 Placement Description

Connecticut Bail Fund pays bail for Connecticut residents who are being incarcerated due to poverty, and then works alongside them and their families to advocate for their rights. We serve individuals who are in pretrial detention (facing criminal charges) and immigration detention (facing possible deportation). While our intervention has profound case-specific impacts, preventing incarceration, deportation, family dis-unification, plea-bargaining, and job loss, our ultimate goal is community organizing. By freeing incarcerated people and bringing them together to identify and confront shared experiences of injustice, we aim to build knowledge and power in communities impacted by mass criminalization. All of the people with whom we work are poor; most are people of color; many are disabled; and many are immigrants—as such, principles of racial and economic justice are central in our work.

Fellow’s Job

The fellow would support our co-directors in the day-to-day activities of the bail fund which include screening clients for the bail fund, community organizing in defense of the accused, research for legislative advocacy on bail reform, technical assistance to bail funds in other states and organizing community discussions about pretrial detention and immigration detention.

Please write a complete description of the specific project you propose and list the duties/outcomes expected of the Fellow. (Suggested length: one to two pages.)

Presently, our criminal and immigration systems are fundamentally flawed. In the criminal system, hundreds of thousands of legally innocent individuals are incarcerated each day because they cannot afford bail. As a result, the majority of pretrial detainees accept plea bargains—often even when innocent—to get out of jail and back to their
lives. In New Haven, the individuals with whom we work generally refer to their public defenders as “public pretenders,” which reflects a popular sentiment that the system does not provide true representation for poor defendants, especially those with criminal records. Most defendants could achieve better case outcomes if they knew their rights, understood the system, and had a collaborative relationship with their public defenders. Meanwhile, in the immigration system, people in deportation proceedings have no right to counsel at all. As a result, those who cannot afford a lawyer are very vulnerable to deportation even if legal relief is possible. Of those detained without representation, only 3% avoid removal.

Our organization uses a model of participatory defense that engages the network of people surrounding the accused in order to provide a more robust defense and support network while that person is involved with the criminal justice/immigrant detention system. Furthermore, our organization conceives of this participatory defense model as a community-organizing tool. Just last week with the Housing Not Jails March, we saw the most public example to date of the way that our participatory defense model translates into significant community-organizing efforts. The Connecticut Bail Fund plans to significantly expand our community-organizing efforts in the coming year through a variety of new initiatives and partnerships.

Additionally, as the Immigrant Bail Fund (IBF) expands its operations throughout the state of Connecticut in 2018, we hope to apply the model of participatory defense in the immigration context. Partnering with organizations such as Unidad Latina en Acción, the Connecticut Immigrant Rights Alliance and Planned Parenthood, this program will grow swiftly to other cities in CT.

Project 1: The fellow would be involved in supporting the coordination, mobilization and implementation of our participatory defense model.

Duties/Outcomes
1. Maintain the database of participants and their networks
2. Connect with participants to remind them of appointments, court dates and other obligations
3. Take detailed notes at community meetings
4. Mobilize people in New Haven on behalf of the participants in the CBF and IBF through demonstrations, protests, and community meetings.

Project 2: The fellow will assist in the research that the bail fund is doing in order to quantify the impact of its intervention. After compiling that info, the fellow will use that research to connect with past and future donors.

Duties/Outcomes:
1. Produce the second annual report of the bail fund’s operations
2. Using that information make easily digestible publicity materials
3. Help connect with donors about the impact of our intervention through our newsletter and social media presence

Project 3: One challenge that the bail fund is confronting is telling the story of the fund and the people that we work with on social media, through our website and through other media. The fellow will work on a communication project that captures several of the many stories that the bail fund hopes to tell. The project may take many forms, and it will be up to the fellow to collaborate with the co-directors and others involved to create the finished product. This project may be part of a specific organizing project, or it might be its own project.

Duties/Outcomes:
1. Produce a compelling and illustrative creative project that tells one of the many stories of the bail fund.
2. Collaborate with co-directors, community organizers, and other involved parties to create an interesting and well researched project

Specific skills/experience required for the project (Please list):

1. Strong attention to details and organizational methods
2. Strong communication and people skills

(Not required but strongly desired)

1. Experience working in New Haven with community-based organizations in the city
2. Community organizing experience
3. Legislative advocacy research experience (e.g. writing or giving testimony, working for or with state legislators, preparing policy briefs or memos)
4. Experience working with people who are currently or formerly incarcerated
5. Spanish speaker

Additional requirements (e.g. a car or weekend working hours). If a car is required, please include information regarding parking arrangements and mileage reimbursement):

N/A

Briefly describe the work that Yale PPSF Fellows have done with your agency in the past and present. If you have not worked with Yale Fellows, please describe any work that Yale students have done with your agency.

Three of the four co-founders of the bail fund were or are currently enrolled in Yale College. Brett Davidson, our executive director, graduated in the spring of 2016 with a degree in political science. Simone Seiver graduated in the spring of 2017 with a masters of political science. Patrick Sullivan is a senior in Yale College and is expected to
graduate in the spring of 2018. The three of us are on the board of the organization, and Brett and Patrick are currently involved in the operations of the fund. This past summer, we had the privilege of working with a Yale PPSF Fellow. Alejandra Trujillo worked for the months of June, July and August providing crucial help in organizing fundraisers, writing our first annual report, engaging in preliminary participatory defense meetings, and supporting our executive director in the day-to-day operations of the fund.