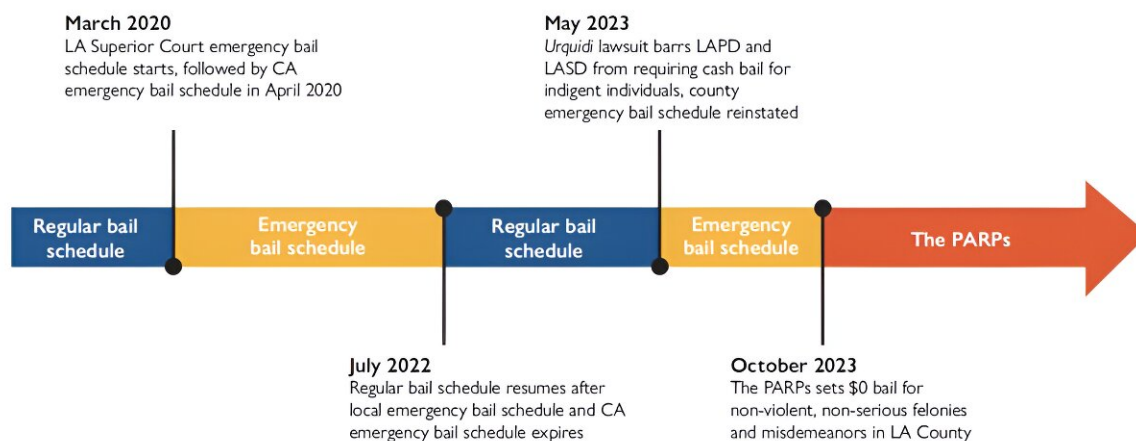


Easing bail policy does not lead to increased crime, report finds

August 29 2024, by Sean Coffey



Credit: University of California - Berkeley

A [new report](#) by the nonpartisan California Policy Lab (CPL) shows the estimated effects of several bail policy changes in the City and County of Los Angeles, including removing the emergency bail schedule that was implemented at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bail reform has been a pressing public policy question at the state and local levels in California, as well as at the national level. Importantly, this report shows the short-term impacts of both implementing and repealing bail reform policies to better inform the debate about the relationship

between bail policy and crime and safety.

The report estimates the short-term impacts these policy changes had on jail populations, crime reports, and arrests in the two months after implementation. CPL is the research partner for the Committee on Reform of the Penal Code (CRPC) and conducted this research at the request of the CRPC.

Prior to the pandemic, LA County used a cash bail schedule, an approach still used in most of California, but one that is heavily criticized for being unfair to people who are unable to pay bail for their release. These individuals often remain in jail until their arraignment—even if they pose a low threat to public safety and a low risk of failing to appear in court. Jail stays can impose legal, social, and economic costs on those who are detained, disrupting their families and jobs.

Policymakers have been focused on better understanding whether bail policies that promote pretrial release (instead of jail detention) for low-level offenses will change overall [crime rates](#), and this report seeks to help answer that question.

"A common critique of reforming bail policies is that reforms will lead to increases in crime, but that's not what we found," explains co-author Dr. Johanna Lacoe, Research Director of the California Policy Lab's UC Berkeley site.

"Not surprisingly, the bail policy changes impacted the number of people who are held in jail, but for the most part, we didn't see statistically significant changes in total crime reports or arrests following these bail policy changes."

Key findings include:

1. Removing the emergency bail schedule and reverting back to cash bail increased average daily jail populations with no short-term effect on citywide crime. The retraction of the emergency bail schedule in July 2022 resulted in a statistically significant increase in the average daily jail [population](#) over the following two months, and no change in arrests or crime reports.
2. Reinstating the emergency bail schedule did not change the average county daily jail population or total citywide crime in the following two months, but some property crimes increased. The resumption of the emergency bail schedule in May 2023 did not cause the average daily jail population to vary from its pre-period decline, but did cause a decline in pretrial jail population beyond the pre-period trend. At the same time, there was no statistically significant change in total crime reports or arrests, but reports of property crime increased relative to the pre-period trend.
3. The Pre-Arrest Release Protocols (PARPs) decreased daily overall and pretrial county jail populations in the two months after implementation, with no effect on citywide crime. The daily pretrial jail population decreased by over 200 people (or three percent) on average relative to the pre-period trend following the implementation of the PARPs. Despite the decrease in people held in jail, there was no change in any measure of reported crime during the same period. Arrests for misdemeanor offenses declined, while overall arrest trends did not change.

The research team analyzed these distinct bail [policy](#) changes:

1. A return to LA County's normal bail schedule in July 2022 after the expiration of the emergency bail schedule.
2. The resumption of the emergency bail schedule in the City of Los Angeles by the Los Angeles Police and Sheriff's Departments in May 2023 following the Urquidi decision.

3. Implementation of the Pre-Arraignment Release Protocols (PARPs) in Los Angeles County in October 2023, which sets \$0 bail for non-violent, non-serious felonies and misdemeanors.

This analysis uses three publicly available data sources: LAPD arrest data for 2020-2023, LAPD crime [report](#) data for 2020–2024, and LA County daily [jail](#) data for 2020–2023 as compiled by the Vera Institute. CPL conducted this study through a research partnership with the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, a state agency that studies and makes recommendations to improve California's criminal legal system.

More information: The Short-Term Impacts of Bail Policy on Crime in Los Angeles, [capolicylab.org/short-term-imp ... rime-in-los-angeles/](https://capolicylab.org/short-term-impacts-of-bail-policy-on-crime-in-los-angeles/)

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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