

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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After Two Years, Close the Workhouse Campaign is Victorious as St. Louis City Government Votes to Shutter Notorious ‘Workhouse’ Jail in 2020

(St. Louis, Mo.) -- As a result of the Close the Workhouse campaign's organizing and advocacy, today, St. Louis City's Board of Aldermen voted unanimously to permanently shutter the City's Medium Security Institution, commonly known as the Workhouse. Stemming from the City's racist and predatory policing and unlawful cash bail system, the Workhouse has disproportionately caged Black people who are legally presumed innocent but could not afford to make a monetary payment to buy their freedom. People would languish an average of 290 days before trial, surrounded by black mold, mice, rats, bugs, inoperable plumbing, and without adequate access to medical care.

Since April 2018, the Close the Workhouse (CtW) campaign has educated, organized, and activated individuals and organizations in St. Louis to denounce the local jail, demand its closure, and re-imagine public safety. In that time, CtW has canvassed local neighborhoods, held monthly meetings, organized phone banks and rallies, published two reports, and mobilized thousands of residents to build social momentum and political will for elected officials to close the jail. The campaign consists of people formerly detained in the jail, local and national allies like the Advancement Project- National Office and Ben and Jerry's, and founding organizations Action St. Louis, the Bail Project-St. Louis, and ArchCity Defenders.

"I'm excited and anxious and it's about time! Too many people have suffered for too many years in the Workhouse, and I'm proud to be part of this incredible movement," said Diedre Wortham, a St. Louis resident, mother and grandmother, and Close the Workhouse member.

"I'm relieved that the BOA is finally listening to the people of this city and encouraged that the money is going to be used to help people who really need it," said Jocelyn Garner, a Close the Workhouse member and mother and grandmother.

"The passage of Board Bill 92 is a historic step towards justice, equity and re-envisioning public safety in the city of St. Louis. Our campaign has always called for the closure of Workhouse as a means to invest directly into communities and this legislation does that with the creation of the Division of Supportive Re-entry and Reimagining Public Safety Fund. Action St. Louis is grateful for the political leaders that championed this legislation and many people who helped us raise awareness, educate the public, and advocate for change," said Kayla Reed, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Action St. Louis.

“We’ve long held the belief that jails, prisons and police do not keep us safe-- investment in people and communities does. While today is a win for the people who have survived the Workhouse, and a big step for the entire campaign, we adamantly hold the belief that the Workhouse is irredeemable and should not be repurposed. Further, we’ll remain vigilant to ensure another jail is not built in its place. It is time to do right by St. Louis and reinvest in communities that have been harmed by failed, racist systems like the Workhouse,” said Inex Bordeaux, Manager of Community Collaborations at ArchCity Defenders and Lead Organizer with Close the Workhouse.

“Today was a victory for the communities that were financially neglected and divested from for decades. The real win is that nobody will ever have to go to that place again. We are thankful for all those that contributed to the CTW campaign and that our city government showed courage and listened to The People. We look forward to working with them to ensure that the money is invested meaningfully toward communities and no new jail is built in its place,” said Mike Milton, Statewide Policy and Advocacy Manager of The Bail Project.

In January 2020, CtW published its second report, [‘The Plan to Close the Workhouse.’](#) which provided the basis for St. Louis Board President Lewis Reed’s [Board Bill 92](#), introduced on July 2, 2020. In summary, BB92:

- Directs the Commissioner of Corrections to begin process of closing the jail
- Calls for housing space for detainees at the City Justice Center to be evaluated and the Workhouse be studied to determine its future
- Directs the Department of Personnel to assist employees with finding other City jobs
- Establishes a fund and participatory budgeting process for resources for marginalized neighborhoods

Data published by St. Louis City indicates the number of people jailed has decreased by 50% since 2013, from 1,798 to now 802. Since the start of the campaign, the population in the Workhouse has decreased by 84%, from 516 people in April 2018 to 86 people as of July 16, 2020. This is a direct result of community organizing, political pressure, community and Bail Project bailouts, prosecutorial reforms, and litigation brought by ArchCity Defenders and co-counsel.

To hear stories from people previously caged in the Workhouse, check out the campaign’s series [Humans of the Workhouse series](#) on YouTube.

The vote follows local and national uprisings stemming from the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and subsequent conversations about defunding racist and failed systems, like policing.

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For more, find Close the Workhouse campaign on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#). Follow the conversation with #CloseTheWorkhouse and learn more about the campaign at www.closetheworkhouse.org