



**RICHMOND
COMMUNITY
BAIL FUND**

**End of Year
Organizational & Fiscal Transparency Statement**

December 6th, 2020

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Who is RCBF?

Brief history:

The Richmond Community Bail Fund (RCBF) operates in so-called Richmond, Virginia on stolen Powhatan land. RCBF was formed in the Fall of 2016, and began posting bonds in the early spring of 2017. RCBF formed as a project of the Business Coalition for Justice (BCJ), a partnership we maintain today for our 501(c)3 status. We are currently the only program of the BCJ. Our organization has and always will be volunteer-run, and until the spring of 2020, three members were responsible for all client services, with a small handful of BCJ folks pitching in intermittently as their capacities allowed. Since our beginning, we have been a member of the National Bail Fund Network, a coalition of abolitionist bail fund organizations and formations.

What does our team look like now?

Since COVID-19 and the Uprising for Black Liberation, we now maintain a horizontal organization of roughly 20-25 active members—the exact number fluctuates as the capacities of individual volunteers changes. Our team strives to function horizontally, with major decisions being made by the entire team during long and challenging zoom meetings with rotating facilitation. We worked hard to dismantle the “leadership team,” and now our next goal is to establish working groups responsible for the varying tasks necessary to operate RCBF. RCBF volunteers are in two major groups—sureties and hotliners—differentiated only by the tasks they perform for our organization. Volunteers fill out our volunteer schedule each week and self-determine which days and for how many hours they will pitch in, with a group norm that volunteers are on the schedule for around 10 hours a month. All of our work, including this statement and data analysis are done by our all volunteer team, we spend \$0 on staff. Our volunteers occupy a vast range of identities. Some of our volunteers are former clients, have been defendants themselves, or are directly impacted by the criminal punishment system in other ways. For others, RCBF work is their first encounter with state violence and police terror. We are always interested in growing our team. If you would like to volunteer and contribute your skills, or learn new ones, please reach out to RCBF via our website rvabailfund.org.

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What are our values?

If you've attended one of our trainings, you know we identify ourselves as a Queer and Trans powered abolitionist organization striving to reduce the harm of the criminal punishment system. We do this by crowd-sourcing funds to get people out of cages in seven facilities in and around Central Virginia. Our work centers folks who belong to deeply criminalized communities, or experience "everyday criminalization." Additionally, we provide a jail support hotline for arrested protestors and post their bonds if needed, as we deeply value street resistance to the carceral state in our community. We strive to be a horizontal organization, where decision-making authority is shared with everyone who puts work into RCBF, no matter how long they have been with the team. Political education and skill-sharing is consistently encouraged and embedded in our day-to-day work. We believe in decentralizing and demystifying the skills necessary to support people captured by the criminal punishment system.

The criminal punishment system is a white-supremacist, ableist, cisheteropatriarchal institution that criminalizes poverty. We do not trust its judgment, support its methods, or believe it should exist. We do not ask our clients for information regarding their charges, and we post bail for everyone who calls us as long as we have the means and the state does not prevent us from doing so. **No matter the charge, no matter the history—we will post the bail if we have the money.** We do our best to use a Transformative Justice framework: that every single one of us has and will hurt the people we love in our lives and ourselves, in one way or another. We know people can and do change to reduce or prevent harm, and that prison does not provide this transformation. We believe transformation happens because of accountability to our community and within our relationships, and because of our desire to do right by each other. We know abolition is messy and challenging, that it is for everyone, even our enemies, even those who have harmed us or our people.

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What do we do?

- **Post bond in seven facilities:**

These include Richmond City, Henrico East, Henrico West, Chesterfield, Riverside, Piedmont, and Pamunkey jails.

- **We run two hotlines:**

1) One free of charge for incarcerated folks to call us from inside jails and prisons in VA.

2) Our other free hotline is for folks who are not currently incarcerated, to call and refer their loved ones or ask about our services.

Though our hotline hours subject to change based on volunteer capacity, we typically provide these hotlines Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, 9:30A-6:30P.

- **Contact attorneys, advocates, and loved ones on behalf of clients** to relay messages from folks on the inside.

- **Send letters inside jails/prisons to offer our services.**

In August and September we sent about 50 letters inside two jails offering our services.

- **Provide Direct Financial Assistance** up to \$300 to each client by request.

- **Advocate for incarcerated people to their attorneys**, make requests for bond hearings, time served requests, etc. on their behalf.



What do we do?

- **Coordinate with Virginia Electronic Monitoring Services and help pay for bracelet bond conditions.**

Often our clients have Home Electronic Incarceration (HEI), GPS, or Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitoring (SCRAM) bracelet conditions. We coordinate with VEMS, work with the incarcerated person to find someone in their community to co-sign for the bracelet, and offer financial assistance for the bracelet installation fee.

- **Work with in-patient treatment and other residential spaces**

To meet certain bond conditions, we offer financial support for intake fees. Sometimes our clients have other conditions on their release in addition to the bond, such as “having a bed” in a mental health or substance use recovery program. This means that the client will not be released until they have paperwork from a court-approved recovery home indicating that they have paid for a spot at the program. We work with our clients and these facilities to pay their intake fees, which are usually several hundred dollars, and to furnish the necessary paperwork for the courts.

- **Provide or pay for transportation**

Many of our clients have no one to give them a ride after their release. Every one of our clients who needs a ride gets one, either from one of our volunteers or from a Lyft/Uber/taxi that we’ve paid for.

- **Coordinate pro bono representation for protestors via the Legal Collaborative**

We no longer offer this service because the Legal Collaborative is no longer taking new clients and it is very difficult to find attorneys willing to offer pro bono representation, this coordination was much of our work from Jun - Sep

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What do we do?

- **Work with our partners in the Pretrial Justice Coalition**
to strategize around structural changes to Virginia’s pretrial punishment system.
- **Work with our partners in the COVID Free Them All Coalition**
to organize pressure on Richmond Sheriff Antoinette Irving and CA Colette McEachin to mass release people from RCJC in response to the outbreaks of COVID-19
- **Provide support and consult for other bail funds in the Southern and Appalachian regions**
- **The Richmond City Court Watch Program**
Before COVID-19 when courts were still open to the public, courtwatch gathered data about court proceedings to document the racist and classist trends in the legal system. We hope to use this data to push for abolishing pretrial detention, and to get courtwatch back up and running after the pandemic.
- **Grassroots Fundraise for Clients**
Because our organization is only able to give \$300 in DFA, (please see above and below for more information on DFA) we often use our social media to create and circulate fundraisers for clients when \$300 is not enough to meet immediate needs.

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Fundraising

What did our money look like before Summer 2020?

Before the uprising, RCBF held a maximum of \$25k annually, with a usual account balance hovering around \$15k. We often fundraised for individual bails after receiving a call from a client when we didn't have the funds to bail them out. Then and now, we sustain our work with grassroots donations.

How much did we raise? When?

In mid-June we raised \$700K without ever circulating a fundraising link, we also published a transparency statement on our website and twitter, asking the community to redirect their resources to NoLef Turns.

By September 2020, we accrued 1.5 million dollars in grassroots donations.

Approximately \$1.2 million of these funds were accrued via electronic donations through our website.

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How do we spend our money?

Paying Cash Bail:

From June 1 to December 1, we bailed out **356 people** by paying **\$1,282,580** in cash bail.

By Month:

- **June: we posted bonds for 7 people, totaling \$27,000.**

The average bond was approximately \$3,857, the median was \$2,500, the minimum bond was \$500 and the maximum bond was \$10,000.

Most of our work in June was supporting the hundreds of protestors arrested at direct actions, with the vast majority not being assigned cash bail.

- **July: we posted bonds for 20 people totaling \$46,550.**

The average bond was \$2,327.50, the median was \$1,500, the minimum bond was \$500 and the maximum bond was \$10,000.

- **August: we posted bonds for 33 people totaling \$128,500.**

The average bond was \$3,779.41, the median was \$2,000, the minimum bond was \$500 and the maximum bond was \$40,000.

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How do we spend our money?

- **September: we posted bonds for 87 people totaling \$352,600.**

The average bond was \$3,597.96, the median was \$2,500, the minimum bond was \$300 and the maximum bond was \$35,000.

In the breakdown for September by facility, we posted 22 bonds at Henrico West, 35 bonds at Chesterfield, 27 at Riverside Regional, 1 at Pamunkey, 11 at Richmond City "Justice" Center, and 1 at Henrico East.

In September, we saw a dramatic increase in how many folks we were serving because we began outreach to folks incarcerated on cash bail in local jails.

- **October: we posted bonds for 115 people totaling \$386,700.**

The average bond was \$3,093.60, the median was \$2,000, the minimum bond was \$500 and the max was \$26,500.

In the breakdown for October by facility, we posted 42 bonds at Henrico West, 27 bonds at Chesterfield, 30 at Riverside Regional, 16 at Pamunkey, 7 at Richmond City "Justice" Center, and 3 at Henrico East.

- **November: we posted bonds for 94 people totaling \$341,230.**

The average bond was \$3,267, the median was \$2,500, the minimum bond was \$250 and the maximum bond was \$25,000.

In the breakdown for November by facility, we posted 39 bonds at Henrico West, 16 bonds at Chesterfield, 30 at Riverside Regional, 10 at Pamunkey, 3 at Richmond City "Justice" Center, 2 at Meherrin River, and 4 at Piedmont Regional.

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How do we spend our money?

- **Direct Financial Assistance (DFA):**

We provide up to \$300 in DFA for each client who we bond out or provide jail support for who requests financial support for any reason. The cap of \$300 exists to first, prevent clients from being taxed on this money as a result of IRS regulations and second, to sustain our organization so we can support as many people as possible.

As mentioned above, because \$300 is often not enough for clients, we also circulate grassroots fundraisers at their request.

We spent roughly \$45K providing 146 people Direct Financial Assistance since June. Before the Summer of 2020, we did not have enough funds to provide DFA, meaning this is a new initiative for RCBF.

- **Virginia Electronic Monitoring Service (VEMS):**

The mechanical function of VEMS is explained above. The installation fee for VEMS is between \$330-360, and we often pay this directly to VEMS as this step is needed first if we want to post bail for a client.

Since June, we have spent roughly \$5,500 on VEMS.

- **GPS at Henrico Jails:**

For clients with GPS monitor conditions at Henrico West and East Jails, \$85 must be placed on their books before their bail can be posted. This fee pays for the installation of the GPS monitor.

Since June, we have spent roughly \$1,300 to pay for Henrico GPS monitors.



How do we spend our money?

- **Commissary:**

RCBF has put approximately \$25,000 on incarcerated people's books. This can be used to buy toiletries or sanitary items as jails and prisons are not providing these to incarcerated folks, before or during COVID-19. Commissary funds can also be used to buy food or small comforts, make calls, etc. We do not police what clients use their commissary for or provide any restrictions or guidelines. Beginning in November we have stopped providing commissary funds as a result of our fiscal scarcity. We hope to resume this support if monies return from the courts or we are able to successfully fundraise.

- **Transportation:**

We are very fortunate to have volunteers who are often willing to provide transportation for clients. We offer rides to and from jail, pretrial services, court dates, and other appointments related to the criminal punishment system. However, when none of our volunteers have capacity, we offer Uber or Lyft rides. The National Bail Fund Network provided us with 40 Lyft vouchers—excluding those 40 free rides, since June 1st we have spent \$867.81 on Lyft and \$703.13 on Uber. From June 1 to December 1, we have spent \$1570.94 on transportation for clients.

- **Accountant + Bookkeeping Fees:**

This year we hired an accountant and bookkeeper with the office of Nadia S. Anderson, CPA. We had to hire these folks because our books were a mess, and because we went from an organization with a few thousand dollar annual budget to a million dollar one, we anticipate an IRS audit. We have set aside about \$50,000 to pay Nadia and her team.

- **Money for the Internal Phone:**

To speak to incarcerated folks, we have to pay our prepaid phone account through Global Tel Link so our clients don't have to. We spend about \$100 per week to keep calls to our hotline free for folks inside jails and prison.

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Community Partners

This year we have distributed \$98,600 to the following organizations in Virginia:

757 Solidarity Fund of Humanities Behind Bars - \$54,000

NoLefTurns - \$40,000

Lynchburg (VA) Community Bail Fund - \$3,600

River City Medic Collective - \$1,000

Including the above organizations, we have and will continue to refer clients to:

Richmond Eviction Defense
Legal Aid Justice Center
RVA Legal Collaborative
Mutual Aid Disaster Relief Richmond
National Lawyers Guild
RVA26
Daily Planet
Health Brigade
La Colectiva
Roanoke Jail Solidarity

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Fiscal Summary

From June 1 to December 1, Richmond Community Bail Fund freed 356 folks by paying \$1,282,580 in cash bail. We put approximately \$25K on incarcerated folks' commissary and distributed \$45K to about 150 folks upon their release to provide support for re-entry. We spent an additional \$6.8K on home electronic incarceration, GPS, and SCRAM bracelet bond conditions costs. We have distributed \$98,600 to other community organizations. We paid \$1,570.94 for clients' transportation needs to and from criminal punishment appointments and court.

As of December 1st, we have spent \$1,459,550.94. Because of smaller donations following our major influx and the few bond returns we have received, we have \$214,342.08 left to continue our work. \$50K of this is set aside for our accountant and bookkeeper as we prepare to be audited by the IRS because of the incredible change in our annual assets.

RCBF now has \$164,342.08 left to post bail and support our folks. Though this is an almost unfathomable amount of money for most of our team and community, the data above shows it is not enough to continue our work for even one month at our current rate.

If we look at months like those we had in September and October, \$164K is not even enough to get us through two more weeks.

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Why isn't the money coming back from the courts?

The money used by revolving bail funds is able to “revolve” because if clients complete their court processes, the money we used to pay their cash bail returns to us. We can then use this money to post other bonds.

To complete their court processes, clients often have to jump through many unnecessary hoops far from their homes at short notice, but generally this means:

- Showing up to court
- Attending pretrial services appointments
- And meeting other bond conditions

Guided by our values, we do not track our folks or enforce in any way their compliance with these processes. Because of COVID-19, court dates and processes are dragged out, meaning these bond returns are being delayed.

Since June, we have only received about \$75K in bond returns.

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Looking Forward

We are confident 90% of our clients will complete their court processes, meaning we believe 90% of the money we have spent on bonds will come back to us and be used to bond more folks out of jail. However, the money is simply not coming back fast enough for us to continue to liberate people at the speed that Virginia is caging them.

On our end, we are deploying a couple strategies to slow down spending. In November, our team decided on a temporary cap on bond postings exceeding 10% of our available funds. At the start of November, this meant that we no longer posted bonds above \$25k. When our total assets drop to \$100,000, we will no longer post bonds over \$10K. We have spent months being able to say yes to anyone who asks, but have implemented this new cap to ensure we can serve as many folks as possible now that we are low on funds. We hope that with fundraising and bond returns, we will again be able to say yes to everyone who asks us to come bail them out. We are also continuing to experiment with running our hotline fewer days a week, hoping we will space out our spending more to give time for bonds to return, and because our team is exhausted.

It is with great gratitude that we share this summary of our work from the past six months, knowing it was possible only because our community and people from all over the country generously trusted us with this wealth. We never expect to raise 1.5 million dollars again, or to be able to get 356 people out in 6 months. However, at our current rate, we can not continue to meet the needs of our communities incarcerated in local jails and prisons.

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Looking Forward

We would like for our fundraising, and as a direct result our work, to become more sustainable. In this spirit of the brilliant organizing by Mutual Aid Disaster Relief Richmond,

we are asking the community for \$25K via recurring monthly donations to last one year or more.

This way, no matter what is going on with the courts or our clients' bond returns, we can always at the very least, get a few people out of jail every month. Any donation is appreciated, but we are asking for sustained monthly donations via our website rvabailfund.org/donate to help us budget and keep this work going year-round. This goal of \$25,000 in recurring monthly donations for one year could be achieved by 500 folks giving \$50 a month, or 1000 people giving 25 dollars a month. Any amount given monthly allows us to plan for the future. With a reliable monthly and annual budget, RCBF can be around as long as cash bail exists in Central Virginia.

Love + Rage,

