

## Bail bondsmen suffer from new court ruling

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### No-shows in magistrate court have increased from 18 to 48 percent since ruling

The life of bail bondsmen in Gallup and other parts of the state has gotten a lot harder since a New Mexico Supreme Court decision last year made it easier for people who were arrested and were facing charges to get out on their own recognizance.

Gerald Madrid, a bail bondsman who operates out of Albuquerque and has a branch office in Gallup, said last week that ever since that decision came down, the number of cases where judges released someone on their own recognizance instead of placing them on bond has sharply increased to the point where it is difficult for a bail company to survive.

Madrid said he has had to rely on income from other businesses to keep his company afloat.

But the problem is even more serious, he said, because it has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of people who have failed to show up for hearings, forcing judges to issue more bench warrants.

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Before the Supreme Court decision, Madrid said, the number of no-shows in magistrate court cases was about 18 percent. Since then, it has increased to 48 percent.

Gallup, like other cities in the state, has seen more bench warrants being issued, according to local court records.

“The situation now is that most people who are arrested and then released on their own recognizance see no consequences if they don’t show up for a hearing,” Madrid said.

This has become a public safety concern in the past year, Madrid said, as people who have committed domestic violence and similar crimes are released back on the streets without having to worry about losing their bail money if they are rearrested.

The bond system works, he said, because if someone doesn’t show up for a hearing and has been placed on a bond that was arranged through a bail bondsman company, the company joins in the effort to track that person down.

Duane Chapman, better known as Dog the Bounty Hunter because of his popular television show by that name, said that the problem isn’t only found in New Mexico. Many states throughout the country are making it easier for people to get out of jail on their own recognizance. “Many judges are now beginning to see the light,” Chapman said. “The people they are letting out without bond are not boy scouts.”

Madrid said that judges in the state are beginning to be aware of the high number of no-shows for court hearings and have been requiring ones to be posted on more cases.

On the day he was interviewed, Madrid said he had three cases where he provided bond money to get someone released from jail, and he said he hoped this may be an indication that things are getting back to the way it was before the Supreme Court issued its decision.

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