

Georgia cash bail expansion sails through General Assembly

AXIOS - Story by Kristal Dixon

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A controversial [bill](#) that would require cash bail for 30 more crimes has sailed through the Georgia General Assembly.

Why it matters: Opponents say [the legislation](#) would undo years of Republican-backed [criminal justice reforms](#) and could increase jail overcrowding.

Details: If signed, the law would require judges to impose cash bail on additional crimes including criminal trespassing, failure to appear, racketeering, domestic terrorism and rioting.

- It also targets charities that help low income inmates pay for bail, by restricting these groups to posting just three cash bonds per year.
- It also mandates the charities meet the same legal requirements as bond companies.

Driving the news: Georgia House members approved the legislation along party lines on Tuesday, days after Senate Republicans [passed](#) it. The proposal now heads to Gov. Brian Kemp's desk.

What they're saying: Republican State Rep. Houston Gaines, a supporter of the legislation, said the bill responds to the trend of some Democratic cities and states eliminating cash bail.

- In 2018, the city of Atlanta [banned](#) cash bail requirements for detainees at its detention center, for example.
- The bill targets "repeat offenders," Gaines said, who are initially arrested for minor offenses, but "then move on to more dangerous and violent crimes" when they post bail.
- He cited the case of [four migrants](#) who were let out on bail after allegedly attacking a NYPD officer.

The other side: Democratic State Rep. Tanya F. Miller said the bill would undermine [criminal justice reforms](#) led by former GOP Gov. Nathan Deal.

- One of those reforms allowed judges to weigh whether a defendant could pay in establishing bail, [according to the AJC](#).
- But, "what is most scary about this bill is the criminalization of churches and religious institutions that have historically been on the front lines of social justice and civil rights justice for Black and brown people in this country," she added.

Threat level: Democratic State Rep. Derrick Jackson argued the bill would require judges to set bail in some cases where, if convicted, defendants would not serve any jail time.

Zoom out: Civil rights organizations have publicly opposed the bill, including the [Southern Center for Human Rights](#), [ACLU of Georgia](#) and [The Bail Project](#), which provides bail assistance to low income people.

- The organization says it's helped pay bail for more than 1,500 people in Georgia since 2019. Erin George, its national director of policy, told Axios Tuesday that the legislation will cut off a "critical lifeline" for less fortunate detainees.
- "When we think about people and what this means and what it looks like, even a few days in jail means people lose their jobs...lose their homes (and) lose custody of their children," she said.