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ORANGE COUNTY BAIL/BOND JUSTICE RELEASES COURT OBSERVATION PROGRAM REPORT

Faith-based group looked at bail/bond practices in Orange County for nearly a year, documenting the procedures actually used to determine bail and bond.

Chapel Hill, NC, February 2: In January, 2019, Orange County Bail/Bond Justice launched as a faith-based initiative, with two main goals: (1) Change unjust bail practices in Orange County; and (2) Provide assistance to people who cannot afford to pay their bail. The main initial work of the project centered on the court observation program. Today OCBBJ releases the initial findings of this program.

Since early March, 2019, at least two trained Court Observation Program team members have been present almost each court day to document how bail was set by the judge. Beginning in May, 2019 the team began entering bail data into an Orange County Bail/Bond Justice database. Additionally, the team collected magistrate data. The newly released report examines the context for setting bail in Orange County and our current pretrial release laws and policies.

It is important to note that there are a number of people, agencies, and organizations in Orange County that have worked on or are working on bail and pretrial detention reform, including reform-minded judges, law enforcement officials, elected officials, Orange County Pretrial Release Services Program, the NAACP, and others. Progress has been made and there are many progressive pretrial programs and practices in Orange County.

However, the OCBBJ report found that there are, in practice, two systems of justice in Orange County - one for the poor and one for those who are not poor. This two-tiered system of justice appears to exist largely because of the inconsistent application of existing state and district bail and bond guidance from state and district court leadership. There also is race inequity in the system: Black members of our community are disproportionately being impacted. The inconsistent application of bail and bond guidance can have significant and meaningful impacts for poor people and Black people interacting with the justice system in Orange County.

We encourage anyone interested in fair, consistent and universal justice practices to read the full report attached and engage in existing community efforts - both inside and outside the system - working to bring equity to pretrial practices in Orange County.

For more information about OCBBJ, visit ocbailbondjustice.org.