

# Baltimore Jail Support

AN ABOLITIONIST PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY CARE

Jail Support  
Members



# Brief History of Central Booking



The Baltimore Central Booking and Intake Center has roots dating back to 1768 and a history rife with injustice and mistreatment. Early prisoners included abolitionists, debtors and young Black boys, and the jail was funded in part by the sale of Black folks arrested as runaways, whether or not they were enslaved. From its beginnings, this facility has been a potent tool of oppression, dehumanization and continued cycles of violence in Baltimore City.

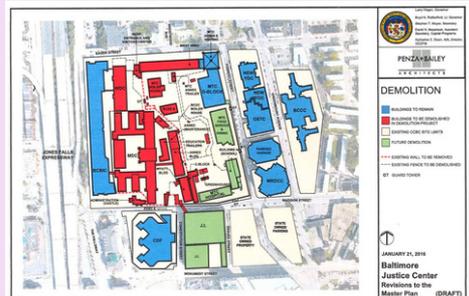
"This public jail and several private slave jails that proliferated in early 19th century Baltimore all made money by boarding the enslaved for a fee. For instance, travelling families or slave traders would all want someplace to keep their enslaved workers while they stopped for the night. As the Civil War began, and especially after slavery was ended in Washington, DC in 1862, these jails were also used by local enslavers to house their enslaved workers in order to prevent them from running away" (Pousson & Messick, 2017).

Despite consistent demands for major overhauls of the physical and systemic workings of Central Booking, there have been only minimal changes over the years without significant improvement in conditions for those incarcerated. People are often stuck in intake for longer than expected due to the lack of follow-through in the carceral system. We've

had reports of unusable bathrooms, undrinkable water, suffocating temperatures (both hot and cold), lack of sleeping materials, lack of medical care, and inedible food. Certain parts of the facility are so bad they have been ordered to close, such as the Baltimore City Detention Center which was demolished in 2021. Deplorable conditions and mistreatment remain the norm at Central Booking at the end of 2024.

**Runaway Slaves.—Twenty-one runaway slaves, from Calvert and Prince George's counties, composed of men, women and children, were arrested on Monday evening last, by the western district police, and subsequently conducted to the city jail, by policemen Hickman, Sanders and others, there to await the requisition of their masters.**

*The Sun, August 26, 1863*



# Jail Support History

Baltimore Jail Support is an abolitionist place of community care drawing from the history and lessons of the struggle for Black liberation.

When organizing a direct action with risk of arrest, it is part of the organizing process for folks to make sure that they know where everyone involved is, and that they are met with love upon release.

Baltimore Jail Support (BJS) began through various actions, and worked closely with Baltimore Action Legal Team (BALT) in 2015 in response to the murder of Freddie Gray and subsequent uprising as well as other local groups organizing against police and prisons. At this time, BALT had a system for tracking who was released and supporting people throughout the system, which was done by a small group of people working constantly on case search research and paperwork. This focused on the hundreds of people every day who were arrested and charged relating to protests.

There were loose formations of people practicing jail support for some time, and then in 2016, three things happened: in July, there was an action at Artscape called AFROMATION, where one of the demands was the creation of a Civilian Review Board of Baltimore City law enforcement. In August, organizers participated in another action called StopFOP, which disrupted a police convention and demanded, among other things, justice for Korryn Gaines. BJS shared space with protesters coming out of Central Booking after both of these actions and more. In September, BJS stood in solidarity with people incarcerated in Baltimore jails who participated in the National Prison Strike – the largest prison strike in the US, spread over 24 states. While jail sitting during and after these protests, volunteers saw large amounts of people getting released for non-protest related charges, and started showing up every Sunday to catch weekenders coming out, making the switch to support the general population instead of only protesters. At this time, BALT separated from BJS as there was no capacity to follow people through the system. Despite many changes in volunteers and logistics over the years, the mission and values of BJS have stayed the same: a non-hierarchical collective providing direct services to folks coming out of Central Booking and imagining a world without prisons.

## **What do we do?**

Operating within a framework of mutual aid, collective action, and sustainable community building, we station outside the release center with resources for folks getting released. We try to do this at peak times, currently 8pm–11pm on Wednesdays and 7pm–11pm on Fridays at Central Booking.

Baltimore Central Booking and Intake Center, commonly known as Central Booking, is the primary location for booking and processing people arrested in Baltimore City, although there are five total jails in city limits.

Folks being held inside are in pre-trial detention status, meaning they have not been actually convicted of a crime (with a few exceptions). Central Booking is a mixed gender facility, so we serve adults of all genders and many ages who are being released.

### **We provide (free) things like:**

- Rides**
- Phone calls**
- Warm clothes**
- Resources & info for after release support**
- Snacks**
- Water and warm drinks**
- Harm Reduction and hygiene supplies**
- General and direct person-to-person support**

## Organizational Values

1. We work to maintain a non-hierarchical structure
2. We don't collaborate with the police
3. We respond and adapt to the needs of our collective members and those being released from Central Booking, including by maintaining up-to-date resource lists and incorporating feedback
4. We preserve and document collective knowledge, history, & problem-solving through time so we can strengthen our systems and build our skills in our work

## **Interpersonal Values**

1. The historical context of incarceration in the US is land theft, genocide, and enslavement. The interlocking forces of white-cis-hetero patriarchy dehumanize and dispose of Black, Indigenous, Queer, Trans, and Disabled people.
  
2. This violence manifests in the actions of the state as well as in how we treat one another. We all both experience and perpetuate this violence.
  
3. As a Collective, we affirm that no human being is disposable, and we commit to the values of compassion, love, autonomy, and humility by:
  - a. Engaging in restorative practices;
  - b. Building trust through listening deeply;
  - c. Honoring our differences;
  - d. Valuing one another's perspectives;
  - e. Being accountable to one another
  
4. Understand that through our interpersonal relationships, we can build the worlds we want to see

## HOW TO SUPPORT

-Donate: Venmo @Baltimore-JailSupport

Cashapp \$BaltimoreJailCare

-Warm clothes: in the winter we are in greater need of supplies such as hats, scarves, jackets, socks,

thermal layers, gloves

-Nonperishable foods

-Cigarettes

### **Want to get more involved?**

We need help with things like....

-sitting shifts

-picking up/dropping off gear (great for folks with cars!)

-joining a working group & supporting the internal structure of the group

-creating deeper connections with local groups also working to abolish the carceral system

Note: a reiteration that this is a group of community members participating in a non-hierarchical structure. This means that we are all accountable for the work we agree to, and in taking the time to understand needs to be executed in order for the group to function fluidly.

-Example would have people who regularly check in with the group to make sure shifts are covered weekly. This is crucial for our organization and to make sure we are held accountable to the mutual aid we are participating in.

**To contact us to support, &/or join the conversation (signal chat), please follow @baltimorejailsupport on Instagram for updates and to access the interest form, or email us at [baltimorejailaid@gmail.com](mailto:baltimorejailaid@gmail.com)**

## Resources Used:

“Demolition of the Baltimore City Detention Center Completed Tuesday.” CBS News, CBS Interactive, 3 Aug. 2021, [www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/live-demolition-of-the-baltimore-city-detention-center/](http://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/live-demolition-of-the-baltimore-city-detention-center/).

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