

Governor signs legislation to transform bail process, ease jail overcrowding

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CHICAGO – Governor Bruce Rauner today signed a comprehensive criminal justice reform bill that will transform the bail process. The bill sponsors Sen. Donne Trotter (D-

Chicago) and Rep. Elgie Sims (D-Chicago), House Minority Leader Jim Durkin (R-Western Springs), Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx and advocate Dr. Willie Wilson joined the governor at the signing at Chicago Baptist Institute.

"We are taking an important step in improving our state's criminal justice system," Governor Rauner said. "Our system must work equally for all our residents, in every community, regardless of their income. We should be focused on putting people in jobs not jail."

Overcrowding is a problem in many county jails, partly because low-level offenders cannot pay their bail. They are forced to stay behind bars until their trial. The purpose of the legislation – SB 2034 – is to ensure low-level, non-violent offenders have their bond reviewed quickly and even lowered if they have not been able to post bond because of financial reasons. Additionally, this group of offenders will earn more credit toward fines while incarcerated.

"Pretrial release must not focus on the defendants' ability to pay," Sen. Trotter said. "This new law allows the courts to look at the threat to the public safety or their risk of failure to appear."

"Our efforts to reform Illinois' broken criminal justice system must focus on protecting victims, providing second chances to individuals who have made mistakes and incapacitating those who are threats to the safety of our communities," Rep. Sims. "By reforming our broken bail system, Illinois becomes a national leader in ensuring incapacitation is reserved for those who are threats to public safety, not those who are poor or suffer from mental health or substance abuse challenges. I applaud the Governor for signing SB 2034 and making it law in Illinois and will continue to work with him to reform our state's criminal justice system."

"Extending RICO and reforming our bail bond system is both tough but smart on crime. RICO is a valued tool for law enforcement and prosecutors to conduct long term investigations against street gangs and criminal enterprises throughout the state. Bail reform makes sense based the multiple examples of low level misdemeanor defendants spending extended time in the jail awaiting trial for lack of resources. The legislation signed today is a good example of forward thinking legislation worked in a bi-partisan manner," said House Republican Leader Jim Durkin.

"This legislation represents a major step in achieving meaningful reform while maintaining the tools we need to fight violent crime," State's Attorney Foxx said. "By preventing the expiration of state RICO, the legislature has maintained an important tool that can help aggressively pursue those high-level players who are orchestrating narcotics and firearms trafficking; while at the same time making strides towards

reforming Illinois' broken bond system, which too often detains individuals who pose no threat to public safety simply because they are poor.”

“It is with tremendous excitement and thankfulness to Governor Bruce Rauner and our Illinois legislators for passing my SB 2034,” Dr. Willie Wilson said. “Their courage, support and dedication to non-violent prison reform will help put an end to this moral issue and set the example throughout the country and United States of America. This movement is well past due, and I'm proud to say that the State of Illinois is taking this stand.”

Additionally, the bill extends the Illinois RICO statute until 2022. The Illinois Street Gang and Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations statute is an important tool for prosecutors and law enforcement. The bill also adds a number of jobs considered public officials under the statute that handles threats to public officials. Social workers, case workers, attorneys, or investigators who work for the Department of Healthcare and Family Services, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Children and Family Services, or the Guardianship and Advocacy Commission are now covered under the law.

Since Governor Rauner took office, he has advocated to change the criminal justice system in Illinois to focus more on rehabilitation. The administration has focused on safely reducing the prison population by providing offenders valuable education and resources to help them build meaningful and productive lives. Since taking office, the prison population has dropped more than ten percent. In 2015, the governor created the Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform Commission to examine ways to improve the criminal justice system in Illinois, and some of the recommendations have already become law. The Department of Corrections has moved to open three new Life Skills and Re-Entry Facilities to help prepare offenders for life after prison.