

Case Studies: The Real 'Bond Pandemic'

The articles below exemplify issues associated with the conflation of arrest with guilt, sensationalized use of PR bonds and bond status, the conflation of misdemeanor and felony bond reform, linkage of a “crime wave” to bond reform, the use of extreme stories to link bond reform to bad outcomes, misrepresentation of the purpose of bond, targeting of individual judges for their bond decisions, an assumption that poor defendants are more dangerous than wealthy defendants, and other insinuations about legally innocent people.

Scroll over the underlined text to read the authors' commentary. Please note: This webpage functionality will work best on a desktop and may not appear on mobile browsers. The case studies and authors' notes are available on pages 12-20 of the full report PDF.

KHOU: 'ENOUGH IS ENOUGH': CAITLYNNE'S LAW WOULD CHANGE BOND SYSTEM THAT PUTS VIOLENT CRIMINALS BACK ON HOUSTON STREETS

Caitlynne Guajardo was 20 and pregnant when her husband, who was out on multiple bonds, allegedly stabbed her 20 times, killing her and her unborn baby.

Author: Michelle Homer

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HOUSTON — Since her daughter's murder in 2019, Melanie Infinger has been on a mission to change a revolving door bond system that puts violent criminals back on Harris County streets.

A bill in Caitlynn Infinger Guajardo's name was introduced in the Texas legislature to help keep some of those criminals in jail.

Caitlynne was 20 and pregnant when her estranged husband, who was out on multiple bonds, allegedly stabbed her 20 times, killing her and her unborn baby.

Alex Guajardo had been arrested a few days before the murder after allegedly assaulting Caitlynne and torturing and killing her cat.

But a Harris County judge let him out on a PR – or personal recognizance – bond, which means he didn't have to pay a dime.

When the assault happened, Guajardo was already out on another PR bond for his second DWI.

“When I found out she was murdered, after the numbness and the shock and the denial and the sadness and the pain, I was just angry because I wanted to know who bonded him out,” Infinger said Monday at a news conference announcing Caitlynne’s Law.

Loved ones of dozens of other victims killed by people out on bond in Harris County have asked the same question: why are judges letting suspects charged with violent crimes out of jail?

“These PR bonds are being handed out like popcorn. It has to stop,” Infinger said. “These criminals are laughing at our Harris County justice system. Criminals who are violent belong behind bars.”

Andy Kahan, Crime Stoppers' Director of Victim Services & Advocacy, has also been sounding the alarm about the broken bond system for months.

The issues stem partly from a lawsuit challenging the county’s cash bail system that often discriminated against the poor and people of color. Before that lawsuit led to bond reform, defendants on misdemeanors could spend months in jail because they didn’t have money to post bond.

But Kahan and others say bond reform was never meant to protect violent offenders and judges have gone too far.

"The ramifications of felony bond reform have taken their toll on our citizens.

It’s created more crime victims than I’ve seen in my 30 years of working in the criminal victims’ advocacy field,” Kahan said.

Texas Senator Paul Bettencourt is the sponsor of Caitlynne’s Law. It would require judges to:

- Stop issuing PR bonds to suspects who’ve already had one
- Set a minimum bond of \$10,000 for anyone who’s had three or more felony charges

Bettencourt stressed this is an issue that affects everyone.

“It’s time for the entire community to come together. We can’t let this continue,” he said. “Judges stop releasing these people! It’s killing people in the community. Stop it!”

Melanie Infinger said she had begged Caitlynn to press charges against her husband and was so proud of her when she did.

They never dreamed a judge would release him within days.

“Obviously, your world stops. The pain is unimaginable. She wasn’t just my daughter, she was my best friend,” Infinger said.

She hopes the bill, if passed, will help prevent others from going through the nightmare shared by her family.

Pasadena police say Guajardo confessed to killing his wife. He told them he purposely stabbed her in the stomach multiple times to make sure the unborn baby died, too.

Guajardo is charged with capital murder for the deaths of Caitlynne and their unborn baby. He remains in the Harris County Jail with no bond.

KHOU: HOUSTON POLICE CHIEF BLAMES 'BROKEN' BOND SYSTEM, COVID-19 FOR ALARMING INCREASE IN HOMICIDES

“If you would tell me I’d be in a major U.S. city and violent criminals would get out in Texas on \$100 bonds, I would have said you’re crazy,” the chief said.

Author: Michelle Homer, Jeremy Rogalski
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HOUSTON — The number of homicides in Houston is up an alarming 44% compared to this time last year.

For perspective, the current murder numbers surpass yearly totals dating back to 2007, when the city recorded 351 murders. We’re already up to 350 with more than five weeks to go.

Police Chief Art Acevedo said Friday that a "perfect storm" is to blame.

- Gang crime and drug-related murders account for some of the increase.
- COVID-19 is also a key factor, as people struggle with the stress of a pandemic.

But the biggest problem, according to the chief, is the “broken” bond system

that has put dozens of violent criminals back on the streets.

“If you would tell me I’d be in a major U.S. city and violent criminals would get out in Texas on \$100 bonds,

I would have said you’re crazy,” Acevedo said.

Releasing suspects in violent criminals on bond also makes it tougher to solve the crimes

because witnesses are scared to cooperate.

“If you witness a murder, and you’re seeing time and again that the murderer is going in one door and, a day or two later, they’re back out, our level of cooperation is quickly going down,” Acevedo said. “People are afraid, and they should be afraid.”

Andy Kahan, a victims’ advocate with Crime Stoppers, is also frustrated.

“It’s high time we recognize that the revolving door at courthouse is playing a significant, major role in the increased crime rates,” Kahan said. “Get a grip on the courthouse and you will get a grip on what’s happening with crime.”

Kahan gave several examples, including the recent case of Jon Parfait. Two weeks after Parfait was released on bond, he was arrested for the shooting death of 39-year-old Danielle Bradley.

Jason Frank Vasquez, the “extreme person of interest” in connection with the murder of HPD Sgt. Sean Rios,

had failed to comply with bond orders for a year but no one did anything, according to Kahan.

Acevedo said bond reform should be the top issue for the Texas legislature next year because other cities are dealing with the same issues as Houston.

Acevedo wants judges to use a risk-based tool when setting bond based on three factors:

- Flight risk
- Risk of reoffending
- Threat to public safety

Acevedo also addressed a report questioning why so many homicides in Houston are going unsolved. The chief said they’ve beefed up the number of homicide investigators and are using funding from the city to pay for their overtime, but it will take years to catch up.

The two bright spots in the city’s violent crime trends are a decrease in rape and robbery, which are down 20 percent and 5 percent respectively.

FOX 26: BREAKING BOND: ONE YEAR AFTER 80-YEAR-OLD GRANDMOTHER IS MURDERED BY A REPEAT VIOLENT OFFENDER

Breaking Bond: Dozens of murders linked to repeat violent offenders

Author: Randy Wallace

HOUSTON - You would think the savage murder of 80-year-old Rosalee Cook a year ago would have been a call for action for Harris County's Criminal Justice System.

Instead, District Court judges pushed the revolving door even harder spitting out repeat violent offenders to wreak even more havoc.

"It's kind of like Rosalee Cook was simply collateral damage of criminal justice reform,"

said Andy Kahan with Crime Stoppers.

On a bright sunny Saturday in May of 2020, Cook was stabbed to death while walking to her car in a Walgreens parking lot.

"It was disbelief," said Rosalee's son Chuck Cook. "I kept saying over and over my mother was killed that makes no sense to me."

What makes even less sense, why in the world was a habitual criminal like 37-year-old Randy Lewis free from jail on two felony personal recognizance bonds.

"They let him out on a PR bond without any kind of supervision, not even an electronic monitoring device,"

Cook said.

A year has passed and 115 Harris County residents have been killed allegedly by repeat violent offenders free from jail on multiple felony or PR bonds. 80 of those killings happened after Rosalee Cook's murder.

"And we haven't changed one bit;" her son said.

"The judges are still held unaccountable and the criminals let out are still held unaccountable."

Take 178th Criminal District Court Judge Kelli Johnson.

Last December, she gave 29-year-old Aaron Chissom, a felony PR bond for a charge of felon in possession of a weapon.

He failed to appear in court so he went back to jail.

On February 15, Judge Kelli Johnson gave Chissom a cash bond.

"In hindsight, what I'd, it was 5 days later, what if he was still in custody, this gentleman would be alive today," Kahan said.

182nd Criminal District Court Judge Danny Lacayo freed 28-year-old Darius Jackson from jail five times with felony cash bonds. Then Judge Lacayo gives him a freebie. A PR bond.

"How on Earth can you justify getting a PR bond when you're already out on five felony bonds," said Kahan.

Jackson is now a wanted fugitive after shooting a woman 11 times.

"What I want to see is laws passed that hold these judges accountable," Chuck Cook said. "That gives some common sense criteria to bond reform."

FOX 26: JUDGE FREES REPEAT VIOLENT OFFENDER BY GRANTING 16 BONDS, TAKES NO ACTION AGAINST CONVICTED SEX OFFENDER

A Harris County Criminal District Judge has freed a repeat violent offender by granting him a total of 16 bonds. That same judge took no action against a convicted sex offender who's now a wanted fugitive. FOX 26 Houston's Randy Wallace tells us more in his ongoing Breaking Bond segment.

Author: Randy Wallace

Andrew Cruz is only 23 but he already has an array of mug shots.

"He's pretty much shown the court I'm going to commit crimes every time you let me out," said Andy Kahan with Crime Stoppers. "From where we sit, when is enough enough?"

The only person who can answer that question is 232nd Criminal District Court Judge Josh Hill.

Since 2017, he had granted Cruz a total of 16 bonds.

"Of which 6 are for Aggravated felonies including 4 aggravated robberies with a deadly weapon aggravated assault," Kahan said.

"He is a repeat violent offender who needs to be locked up

and away from society," said Douglas Griffith, President of the Houston Police Officers Union. "Sadly our courts are failing us in that."

Last Fall the DA's office filed a motion asking Judge Hill to revoke Cruz's bond and put him in jail.

"A month later for some inexplicable reason there's no documentation the court gives him another bond," Kahan said.

"We arrest these violent offenders put them in jail over and over again and the courts continue to let them out," said Griffith.

Cruz is free from jail on bonds totaling \$300,000. That means he had to come up with around \$30,000. Now guess who's paying for his attorney.

"You and I - the taxpayers are and that makes no sense," said Kahan.

Even more troubling than Cruz is 23-year-old Carlos Martinez, a registered sex offender. In 2018 Judge Josh Hill put Martinez on deferred probation for 5 years for sexual assault of a child.

Martinez has spent his time on probation picking up 6 new criminal charges including aggravated robbery and aggravated assault. The DA's office repeatedly asked Judge Hill to revoke Martinez's probation and sentence him to prison for 5 to 99 years. Hill let Martinez remain free.

"Now we have no clue where Carlos Martinez is he's now a wanted fugitive," Kahan said.

"That just blows my mind," said Griffith.

These case studies are part of a report on media bias in bond coverage called "The Real 'Bond Pandemic': Misinformation, False Narratives, and Bias in the Media." The full report is available [here](#).