Elected Prosecutors File Amicus Brief Urging Appellate Court to Affirm Right to Counsel in Bail Hearings

*Amici Argue that Representation when Critical Bail Decisions are Made is Necessary for Fairness and Integrity*

ST. LOUIS – Today 44 current and former local elected prosecutors and state attorneys general from across the country filed an *amicus curiae brief* in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in *Booth v. Galveston* in support of a defendant’s right to counsel at initial bail hearings. In the brief, *amici* argue that legal representation at a time when these critical decisions are made is essential to ensuring fairness in the process for defendants and that failure to provide an attorney can result in uninformed decision making and erodes public trust in the integrity of the criminal justice process as well as public safety.

“The integrity of the criminal justice system is dependent on fundamental due process rights afforded to all individuals who come before a court, including the right to be represented by an attorney following arrest,” said Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of *Fair and Just Prosecution*. “Yet, defendants in Galveston are being denied this right at one of the most critical stages of the justice process – where having counsel could mean the difference between remaining jailed, losing employment and the ability to care for loved ones, or being allowed to remain with family and in the community. Denial of the fundamental right to counsel is not only unconstitutional but erodes broader trust in the integrity and fairness of our system that only harms public safety.”

In Texas, individuals arrested and charged with crimes are subject to an initial bail hearing with a magistrate in which they are not given access to court-appointed legal representation until after the hearing. During the initial hearing, the magistrate is required to assess the nature and circumstances of the alleged offense based on presentation of evidence and make a subjective determination regarding bail. *Amici* argue that when individuals lack representation during this critical hearing, these subjective assessments are not tested through the safeguards of the adversarial process, which necessarily includes legal counsel for defendants. The brief cites to research that makes clear that detention decisions, even for a short period, can have tremendous adverse impact on individuals, families and communities. Further, they claim that requiring individuals to appear in these proceedings without legal representation is coercive and can result in waiving another fundamental right under the 5th amendment – the right against self-incrimination.

“Prosecutors are entrusted with carefully balancing the need to ensure those who present a danger to the community are prevented from exacting harm and protecting the due process rights of those who enter the criminal justice system,” said John Creuzot, Dallas County, Texas District Attorney and a signatory to the brief. “In meeting this obligation, far too often we end up punishing people, not because they represent a
danger to public safety, but because they do not have the economic means to go free. My vision for our system does not criminalize someone simply because they are poor, it creates fair access to resources across the board such that criminal cases can be determined based on facts, rather than access to wealth.”

*Amici* argue that prosecutors have an obligation to ensure individuals have access to legal representation as a matter of fairness and justice and because their role dictates that they protect the integrity of the justice system. When legal counsel is denied at such an integral stage of the criminal justice process, people are more likely to be detained, which has numerous legal and economic consequences, including lowering the likelihood of a successful defense, increasing the likelihood of recidivism and harm to families and communities.

“Our system provides a constitutional right to legal counsel to ensure fairness and that convictions aren’t arbitrary decisions based on a one-side presentation and interpretation of evidence,” said Ingham County, Michigan Prosecuting Attorney Carol Siemon. “Failure to provide legal counsel at such a critical stage, erodes the public perception that the bail process is fair. And when people remain locked behind bars simply because they don’t have the means to pay for their freedom, trust in the legitimacy of the entire criminal justice system is undermined, resulting in reduced cooperation with law enforcement and prosecutors, and ultimately, harm to public safety.”

The brief was authored by Ariel Glasner at Blank Rome LLP, with the assistance and coordination of Fair and Just Prosecution, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting a justice system grounded in fairness, equity, compassion, and fiscal responsibility.

Read the brief [here](#) and see below for a full list of signatories.

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*Fair and Just Prosecution is a national network of elected prosecutors working towards common-sense, compassionate criminal justice reforms. To learn more about FJP’s work, visit [http://www.fairandjustprosecution.org/](http://www.fairandjustprosecution.org/) or follow us on Facebook [@FairAndJustProsecution](https://www.facebook.com/FairAndJustProsecution).*

**List of Signatories**

Diana Becton, District Attorney, Contra Costa County, California  
Wesley Bell, Prosecuting Attorney, St. Louis County, Missouri  
Buta Biberaj, Commonwealth’s Attorney, Loudoun County, Virginia  
Sherry Boston, District Attorney, DeKalb County, Georgia  
Chesa Boudin, District Attorney, City and County of San Francisco, California  
John Choi, County Attorney, Ramsey County, Minnesota  
David Clegg, District Attorney, Ulster County, New York  
W.J. Michael Cody, Former Attorney General, Tennessee  
Scott Colom, District Attorney, Sixteenth Judicial District, Mississippi  
John Creuzot, District Attorney, Dallas County, Texas  
Satana Deberry, District Attorney, Durham County, North Carolina  
Thomas J. Donovan, Jr., Attorney General, Vermont
Michael Dougherty, District Attorney, Twentieth Judicial District, Colorado
Mark Dupree, District Attorney, Wyandotte County, Kansas
Keith Ellison, Attorney General, Minnesota
Kim Foxx, State's Attorney, Cook County, Illinois
Kim Gardner, Circuit Attorney, City of St. Louis, Missouri
Sarah F. George, State's Attorney, Chittenden County, Vermont
Sim Gill, District Attorney, Salt Lake County, Utah
Joe Gonzales, District Attorney, Bexar County, Texas
Christian Gossett, District Attorney, Winnebago County, Wisconsin
Andrea Harrington, District Attorney, Berkshire County, Massachusetts
Peter Holmes, City Attorney, Seattle, Washington
Paul Howard, District Attorney, Fulton County, Georgia
John Hummel, District Attorney, Deschutes County, Oregon
Michael Jackson, District Attorney, Dallas County, Alabama
Justin F. Kollar, Prosecuting Attorney, County of Kaua‘i, Hawai‘i
Lawrence S. Krasner, District Attorney, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Beth McCann, District Attorney, Second Judicial Circuit, Colorado
Brian Middleton, District Attorney, Fort Bend County, Texas
Stephanie Morales, Commonwealth’s Attorney, Portsmouth, Virginia
Marilyn Mosby, State’s Attorney, Baltimore City, Maryland
Jim Petro, Former Attorney General, Ohio
Karl Racine, Attorney General, District of Columbia
Ira Reiner, Former District Attorney, Los Angeles County, California
Jeff Reisig, District Attorney, Yolo County, California
Rachael Rollins, District Attorney, Suffolk County, Massachusetts
Jeff Rosen, District Attorney, Santa Clara County, California
Stephen Rosenthal, Former Attorney General, Virginia
Marian Ryan, District Attorney, Middlesex County, Massachusetts
Dan Satterberg, Prosecuting Attorney, King County, Washington
Carol Siemon, Prosecuting Attorney, Ingham County, Michigan
David Sullivan, District Attorney, Northwestern District, Massachusetts
Raúl Torrez, District Attorney, Bernalillo County, New Mexico