



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

Bronx Freedom Fund Releases First Year of Results

GUSTAVO RIVERA February 17, 2015

State Senator Gustavo Rivera's First Law Helps 140 Bronxites Successfully Avoid Unnecessary Jail Time in First Year and Inspires City-wide Bail Fund

(Bronx, NY) – The Bronx Freedom Fund has released its one year report highlighting its success in helping 140 low-income Bronx residents post bail over the nonprofit's first year. The Bronx Freedom Fund was the first organization to be licensed as a charitable bail organization in the State of New York after Governor Cuomo signed into law a bill sponsored by Senator Gustavo Rivera allowing these types of organizations to function in the State.

"No one should be forced to sit in jail awaiting trial or plea to a charge because they cannot afford bail," said **State Senator Gustavo Rivera**. "Charitable bail organizations, like the Bronx Freedom Fund, provide countless of struggling New Yorkers with a fairer alternative to navigating the justice system, while saving tax payer money. Expanding such programs, including the creation of a city-wide bail fund as Speaker Mark-Viverito recently proposed, would go a long way in ensuring our justice system is more effective and just for all New Yorkers."

The Bronx Freedom Fund has leveraged its revolving bail fund to post bail for low-income Bronx residents facing a misdemeanor case where bail is set at \$2000 or less. In its first year of operation, the Bronx Freedom Fund saw the following results:

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- They posted bail for 140 individuals, helping change the trajectory of each of those cases.

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- 98 percent of these clients made all required court appearances.
- 56 percent of these cases have ended in dismissals where all of the charges were dropped
- 23 percent of the cases have resulted in non-criminal disposition
- 9 percent of the clients plead guilty to a misdemeanor

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“The Bronx Freedom Fund’s first year not only proved that our model works, but that it can be the difference between an individual being saddled with criminal charges or allowed to go free,” said **Alyssa Work, Project Director of the Bronx Freedom Fund**. “The success of our model is a great step forward for fairer bail practices in New York State, but there are still too many New Yorkers who are needlessly held in jail before trial or forced to take a plea because they cannot afford bail.”

Citing the growing need to reform various parts of our criminal justice system and the Bronx Freedom Fund’s success, Speaker Mark-Viverito proposed creating a \$1.4 million city-wide bail fund during her first State of the City address. The proposed city-wide fund would be modeled after the Bronx Freedom Fund’s successful pilot program in an effort to provide the same effective and cost-saving program to all New Yorkers across the five boroughs.

“Too many New Yorkers are in detention centers because they could not make bail and the bail fund is a common sense reform to this long-standing problem. This is an exciting and innovative idea and I want to especially thank State Senator Gustavo Rivera for his advocacy. I look forward to engaging with my Council colleagues as we seek to create the first ever citywide bail fund,” said **Council Speaker Mark-Viverito**.

In addition to helping individuals avoid spending unnecessary time in jail, the report also proves that providing low-income individuals with the ability to post bail helps them achieve better outcomes in their cases and avoid the negative consequences that stem from pre-trial incarceration, which can range from becoming homeless and unemployed to facing deportation.

“I found myself charged with a misdemeanor for driving under the influence and was unable to post bail,” said **Billy, a Bronx Freedom Fund client**. “If the Bronx Freedom Fund had not stepped in to help, I would have had to stay in jail until my trial was completed and I would have lost my job as a senior care aide. Thanks to them, I was not only able to return home immediately, but I was also able to fight my case and resolve it by attending an alcohol treatment program.

To view the full report, please visit: <http://bit.ly/1MuieSu>

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