs. Despite these facts, judges endanger public health and safety by caging people who should be receiving care from their community.

37

18

67% OF PEOPLE WHO PRESENTED A **HOUSING NEED** WERE DENIED BOND OVER THE PAST FIVE MONTHS.

159

81

66% OF PEOPLE WHO PRESENTED A **MEDICAL NEED** WERE DENIED BOND OVER THE PAST FIVE MONTHS.

156

77

67% OF PEOPLE WHO PRESENTED A **MENTAL HEALTH NEED** WERE DENIED BOND OVER THE PAST FIVE MONTHS.

110

57

66% OF PEOPLE WHO PRESENTED A **SUBSTANCE USE NEED** WERE DENIED BOND OVER THE PAST FIVE MONTHS.

ALTERNATIVE TO INCARCERATION



CASE STUDY

James* was arrested for a first degree assault (Felony B), armed criminal action (felony unclassified) and property damage (misdemeanor). **He was held in jail pretrial for 5 months.** Because of his stay in jail, James had lost his apartment, job, and all of his clothes and belongings were taken from him. After FCC interviewed him, **we supported James with temporary housing, financial assistance for direct needs, and we worked closely to stabilize him following release.**

James joined our Group Track cohort over the summer, and he became a leader in the class. James identified that a key aspect of his participation in cycles of violence was because he had burned bridges with his social support network. He told us he had “no one.” While engaged with FCC, we conducted a series of restorative justice circles for James designed to target the harm that James had done to his family and loved ones. He is now re-engaged with those family members, has an apartment, regularly attends therapy, and recently received a promotion at his job where he works full time.

*Name changed for confidentiality purposes.