

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/eliminating-money-injustice-in-new-orleans/confronting-the-true-harms-of-money-injustice>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Last week, [we interviewed Alison Shih](#) co-author of Vera's recent report [Paid in Full](#) that highlights the landscape of money injustice in New Orleans, and provides a roadmap for how the city could become the first in the nation to eliminate both money bail and conviction fees. The report and roadmap are endorsed by 32 local organizations, who have partnered with Vera in calling for change. These organizations, local leaders, and staff from Vera New Orleans [will convene for a public event on July 3](#) co-sponsored by Vera, RFK Human Rights, and Global Citizen to highlight the urgency for change and uplift the voices of those most impacted by money injustice in the city.

This week, we spoke with Roy Brumfield a New Orleans resident and member of local grassroots organization [Stand With Dignity](#) who discusses how desperately change is needed.

1. Can you talk about Stand with Dignity's mission and your work in the New Orleans community?

Stand with Dignity is a grassroots organization that organizes structurally under- and un-employed black men and women of New Orleans. I've been with them for almost seven years now. We do a combination of advocacy campaigns and working to change city policy.

2. Can you discuss your work in New Orleans as it relates to eliminating money injustice?

Yes, our attempt at working on this is called the warrant clinic. It's to relieve people who are stressed from warrants, fines and fees. Especially for people who have their license suspended because they owe money for traffic tickets. A lot of us in the community are not paying traffic tickets not because we don't want to pay, but because we don't have the ability to pay. And once they take away your license, that's a form of economic suppression, because for most jobs you have to travel.

3. In addition to eliminating excessive fines and fees which criminalize poverty why is it important for New Orleans to eliminate money bail as well?

If you go in the New Orleans jail right now and look at the population that cannot pay a bond, the population looks like me, or the Latino community. If you look at the traditional reasons why a person should pay a bond if they're a flight risk, or a danger to the community that's not often the case for why people are in there.

If I'm arrested, and I'm from this city, and I don't have a violent crime, then I'm not a flight risk. I should just be released on my own recognizance. So this is really important to us. If I can't pay my bond, but I can't afford to sit in jail, then I'm going to try and work out some kind of deal. I'll take the conviction just to go home today.

4. Can you share some more about the impact of money injustice in New Orleans, and how the city would change if Vera's reforms were adopted?

I'm heading to the jail right now, and most people there can't pay bail. And more often than most, people plea just to get out of jail. Not because they committed the crime but just because they want to go home.

It would make New Orleans a better city, a safer city. If you look at a person's ability to pay, if you look at the crime and make some kind of assessment based upon flight risk or danger to the community you would have less convicted felons. Because people would stop copping just to get out of jail. Not because they committed the crime, but just because they want to go home.

If this reform happened there would be less convicted felons, so more people could apply for public assistance, more people would be able to get better jobs, the average person would be able to get better housing. This would cure a lot of the problems in our neighborhoods.

5. How do you feel about this moment and the potential for reform?

I'm angry, honestly. When I was in jail and I couldn't pay my bond, I had to make a choice: what's important right now? And I know that's not unique about me. I'm not the only person who made that decision based upon the circumstances.

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