

Bail reform isn't an abstract idea to me; it highlights a real contradiction in how we say the justice system is supposed to work. Bail is meant to make sure people come back to court, not to decide who stays locked up based on how much money they have. But in practice, that's exactly what it does. Kansas already allows non-monetary conditions of release, which tells us the system understands that money isn't required to ensure appearance. Yet we continue to rely on it anyway.

Consider what happens. Two people are arrested for the same low-level offense. They have similar backgrounds and no violent history. One has savings or family who can help and is released the same day. The other doesn't and ends up sitting in jail for weeks or even months before trial. During that time, they may lose their job, their housing, or even access to their children. None of that comes from a conviction. It comes from being poor.

At that point, bail stops being a procedural safeguard and starts operating as punishment. If we're comfortable with pretrial freedom depending on income, we should be honest about that. If we're not, then real reform—supervised release, court reminders, unsecured bonds, and individualized judicial decisions—isn't radical. It's necessary.

So the real issue isn't whether bail still exists, it's whether we're willing to keep defending a system that quietly punishes poverty before guilt is even decided.