

MASS BAIL OUT

POVERTY IS NOT A CRIME

People who can't afford to post bail are paying with their lives. Waiting on overdue reforms is no longer enough, it is time to end cash bail and pre-trial detention now. This system unjustly punishes the poor and disproportionately impacts Black and Brown people. Everyday tens of thousands of people who are awaiting trial, including a growing number of women, children, LGBTQIA, and differently-abled, are languishing in jail simply because they are too poor to make bail. Even a few days in jail can ruin a person's life. They may lose their job, their family may lose housing and some may even lose custody of their children. We invite you to take part in the Mass Bail Out action and end wealth-based incarceration because:

- In New York alone, 79% of those detained in jail have not been convicted of a crime
- Though 53% of NY residents are Black/Latino, 89% of Rikers detainees are Black/Latino
- Detaining a person at Rikers Island for a year, costs taxpayers close to \$270,000, money that could be better spent on education, health and community-based services.

WHAT IS THE MASS BAIL OUT ACTION?

Inspired by leaders throughout history who fought to free enslaved people, and more recently, the movement to end bail nationwide, from the #CloseRikers campaign, National Bail Out, local bail funds and the visionary Black Love Bailout actions, Mass Bail Out will be another historic, major mass action in the fight to end mass incarceration. Mass Bail Out is a collaborative effort to free four hundred women jailed at Rose M. Singer Center and fifty children detained at the Robert N. Davoren Complex on the notoriously violent Rikers Island. The *Mass Bail Out* will demonstrate the truth of our inalienable human right: ***No one should be held in jail simply because they cannot afford the ransom on their freedom.***

Mass Bail Out is an unprecedented and historic three-week action starting on September 29th, 2018 to pay bail for hundreds of women and children jailed at Rikers Island. Notorious, violent, and full of despair, Rikers Island is a complex of ten separate facilities in the East River between the Bronx and Queens that houses 7,000 people on any given day at a cost of \$247,000 per person annually. In a moment of growing awareness of the harms of mass incarceration, the Mass Bail Out will make the case for closing Rikers Island once and for all and investing instead in the supports and services—housing, education, jobs, and healthcare—that communities need to thrive.

The Mass Bail Out is raising \$5 million to pay 400 bails for the 16- and 17-year old children held at the Robert N. Davoren Complex, called “RNDC,” the young adult jail at Rikers Island, and women held at Rose M. Singer Center, or “Rosie’s,” the women’s facility. By paying as much bail as we can afford in a short amount of time for the children and women held at Rikers Island, the goal is to “empty” two of the ten jails with a sudden and dramatic drop in the number of people incarcerated there.

The core organization managing this effort is Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, a nonprofit led by Kerry Kennedy, with an advisory committee comprised of four grassroots and community-based organizations—Center for NuLeadership; JustLeadership USA; Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice; and VOCAL-NY. Additional support is provided by the Vera Institute of Justice; Revolve Impact; Kivvit; Hyperakt; as well as Global Citizen. The Mass Bail Out will kick off with an announcement at this year’s Global Citizen festival on September 29, 2018. Other partners to the Mass Bail Out include service providers with experience working with women and youth on Rikers Island, the New York City defense bar and public defenders, and

communications experts, influencers, and artists who will help to amplify the message and policy goals of the Mass Bail Out in New York City and nationally.

WHY BAIL OUT WOMEN AND CHILDREN?

On any given day, 500 women are jailed at Rosie's and almost 100 children aged 16- and 17-years old are jailed at RNDC. Of them, approximately 350 women and 60 children are detained pretrial, presumed innocent of any crime, but remain in jail held on bail they cannot afford. Many remain locked up for weeks, months, even years. They are overwhelmingly black and brown New Yorkers from parts of the city that have been under-resourced and over-policed, and they grow increasingly isolated from their families and communities—from children, spouses, loved ones, parents, siblings, jobs, school, and more—the longer they spend at Rikers Island.

By “emptying” two jails, we will make the point that we can and must close Rikers Island, starting but not ending with the women and children locked up there.

HOW WILL WE BAIL THEM OUT?

The Mass Bail Out will organize each one of the 400 bail outs by:

- (1) partnering with defense attorneys and public defenders to identify women and children to be bailed out;
- (2) meeting with each woman and child at Rosie's or RNDC before bail is paid; and
- (3) coordinating community-based supports and services for women and children who need them as they reunite with their communities and come back to court to fight their cases.

RFK Human Rights will manage the “bail corpus,” the pot of money that will be drawn upon to pay bail. For each bail out, RFK Human Rights will line up a volunteer, issue a cashier’s check, and guide the volunteer through the bail payment process. Volunteers, ranging from celebrities to members of community groups, faith organizations, professional associations, and everyday New Yorkers, will then pay bail at one of the bail “windows” at the jails in Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, or at Rikers Island.

HOW ARE WOMEN AND CHILDREN SUPPORTED AND SET UP TO THRIVE?

We know that sometimes it takes more than simply paying bail to make sure that someone is thriving and successful. Staff from the Mass Bail Out, defender offices, and nonprofit service providers will meet with each woman and child before bail is paid to create a support plan. For some, that support will simply be a reminder of their next court date and letting their loved ones or family know that they are coming home. For others, it will require coordinating housing, medical or treatment needs, transportation, and more.

Every public defender office in New York City is signed on to help with identifying women and children and providing on-staff social workers and advocates to work with the Mass Bail Out on individual support plans. Nonprofits, including Friends of Island, Youth Represent, Osborne Association, and Women’s Community Justice Project, will provide support and services as needed to women and children even before they are released and will continue in the community. For the weeks of the Mass Bail Out, we will set up a 24-hour community “landing pad” in Queens, right by the bridge from Rikers Island where people are released, to provide a meeting spot for families, offer care kits with basics such as toothbrushes, clean socks,

MetroCards, and prepaid phones, and to host volunteers who can assist with immediate needs such as contacting family members, arranging transportation, etc.

HOW MANY VOLUNTEERS DO WE NEED AND WHAT WILL THEY DO?

We need at least 200 volunteers to help with paying bail and supporting the Mass Bail Out. Because of a quirk under New York law, each volunteer can only pay bail twice in one month, requiring us to make the Mass Bail Out a truly broad community effort with many hands on deck. Volunteers will also help to staff the community landing pad to help with welcoming women and children in the moments after their release from Rikers Island.

Before paying bail or staffing the landing pad, Mass Bail Out volunteers will take part in a community education and training to learn not only the mechanics of paying bail in New York City, but importantly, about the injustices of the legal system, bail reform, and how they can engage in the larger campaign to end mass incarceration. We see the Mass Bail Out as an opportunity to drive greater awareness, build advocacy, and create a groundswell of support for closing Rikers Island and investing in safe, thriving communities.

HOW WILL WE CREATE THAT GROUNDSWELL OF SUPPORT?

The Mass Bail Out has partnered with Revolve Impact, a social action and creative agency, to build and amplify the core messages of the campaign, and Kivvit, another communications firm, to manage media and rapid response communications. Central to the communications effort are the experiences, expertise, and stories of people directly impacted by the justice system and Rikers Island. We are also using the Mass Bail Out to engage celebrities by educating them, using their platforms to lift up this campaign, and having them do high-profile bail outs that will be documented on social media. Global Citizen, an organization that uses musicians and influencers to bring attention to issues of justice and poverty, are announcing the Mass Bail Out in front of 60,000 people during their annual festival held at Central Park.

Finally, we are launching a dynamic website, built by Hyperakt, on September 29th, 2018, the same day as the Global Citizen festival announcement and the formal kick-off of the Mass Bail Out. The website will allow for real-time updates on the Mass Bail Out, including a livestream of bail paying; “counters” that document the number of people bailed out and the costs of buying freedom; stories and updates about the Mass Bail Out, Rikers Island, and the injustices of the current system; and a link to donate to the Mass Bail Out and to sign up as a volunteer.

WHAT DO WE HOPE THE IMPACT TO BE?

The potential impact of the Mass Bail Out is immense. It is an unprecedented opportunity to educate people about the shame of mass incarceration. It is also a chance to demonstrate, in real-time, how the criminal justice system can prioritize freedom and not incarceration. The potential policy asks as a result of the campaign are numerous, including immediate demands for real bail reform, closing Rikers Island on a much shorter timeline than ten years, and investing now in community-based services and resources, both before people are swept up in the criminal justice system, and instead of incarceration when they are already in it.

Our hope for long-lasting impact? That the Mass Bail Out marks a radical shift in the way the criminal justice system operates in New York City and beyond.

FUNDRAISING TO MAKE THE MASS BAIL OUT HAPPEN

We need to raise \$5 million for the bail corpus. The way bail works is that if it is paid in cash at a bail window, and the person comes to court for all of their future court dates, at the end of the case that money is returned. RFK Human Rights will manage the bail corpus, which will largely be comprised of zero-interest loans used to pay bail upfront and then returned in an agreed-upon timeframe consistent with the average amount of time a case is pending in New York City.

We are also fundraising for grants and donations from foundations and individuals. We have raised \$500,000 to support the organizing and administration of the Mass Bail Out, including the communications strategy, website, staffing, and the time and expertise of grassroots organizations that are central to this campaign. We expect to raise at least another \$250,000 from foundations and another \$100,000 from individual donors to support the Mass Bail Out's bail corpus. Any non-loan funds that are left over from the Mass Bail Out or returned at the end of a case will be re-invested in communities and community groups working to close Rikers Island and tackle mass incarceration.