

COURT WATCH

SUMMER 2020

CASH BAIL,
ARBITRARY DETENTION
AND APARTHEID IN
ALLEGHENY COUNTY



ABOLITIONIST
LAW CENTER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

II. METHODOLOGY

III. MONEY BAIL FINDINGS

A. Definitions

B. Summary

C. Impact of Money Bail by Zip Code

IV. JUDGES & BAIL: THE IMPACT OF JUDICIAL DISCRETION

V. POLICE OFFICERS, DEPARTMENTS, AND

DISCRETIONARY ARRESTS

VI. RACE, SEX, AND MISDEMEANOR ARRESTS AND CASH

BAIL

VII. CONCLUSION

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2020, the Abolitionist Law Center launched a court watch program committed to transformative racial justice by keeping the courts accountable through observation, data collection, and public reporting. The program is dedicated to gathering information and processing data to produce viable reports for the benefit of those who are organizing against mass incarceration, state violence, and racial apartheid. Court watch volunteers examined municipal court dockets from May 11, 2020 through June 8, 2020 and processed the data using statistical software.

While the population of Allegheny County is less than 13% Black, the population of the Allegheny County Jail is 67% Black.¹ The racially disproportionate imposition of money bail is a contributing factor to this gross disparity. Despite being less than 7% of the county population, Black men between May 11 and June 8 made up 32% of misdemeanor arrests and 44% of misdemeanor defendants. Additionally, Black men alone were subjected to 43% of the total dollar value of unsecured monetary bail impositions for misdemeanors and 39% of the total dollar value of secured monetary bail impositions.

<13%
of the Allegheny
County population
is Black.

67%
of the Allegheny
County Jail
population
is Black.

¹ From the period of May 1, 2020 to July 31, 2020, the jail population was 67% Black. Allegheny County Jail Population Management: Interactive Dashboards, DHS <https://www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us/index.php/2019/11/04/allegheny-county-jail-population-management-dashboards-2/> (last accessed July 31, 2020).

In other words, the Black residents of Allegheny County are more likely to be arrested, charged, and have monetary bail imposed against them. The obvious outcome of this disparate treatment is that Black residents have a greater chance of being detained in jail for long periods, likely accounting for the massive racial disparity amongst the jail population. ALC Court Watch can also confirm through its observations of preliminary arraignments that *judicial inquiry concerning a defendant's ability to pay bail is rarely undertaken, even though it is a constitutional requirement.* The consequence is that bond is being imposed at substantial cost to defendants without any assessment as to their ability to pay. This practice functionally undermines the purported presumption of innocence that is supposed to define the criminal prosecution process. Another disconcerting feature of this bail-as-ransom system is that there is no evidence nor research proving that cash

“judicial inquiry concerning a defendant’s ability to pay bail is rarely undertaken, even though it is a constitutional requirement.”

bail furthers any public safety goals whatsoever. The practices of pretrial detention in Allegheny County are marked by arbitrariness and normative constitutional defects, and operate to invert the proper presumptions and rights accorded to those charged with crimes such that a presumption of guilt rather than innocence is established. The result is that individuals are placed in punitive conditions in the Allegheny County Jail prior to receiving due process and opportunity to defend themselves.

The imposition of monetary bail in this racially disparate manner is not only a grave domestic policy concern, but it is also a serious violation of human rights that has contributed to a system of apartheid in the region. International human rights law establishes that all people have the right to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention.² Human rights law also requires

² Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article IX.

governments to take affirmative measures to end racial discrimination in all forms, including any laws and regulations which create or perpetuate racial discrimination.³ The criminal punishment system in the United States, and its subordinate jurisdictions of Pennsylvania and Allegheny County, are in constant violation of the decades-old international human rights obligation to end all policies or practices that result in discrimination, including laws, policies, and practices that are facially race-neutral, yet operate to produce structural racism in the form of disparate, racialized impacts that have an adverse effect on certain groups. These standards explicitly recognize that arbitrary arrest and illegal imprisonment of members of a racial group, for the purpose of maintaining racial dominance, constitute predicate acts of the crime of apartheid, which is a crime against humanity under international law.⁴

“...arbitrary arrest and illegal imprisonment of members of a racial group, for the purpose of maintaining racial dominance, constitute predicate acts of the crime of apartheid, which is a crime against humanity under international law.”⁴

The policing and incarceration practices detailed in this report represent systematic, arbitrary practices of state violence that disproportionately target Black people in Allegheny County. The failure of government officials, including judges, to acknowledge and rectify this state of affairs is so deeply entrenched as to represent an affirmative and intentional policy preference for the outcomes produced by contemporary policing and incarceration practices. In other words, this report provides a snapshot of a criminal punishment system that does what it does on purpose, aware of the racially disparate outcomes involved. This is

³ International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Article II.

⁴ International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, Article II(a)(3).

a criminal punishment system that meets the legal definition of apartheid due to its being sanctioned by the government at every jurisdictional level. These are not mere statistical anomalies or inexplicable realities depicted in this report. Instead, this is evidence of an ongoing crime against humanity that is being carried out by police, prosecutors, judges, jailers, and the elected officials who enact, maintain and refuse to change the laws, policies, and practices responsible for structural white supremacy.

This report was created to be a resource for organized people seeking to *build power and fight back against apartheid*. We require, at minimum, and will fight for upholding the legal and ethical standard set by international governing bodies to end racial discrimination, apartheid, and unequal treatment in Pittsburgh and the greater Allegheny County region.

– ALC Court Watch, November 2020

II. METHODOLOGY

This report is primarily based upon publicly available docket sheets from the criminal and municipal courts from **May 11, 2020, to June 8, 2020**. Docket sheets contain the complaints filed against each defendant. They display personal identifying information as well as which police department is responsible for their arrest, charges, the bail-type set by the judge, and what the status is of their detention.

In this period, 880 individual defendants were named as facing new criminal charges on 940 docket sheets (another 46 dockets concerned criminal contempt charges for violations of protection-from-abuse orders, or extradition orders). A total of **825 defendants** had a single docket sheet during this period. Unless otherwise noted, this report focuses on the 825 individual defendants with one docket sheet during the period under consideration.

Additionally, a number of preliminary arraignments were observed telephonically throughout the month-long period, though access was inconsistently provided, resulting in an incomplete collection of auditorily-gathered impressions and information. Nonetheless, audio observations proved invaluable to fill in the gaps in information gleaned from the dockets and provided context to the process (or lack thereof) in constitutionally-required bail determinations.



III. MONEY BAIL FINDINGS

A. Definitions

Allegheny County judges impose two kinds of monetary bail: unsecured monetary bail and secured monetary bail.

Unsecured monetary bail imposes no immediate cost on the defendant and therefore permits release from custody, but there is a potential cost should the defendant fail to appear in court. Defendants promise to both comply with the judicially-determined non-monetary conditions of bail and appear in court for their scheduled hearing, or else be subject to a potentially hefty financial cost.

UNSECURED:

no immediate cost; defendants promise to comply and appear in court

VS

SECURED:

defendants pay ALL or % of bail in order to be released from pre-trial custody; bails bondman

Secured monetary bail requires defendants to pay all or a portion of the bail in order to be released from custody during the pre-trial period. There are two forms of secured monetary bail: monetary percentage bail, and non-percentage (full or ‘straight’) monetary bail.

The **percentage version of secured monetary bail** typically requires the defendant to pay 10%, or 1/10, of the bail set by the judge as a condition of release. If the defendant then appears in court as scheduled, the money is returned to them. In order to be released, they must have access to the ten percent upfront, whether it is their own money, that of their friends/family, or from a professional bail bondsman.⁵ In this case, pre-trial liberty costs money, but it’s money that can be recovered in full if they put up the ten percent themselves. However, if they use the services of a professional bail bondsman, they must pay a specific percentage of the total bail amount to the bondsman as a fee. This amount cannot be recovered. (For example, if \$10,000 is the 10 percent secured monetary amount, then defendants must either pay \$1,000 upfront to the court directly, or \$100—which they cannot recover—if they use the services of a professional bail bondsman to put up the \$1000.)

⁵ A bail bondsman is a private person or agency that takes on the responsibility to pay bail on behalf of a defendant in exchange for a fee, typically between 5% - 10%.



Ordinary secured (full or ‘**straight**’) **monetary bail** requires the full amount to be paid as a condition of release. For most defendants, this means that they must use the services of professional bail bondsman. While this money can also be recovered in full if one pays for it themselves, using the services of a professional bail bondsman for this type of bail requires a non-returnable payment of a specific percentage of the assessed bail amount as the bail bondsman’s fee. (For example, a \$10,000 bail can cost the defendant \$1,000 in fees to a professional bail bondsman, if the bonds company charges a 10% fee, assuming the defendants or their families cannot themselves post the full \$10,000 themselves.)

***The United States and the Philippines are the only countries in the world to have a commercial bail industry.**

B. Summary of Bail Data

Between May 11 and June 8 (29 days), the 825 defendants with a single docket sheet experienced the following:⁶

**MORE
THAN
\$5M!**

- Judges imposed more than \$5 million in unsecured and secured bail (\$5,180,488) on 351 defendants (averaging \$14,759 per defendant).⁷
- More than 84 percent of the dollar value of these bail assessments involved **secured monetary bail** (\$4,357,500), which requires defendants to pay upfront for their pre-trial liberty. Almost all of this secured monetary bail (\$4.07 million of the \$4.36 million) required the full payment. This type of bail is also known as ‘**straight**’ bail.
- Among the 351 defendants who faced some form of money bail, the types and amounts were as follows:
 - 89 defendants faced \$823,000 in **unsecured monetary bail**. That averages to \$9,247 per defendant in this category, although, as noted, unsecured

⁶ Defendants with more than one docket sheet are typically assessed more money bail than those with one docket sheet, so focusing on defendants with only one docket sheet somewhat underestimates the full scope of money bail impositions.

⁷ When all docket sheets with new criminal offense charges are taken into account -- 940 docket sheets involving 876 defendants -- the total amount of unsecured and secured bail was \$6,066,987, which included \$5,147,000 in secured monetary bail.



“Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, an average of more than two people per day in Allegheny County were required to pay \$1,079 in order to avoid incarceration for a misdemeanor charge.”

monetary bail requires no immediate payment for pre-trial release.

- 62 defendants faced \$285,000 in **percentage bail, where the individual must pay a portion of the full amount to make bond (usually 10 percent)**. That averages to \$4,597 per defendant, for an average 10 percent amount of \$460. The median bond was \$3,000, for a median 10 percent amount of \$300.

- 200 defendants faced \$4,072,500 in **‘straight’ bail**, where the individual must pay the full amount to make bond. That is an average of \$20,363 per defendant. The median amount was \$10,000.

Overall, 31.8 percent of defendants (262 out of 825) with a single docket sheet had **secured monetary bail** imposed on them.

- 38.2 percent of felony defendants (151 out of 395) faced a total of \$3,478,000 in secured money bail. Over \$1.9 million of this was for the less serious second- and third-degree felonies.

- 25.8 percent of misdemeanor defendants (111 out of 430) faced a total of \$879,500 in secured money bail, \$562,500 of which was for the lower grade, and presumptively less serious, second- and third-degree misdemeanors.

A total of 430 defendants were **misdemeanor defendants**, meaning they only had one docket sheet and were arrested for a charge no more serious than a misdemeanor.

- 149 of these 430 misdemeanor defendants had some form of monetary bail imposed on them, and this totaled \$1,158,000.
- 111 of these 149 misdemeanor defendants with money bail faced a secured form that requires paying money upfront as a condition of release.
- 46 of the 111 faced monetary percentage bail totaling \$178,500. That averages to \$3,880 per misdemeanor defendant facing percentage bail (10%), for an average cost of \$388 per defendant.
- 65 of the 111 faced \$701,000 in full monetary bail, which averages \$10,785 per misdemeanor defendant in this category. Assuming they can’t put up the money themselves, the cost of liberty for these defendants is an average of \$1,079. **This is a true cost: they will never get the money back.**
- *Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, an average of more than two people per day in Allegheny County were required to pay \$1,079 in order to avoid incarceration for a misdemeanor charge.*

C. Impact of Money Bail by Zip Code

The 825 defendants with a single docket sheet have home addresses across 127 different zip codes, mostly in Allegheny County.⁸ But 304 come from just 9 zip codes (37 percent of all defendants).⁹ These 9 zip codes' share of the total value of secured monetary bail imposed between May 11 and June 8 was 38 percent (\$1.6575 million out of \$4.3575 million).



In these 9 zip codes, the population varies from 25.4 percent to 59.1 percent Black, with the average across the populations of these zip codes combined being about 37 percent Black.¹⁰ **Each of these zip codes has a higher percentage of Black residents than Allegheny County, which is only 12.9 percent Black.¹¹ In other words, zip codes with a higher percentage of Black residents bear a disproportionately high share of monetary bail in this region.**

At the other end of the spectrum, 51 zip codes had only one defendant, and the secured bail burden for these 51 zip codes combined was \$267,500.¹² Expanding the scope to the 100 zip codes with the least number of defendants (no more than eight defendants per zip code), these 100 zip codes accounted for only 31 percent of monetary bail impositions (80 of 262), and 26 percent of the total value of secured monetary bail imposed in Allegheny County between May 11 and June 8 (\$1.1495 million / \$4.3575 million).

⁸ To be more precise, 771 defendants with a known zip code come from 127 different zip codes, while the zip code is unknown for 54 defendants.

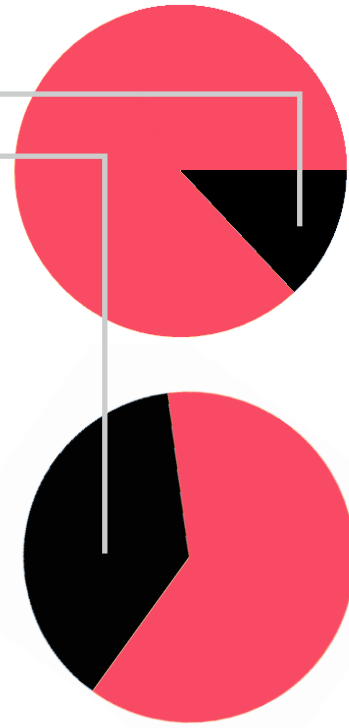
⁹ The zip codes, with the number of defendants in parentheses, are as follows: 15235 (47 defendants), 15210 (44), 15206 (43), 15212 (43), 15221 (35), 15132 (29), 15219 (25), 15208 (19), 15214 (19). These zip codes encompass the neighborhoods of Penn Hills, Churchill, Wilkins, Knoxville, Beltzhoover, Carrick, Arlington, East Liberty, Morningside, East End, Northside, Brushton, Homewood, East Hills, Mckeesport, Uptown, Herron Hill, Schenley Heights, and Point Breeze. PITTSBURGH POST OFFICE ZIP CODES - 15201 to 15243, City of Pittsburgh (2014), <https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/finance/2014-zip-codes.pdf>.

¹⁰ Race American Community Survey 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau (2014-2018) available at https://censusreporter.org/data/table/?table=B02001&geo_ids=05000US42003,86000US15235,86000US15210,86000US15206,86000US15212,86000US15221,86000US15132,86000US15219,86000US15208,86000US15214.

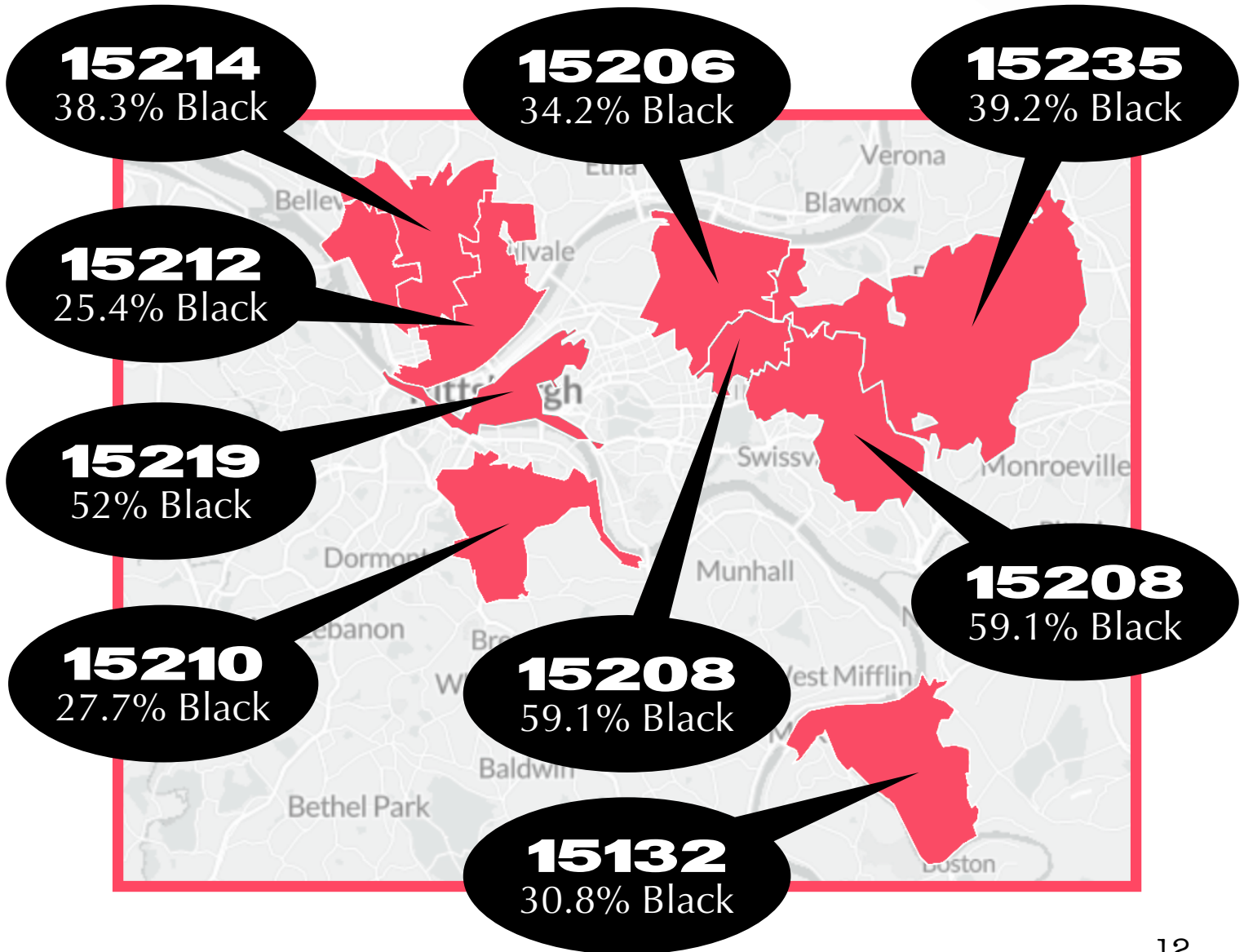
¹¹ Id.

¹² This means these 51 zip codes had 6.2% of all defendants with a single docket sheet (51/825) and 6.1% of all secured monetary bail (\$0.2675 million / \$4.3575 million)

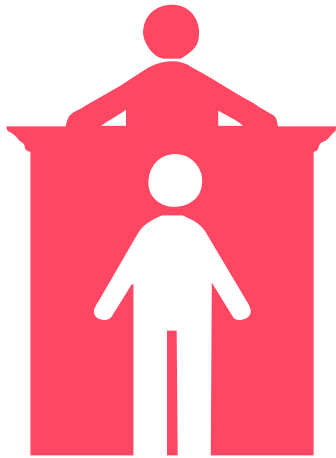
Allegheny County is only **12.9%** **BLACK**, yet **MORE THAN ONE THIRD** of all defendants (304 out of 825) and all secured monetary bail (\$1.6575 million out of \$4.3575 million) come from these nine zip codes:



BLACK PITTSBURGH.



IV. JUDGES AND BAIL: THE IMPACT OF JUDICIAL DISCRETION



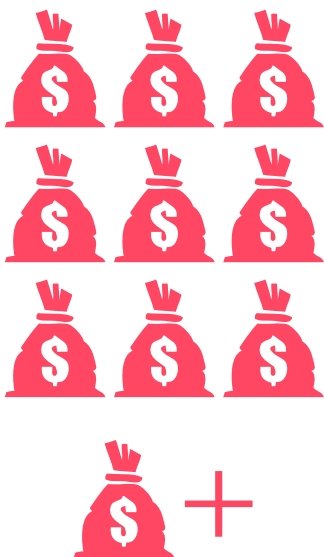
“...one group of judges accounted for over 10 times more monetary bail impositions than the other group.”

In virtually every case, judges have unbridled discretion to decide on the type of bail, and when bail is monetary, the amount of bail. The previously-discussed bail figures are ultimately based on the exercise of judicial discretion. This section examines the comparative bail practices of magisterial district court judges in imposing secured monetary bail.

Judges imposed secured monetary bail on 262 of 825 defendants. In those cases:

- 3 judges heard 21 percent of cases but accounted for 34 percent of all monetary bail impositions.¹³
- At the other end of the spectrum, 17 judges also heard 21 percent of all cases but accounted for only 3 percent of secured monetary bail impositions.
- These two sets of judges each heard 21 percent of all cases, **but one group of judges accounted for over 10 times more monetary bail impositions than the other group.**
- The other 27 judges heard 58 percent of cases and accounted for 63 percent of secured monetary bail impositions.

The impact of judicial discretion is clearer when we narrow the focus to **misdemeanor defendants**. Judges imposed secured monetary bail on 111 of 430 misdemeanor defendants. In those cases:



- 3 judges heard 18 percent of cases (78 out of 430) but accounted for 41 percent of all secured monetary bail impositions (45 out of 111). These judges heard cases that accounted for 13 percent of all first-degree misdemeanor charges, the most serious grade of misdemeanor.
- At the other end of the spectrum, 16 judges heard 23 percent of all misdemeanor cases and accounted for exactly 0 percent of all secured monetary bail impositions on misdemeanor defendants. These judges heard cases that accounted for 15 percent of all of first-degree misdemeanor charges.
- 28 judges hearing 50 percent of all misdemeanor cases accounted for only 14 percent of all secured monetary bail impositions (16 out of 111). These judges heard 45 percent of all first-degree misdemeanor charges.

¹³ Thomas S. Brletic imposed secured monetary bail in 31 of 48 misdemeanor cases. James A. Motznik heard 20 such cases and imposed secured monetary bail in 10 of these. Eugene Ricciardi imposed monetary bail in 4 of 10 misdemeanor cases.

V. POLICE OFFICERS AND POLICE DEPARTMENTS

Being arrested by a police officer is the step that precedes a defendant's appearance in court. Police officers have wide discretion when it comes to making felony arrests, and are subject only to limited and superficial oversight from the District Attorney's office. However, when it comes to misdemeanor arrests, there is no oversight whatsoever until the preliminary hearing stage, at which point much of the damage has already been done. This lack of oversight is indefensible, as it incentivizes overcharging and police perjury. Lying is incentivized and practiced to such an extent that perjury among police officers testifying in court is commonly known across the country by the term "testilying." This endemic feature of American policing is especially concerning when considering racial disparities in policing and arrests. **Black residents make up only 23.2 percent of the Pittsburgh population, but they experienced 44 percent of all traffic stops, 71 percent of all frisks, 69 percent of all warrantless search and seizures, and 63 percent of all arrests conducted by the Pittsburgh Police in 2019.**¹⁴

TESTILYING

v. (tēs'tə-lī'ing) *to provide a false testimony against a defendant in order to get a conviction. Testilying is an incentivized open secret and feature of carceral capitalism. See also: police perjury*

Focusing on *all* arrests for new criminal charges—not just those defendants with one docket sheet—the following findings were made:



- 571 police officers working for 101 different police agencies in Allegheny County made 945 arrests leading to preliminary arraignments that took place between May 11 and June 8.
- 51 percent of these arrests were for misdemeanors, a figure that drops slightly to 48 percent when one removes the protest arrests ("failure to disperse") from the analysis.
- Focusing on non-protest arrests (a total of 880), 365 officers each made 1 arrest; 127 officers each made 2 arrests; 37 officers made 3 arrests each, and 17 officers made 4-8 arrests each.
- Officers who made more arrests were more likely to make felony arrests: while 51 percent of arrests by officers making one arrest were for misdemeanors, this figure generally declined as the number of arrests per officer increased. For example, the misdemeanor arrest rate was 30-40 percent for those who made 5-7 arrests (although it was 50 percent for the 2 officers who each made 8 arrests).

¹⁴ https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/redtail/images/9640_2019_Annual_Report_Final.pdf.

What about those 101 police agencies that made 880 non-protest arrests between May 11 and June 8? Six departments, each with at least 20 arrests, accounted for nearly 60 percent of all arrests (520 out of 880), including 52 percent of all misdemeanor arrests (216 out of 418): Pittsburgh city police (352 arrests), Allegheny County police (48 arrests), Penn Hills (43 arrests), McKeesport (31 arrests), Duquesne (23 arrests), and Wilkinsburg (23 arrests). Sorting these top 6 police departments in terms of their misdemeanor arrest rate (that is, arrests where a misdemeanor is the most serious charge):

PENN HILLS	60% MISDEMEANOR RATE
PITTSBURGH	45% MISDEMEANOR RATE
WILKINSBURGH	39% MISDEMEANOR RATE
MCKEESPORT	39% MISDEMEANOR RATE
DUQUESNE	26% MISDEMEANOR RATE
ALLEGHENY COUNTY POLICE	8% MISDEMEANOR RATE

Focusing on the City of Pittsburgh Police, the city has about 25 percent of the county's population but accounted for 40 percent of all non-protest arrests (352 out of 880) and 38 percent of all arrests for which a misdemeanor was the most serious charge (159 of 418). The picture is similar when we disaggregate by misdemeanor degree: The City of Pittsburgh Police accounted for 38 percent of arrests in which a third-degree misdemeanor was the most serious charge (42 of 110), 38 percent of arrests in which a second-degree misdemeanor was the most serious charge (81 of 216), and 40 percent of arrests in which a first-degree misdemeanor was the most serious charge (36 of 91).



101

**DIFFERENT POLICE AGENCIES
IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY**

VI. RACE, SEX, MISDEMEANOR ARRESTS, AND CASH BAIL

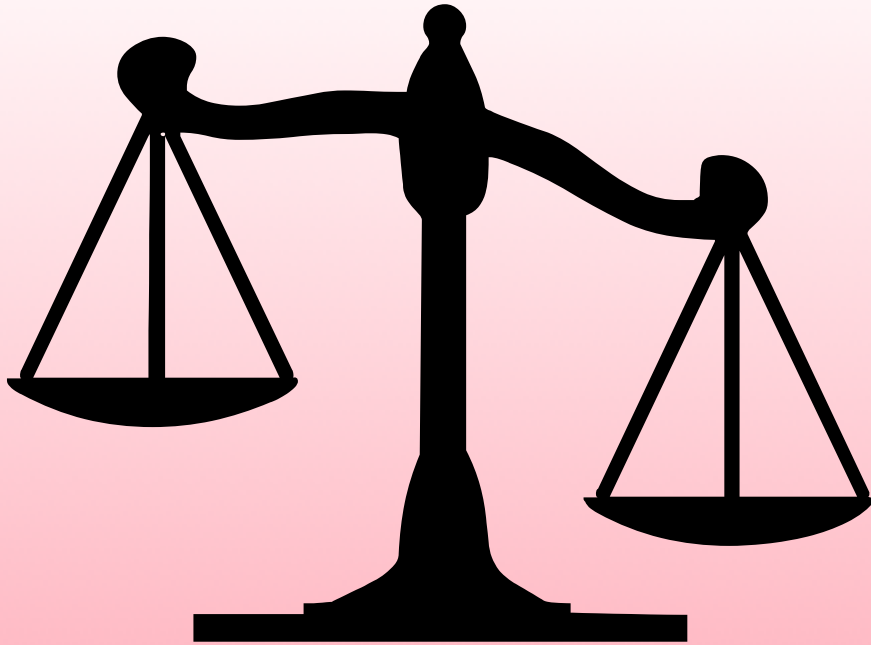
Misdemeanor arrests affect Black residents much more than white residents of Allegheny County. Of the 430 misdemeanor defendants between May 11 and June 8, 415 were either Black or white. Despite the fact that Black residents are only about 13 percent of the county population, they were more than 44 percent of misdemeanor defendants (191 out of 430) – that is, defendants for whom a misdemeanor was the most serious charge.

Breaking the white and Black population down by sex, Black male misdemeanor defendants were least likely to receive the most relaxed form of bail, nonmonetary bail: only 58 percent received this type of bail as compared to 66 percent of white defendants. Correspondingly, Black men were about twice as likely to have unsecured monetary bail imposed on them. Likewise, of all 415 Black and white residents arrested, *only Black residents were denied bond altogether.*

Bail Type by Race & Sex, Most Serious Offense = Misdemeanor (percent distribution)				
	BLACK	BLACK	WHITE	WHITE
BAIL TYPE	female	male	female	male
NON-MONETARY	78.2%	58.1%	63.8%	66.0%
UNSECURED	7.3%	13.2%	5.0%	7.6%
MON-10%	3.6%	9.6%	22.5%	8.3%
MONETARY	9.1%	17.6%	8.8%	18.1%
DENIED	1.8%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL NUMBER	55	136	80	144

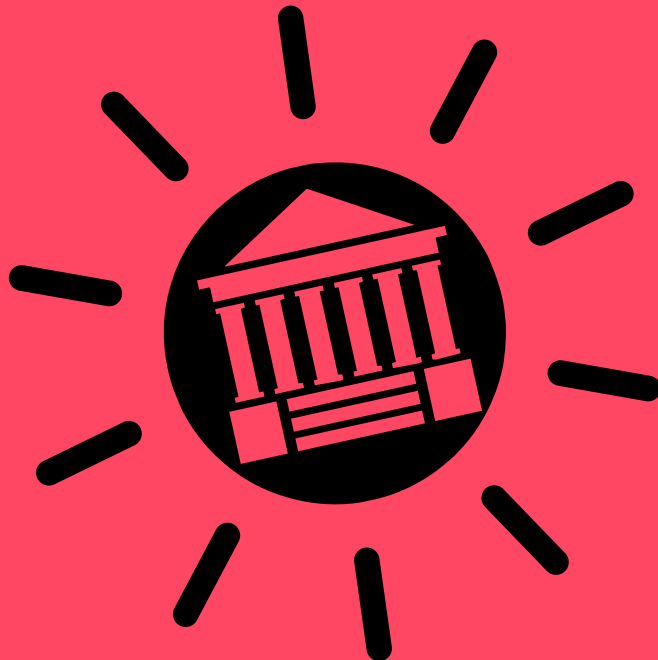
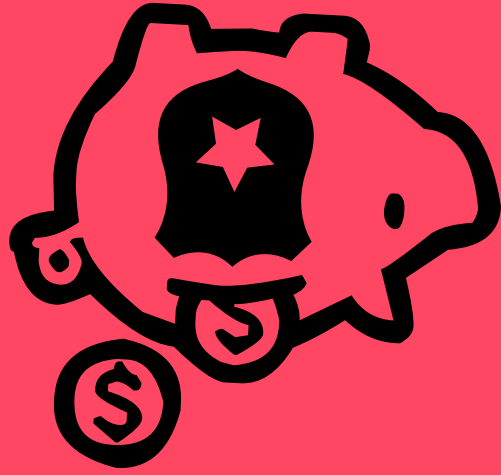
Despite being less than 7 percent of the county population, Black men between May 11 and June 8 were:

- *burdened with 32 percent of misdemeanor arrests;*
- *subjected to 43 percent of the total dollar value of unsecured monetary bail impositions for misdemeanors;*
- *subjected to 39 percent of the total dollar value of secured monetary bail impositions.*



OUT OF THE 415 BLACK AND WHITE ALLEGHENY COUNTY RESIDENTS
ARRESTED ON A MISDEMEANOR CHARGE (*MISDEMEANORS =
CRIMINAL OFFENSES SUCH AS "DISTURBING THE PEACE", PETTY
THEFT, PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS, TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS, TRESPASSING,
GRAFFITI, "DISORDERLY CONDUCT", "PUBLIC LEWDNESS", AND
ISSUING A BAD CHECK*), **IT WAS ONLY THE BLACK COMMUNITY
MEMBERS WHO WERE DENIED BOND ALTOGETHER.**

**EVERY WHITE PERSON CHARGED WITH A MISDEMEANOR WAS
OFFERED BAIL OPTIONS.**



VII. CONCLUSION

The findings of this report are as unsurprising as they are unacceptable. While reports and investigations can be helpful at establishing and clarifying facts, the purpose of this work is to assist in mobilizing people to take action. Rather than tinker with the machinery of apartheid, the Abolitionist Law Center shares these recommendations that, if achieved, would contribute toward eradicating apartheid in our region:

Recommendations

DEFUND THE POLICE

1

The Pittsburgh Police Department has seen an extraordinary expansion of state violence under the Peduto administration, which has lavished an obscene amount of money on the police despite the absence of any meaningful evidence that police are effective at promoting public safety. However, there *is* ample evidence that they are primary drivers of structural white supremacy. Funding should immediately revert to pre-Peduto levels. Jurisdictions throughout the county should be pushed to slash police budgets and invest in the educational, housing, health care, and employment initiatives that make communities safe and healthy.

END CASH BAIL

2

Pre-trial incarceration can only be imposed under the Constitution in order to protect the community or to ensure a person's presence at trial. In practice, however, bail is a shakedown that serves no purpose beyond transferring money from those communities targeted by police and prosecution into the pockets of the court system. Judges have every authority to detain people determined to pose a risk without relying on bail. Bail-as-ransom must end.

OPEN THE COURTS

3

The content of this report is entirely based on information collected through publicly-available dockets and through live and present court observations. Dockets gathered during the referenced timeline revealed problematic patterns aggregated from individual instances, while direct observations of proceedings allowed researchers to fill-in gaps and nuances to data which are not apparent nor included in the docket. With the current pandemic making physical courtroom participation impossible and a threat to public health and safety, remote court access must be provided. Full remote access through livestreaming of all court proceedings is common through the country, and should be immediately implemented in Allegheny County. The continued exclusion of the public from proceedings is both troubling and antidemocratic. The open court system is a fundamental constitutional principle of American democracy, not to be undermined by the members of the court themselves.



ALC Court Watch is a component of the Abolitionist Law Center, a non-profit law agency and organizing coalition that works to secure human rights for those in prison, and fights to end apartheid racism, and carceral mentality wherever it exists.