Union Benevolent Association provides $20,000 grant to address cash bail crisis in Philadelphia

Philadelphia, PA, -- Philadelphia has the fourth largest jail population of all major cities. The primary reason for this dubious distinction is that nearly 33% of those held in jail pretrial are there because they cannot afford cash bail. And, more than half of them remain jailed for more than 30 days.

To help address this crisis, Union Benevolent Association (UBA) has awarded a $20,000 grant to the Philadelphia Community Bail Fund (PCBF), an organization working to end cash bail in Philadelphia. PCBF will use the funds to post bail for Philadelphians who cannot afford to pay for their freedom.

UBA, a Philadelphia-based foundation established in 1831, provides funding and support to organizations that help vulnerable Philadelphians access basic needs. The organization also provides an annual grant aimed at addressing a critical challenge affecting Philadelphia.

Sigrid Lundby, President of UBA’s Board of Trustees, notes that the grant speaks to the heart of UBA’s mission to help vulnerable Philadelphians. “We believe no one should end up in jail simply because they are poor, but the fact is only 50 percent of defendants are able to post bail when it is set at $5,000 or less.

According to a report by the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, cash bail creates de facto detention orders for poor Philadelphians and disproportionately impacts communities of color. These findings are backed by The Quarterly Journal of Economics which states that the cash bail system not only unfairly penalizes the poor, it also discriminates against African Americans who tend to be treated more harshly by judges who set bail, regardless of the judge’s race.

The Philadelphia Community Bail fund is run by a collective of volunteer grassroots organizers and active members of the community. “We work to bring to light the inequities of the use of cash bail in Philadelphia and advocate for the abolition of bail and pretrial detention in our city,” says Candace McKinley, a Core Organizer for the organization. “Pre-
trial detention leads to higher rates of conviction, the pressure to accept guilty pleas, longer sentences, and traumatic disruption of lives including loss of jobs, housing, mental health supports, and devastated families. By paying bail, our fund supports individuals in remaining at home with their families and communities while fighting their cases.”

Expressing her gratitude for the grant, McKinley said, “This funding will enable us to post bail for more of our neighbors held in Philly jails. Given the number of people who need our help and the limited funding we have, we often have to turn people away. To date, we have posted bail for 130 people. With these additional funds, we hope to free 200 by the end of the year.”

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*Union Benevolent Association has provided critical funding and support to organizations that assist and enrich the lives of the poor, disadvantaged, elderly, and youth of Philadelphia since 1831. In recent years, the foundation has also begun providing timely support to address emergency issues impacting Philadelphia residents.*