



**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL
RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW JSO PRIMARY FACILITIES:
WORKING GROUP ON INTAKE, ADJUDICATION AND REHABILITATION**

Meeting Minutes

**December 15, 2023
9:00 a.m.**

Location: Council Chamber, 1st floor, City Hall

In attendance: Council Members Jimmy Peluso and Michael Boylan; Charlie Cofer, Public Defender; Coral Messina (remotely), SAO; Reggie Fullwood, Operation New Hope; Mone Holder, Florida Rising; Beau Rudder, Bail Project

Also: Colleen Hampsey, Council Research Division

Meeting Convened: 9:03 a.m.

Chairman Peluso convened the meeting and called for introductions. He reviewed the discussion from the previous meeting regarding JREC and other re-entry services. Mr. Cofer said it would make sense to house such services in a central location proximal to a new jail facility. Mr. Fullwood said that it would benefit those recently released from jail if there was more coordination among re-entry service providers, and he noted that after release there are multiple required actions (felony registration, probation) located in different parts of the city.

Beau Rudder, Bail Project, gave a presentation about their program. The Bail Project is the only national bail fund and operates in 20 cities, including Jacksonville. It began in 2018 using \$10 million in grant funds with the mission to assist those who cannot afford bail but are constitutionally presumed innocent. Mr. Rudder is a former Mississippi public defender and is now the Southern Regional Director of the Bail Project. He explained the difference between the services they provide in contrast to bail bondsmen. The Bail Project pays cash bail in full directly to the court and the funds are returned after the arrestee returns to court and the case is over. Bail bondsmen accept payment of 10% of the bail (or equivalent collateral) with the remainder as a security bond pending the arrestee appearing in court, but the 10% is not returned. Mr. Cofer said that arrestees who post bond are released within 72 hours and most who are aided through

the Bail Project are released 4-7 days after arrest. The arrestees who become clients of the Bail Project do not have the resources to give 10% of their bail to a bail bondsman.

Mr. Rudder talked about community release with support, wherein the individual is interviewed to determine eligibility, bail is paid to secure their release, text reminders and transportation is offered to court dates/job interviews/doctor appointments, and other support services are offered if needed (job assistance, substance use treatment). He said that since they started operations in Jacksonville, the fund has expended \$856,000 and helped 176 people. Since the bail funds are returned after the case is resolved, the monies recycle to assist others who are in jail but can't afford bail (or the 10% to a bail bondsman). He said that Bail Project clients have a 92% court appearance rate, and 36% of their clients' cases are dismissed. Mr. Rudder said the Bail Project has saved the City roughly \$600,000 in incarceration costs thus far. He talked about the number of arrestees held in the jail pre-trial with bail being their only obstacle to release, an average of 18 out of 88 people arrested daily with bail set at \$10,000 or less. Most of those individuals are charged with misdemeanors. CM Boylan asked about eligibility, and whether arrestees who are homeless are helped through the Bail Project. Mr. Rudder explained that the Bail Project assists clients with bail set at \$10,000 or less who have a local third-party contact, family member/close friend/work contact. He said they assess the client's history of failures to appear in court, which often is attributed to transportation barriers. Mr. Cofer talked about arrestees who remain incarcerated in between court dates and how some accept plea agreements just to get released regardless of whether the charges are valid. They discussed the impact of incarceration, from losing one's job or home to the loss of custody of their children.

Mr. Fullwood asked about the cycle of funds used by the Bail Project. Mr. Rudder said that most cases take 1-2 months to resolve and that afterwards it takes 1-2 months to have the bail money returned by the court. He described the process of paying cash bail with a cashier's check and the delays that occur to get a client released due to unwieldy paperwork. Ms. Holder asked about alternatives to cash bail. The group talked about how some states have eliminated cash bail entirely as it disparately impacts those in poverty. Mr. Rudder noted that Cleveland, Ohio has implemented an electronic payment system for bail. Ms. Messina asked about Bail Project assistance for violent offenders. Mr. Rudder said that for most violent offenders the bail is set higher than \$10,000, and many cases are complicated by protective orders making community release difficult.

CM Peluso asked how the Bail Project identifies clients. Mr. Rudder said about a third are referrals from the Public Defender, a third from family/self referrals, and a third come from the "jail sweep" handwritten court document with details of each day's cases. CM Peluso asked if the Bail Project seeks City funding of any kind. Mr. Rudder said they prefer not to accept government funds and leave such funding available to local nonprofit service providers. Vernon Washington, Bail Project Jacksonville operations manager, talked about transportation challenges post-release and how the Bail Project can provide their clients with cell phones to maintain contact and send court date reminders.

CM Peluso said he will be touring the Montgomery Corrections Center on December 19th at 9:00 am. CM Boylan reminded the group that developing a plan to construct a jail is a multi-year project. He said that the Sheriff is considering relocating the Police Memorial Building offices to a leased space in an existing building instead of buying land for a "new build" project. CM Peluso said the AIR meeting for January 5th will be rescheduled due to his travel plans to Nashville, and that he plans to tour the Nashville jail facility on that trip. With no further business, CM Peluso adjourned the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 10:11 a.m.

Minutes: Colleen Hampsey, Council Research Division
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12.18.23 Posted 5:00 p.m.