3. WHO BENEFITS FROM CASH BAIL?

Money pervades the criminal justice system. The bail bond industry collects an estimated $2.4 billion in profits per year. Given what we know about the harms of cash bail, it is important to identify the role financial incentives play and the beneficiaries of the system. The bail bond industry encompasses entities from the small bail agencies to the global insurance companies that underwrite bonds for the small bail agencies or may own the agencies themselves. Storefront bail agencies are what most people see so the industry appears highly local and decentralized. However, it is not just bond agents and agencies making money off bail bonds. Many are run by a handful of large global insurance companies that reap huge profits while taking nominal risk.

Bail bond agencies profit

Watch Inside America's For-Profit Bail System (24:35 min.) (Vice, 2016)

Global insurance companies reap huge profits with minimal risk

- Read the report Who Really Makes Money Off of Bail Bonds? (The Atlantic, May 12, 2017)
- For an in-depth look at the role of insurance companies as well as a list of recommendations and alternatives to bail, read:

  $elling Off Our Freedom; How insurance corporations have taken over our bail system (Color of Change and ACLU, May 2017)

  All profit, no risk: How the bail industry exploits the legal system (Prison Policy Initiative, October 2022)

Global insurance companies finance opposition to bail reform

Read U.S. bail-bond insurers spend big to keep defendants paying (Reuters, March 6, 2021)

While the cash bail system benefits these for-profit companies, it disproportionately harms poor people, People of Color, and their communities. See Question #1 to learn more about who cash bail harms.

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