

Mortocracy: Who Pays, Who Profits, and Who Dies Early in Indianapolis

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Mortocracy is what I call a system where decisions about who pays, who gets covered, who keeps a home, and who gets watched end up shortening some people's lives, while the people making those decisions never carry the cost. It names a pattern in who dies early. I found no plan behind it and no one who meant for it to happen. What I did find is where the money goes, who makes the calls, and who dies first.

Fishers and the near south side of Indianapolis sit about 17 miles apart, and between 2014 and 2018 people in the shortest-living ZIP code inside the city could expect to live 16.8 fewer years than people in Fishers. This work started with a rough question I called "Pimping the Poor," which asked whether poverty and basic needs like water, rent, and health coverage have turned into steady income for agencies, contractors, landlords, and lenders. I followed that money through eight Indianapolis stories from 1994 to 2026, looked at how private contracts, data scoring, and public punishment fit together, and finished with what researchers know about who dies early and why.

Summary of findings

Across eight Indianapolis stories from 1994 to 2026, the households with the least money to spare kept making steady payments for water, health coverage, rent, and emergency loans, and the rules for those payments were set by boards, contractors, and lawmakers those households had no say over. Two of my three original claims hold up. The third, that institutions came to need poverty to keep their business going, holds up clearly for eviction filing and payday lending, and hardly at all for the 1994 sewer contract or the Medicaid health plans.

My claim	Where it holds	Where it falls apart
People with the least money make steady payments that are hard to stop	About 60,000 Hoosiers lost or never got HIP coverage over small monthly payments; about 60% of payday borrowers take a new loan the same day they pay off the old one	I found no story where the payments stopped on their own; they stopped only when the state paused them, as with HIP payments since 2020
Whoever controls access gains money, property, or power	Sewer ratepayers paid for police and fire pensions and a \$425 million payment to the city; JPC kept a tax break while its tenants lost water	Medicaid plans spend about 91 cents of each dollar on care, and I couldn't see most contractors' profits
Institutions come to depend on poverty	Fifty owners filed half of Marion County's evictions; payday lending runs on repeat loans	The 1994 sewer contract saved public money and paid workers more; the DigIndy rate increases paid for real cleanup

The clearest pattern is cost moved onto poor families in the name of efficiency. Indiana's IBM contract took eligibility work off paid caseworkers and put it on applicants, and about a million applications were denied in three years. The POWER account turned the idea of saving into a monthly test, and nearly a third of the people charged lost coverage or never got it. Mayor Goldsmith's 1994 sewer contract runs the other way. It saved public money, raised pay for the plant workers who stayed, and cut permit violations, though the sewer overflows it never touched landed on ratepayers twenty years later.

My second question was whether private contracts, data scoring, and public punishment work together to treat poor people as income, as risk, and as warnings to everyone else. The answer is yes in part.

Link in the chain	Where it holds	Where it falls apart
Public services move into private or contract hands	IBM and ACS/Conduent ran benefit eligibility; private plans run Medicaid; Flock runs police plate cameras	The courts made IBM pay back about \$96 million
Data and scores decide who gets help, and a failed match is treated like guilt	A million “failure to cooperate” denials; the 2027 work-requirement design; TransUnion reports that listed dismissed and sealed evictions	Indiana now seals dismissed evictions automatically, and federal regulators made TransUnion pay \$15 million
Punishment is put on public display	Eviction filings become public court records and get resold as screening data	Benefit cutoffs come by private letter, and Indiana has made its executions less public
Poor people get less room for mistakes than organizations	IBM got ten years of hearings and appeals; applicants got form letters	I couldn’t find how often households win their appeals, which could show they get more of a hearing than it looks

The whole chain shows up in one place. A landlord files an eviction, the court posts it publicly, a data company buys it and turns it into a tenant score, and the next landlord says no. Indiana’s sealing laws of 2022 and 2025 broke that chain for cases that were dismissed or that the tenant won.

What I set out to test

I started with three claims and checked each one separately. First, people with the least money to spare make steady payments that are hard to stop, because what they are paying for is water, a roof, health coverage, or a way out of a debt. Second, the companies, agencies, and nonprofits standing between those people and what they need collect fees, interest, property, or control. Third, some of those institutions come to depend on that money, so their business would shrink if poverty shrank.

For every story I asked the same six questions: who pays, who gets paid, who owns the property, who takes the loss when something goes wrong, who gets a tax break, and who decides. Where the paperwork allowed, I split the money into worker pay, operating costs, overhead, fees paid to related companies, interest, and profit. Money coming in is not the same as profit, and a break on one kind of tax does not mean an organization pays no taxes at all.

Every number and claim carries one of four labels:

Label	What it means here
Documented	A court ruling, contract, regulatory filing, audited statement, or official evaluation states it
Estimate	A figure produced by a party with a stake, such as a city, vendor, or advocacy group, and not independently audited
Counterfactual	A claim about what would have happened otherwise, such as savings measured against a projected budget
Interpretation	The investigator's reading of what the documented facts add up to

I worked from court rulings, state and federal evaluations, utility rate cases as reported in the press, and reporting from the *Indianapolis Business Journal*, *Indiana Capital Chronicle*, WFYI, and others. I did not get the full contracts, Form 990 tax returns, or tax-abatement agreements in this round, and the list of missing documents near the end says where to find them.

The second question: income, risk, and the public lesson

My second question asks whether private contracts, data scoring, and public punishment work together to treat poor people as sources of income, as risks to manage, and as examples for everyone else. It works like a chain with four links. Public services like benefits, water, and housing move into private or contract hands. The people running them collect data to decide who qualifies, who can pay, who might cheat, and who might

The distance between us

Wealth concentration and life expectancy tell related stories. They measure different things: this chart does not prove that one local transaction caused a national wealth pattern.

22.8% → 31.7%

TOP 1% · NET WORTH

3.5% → 2.5%

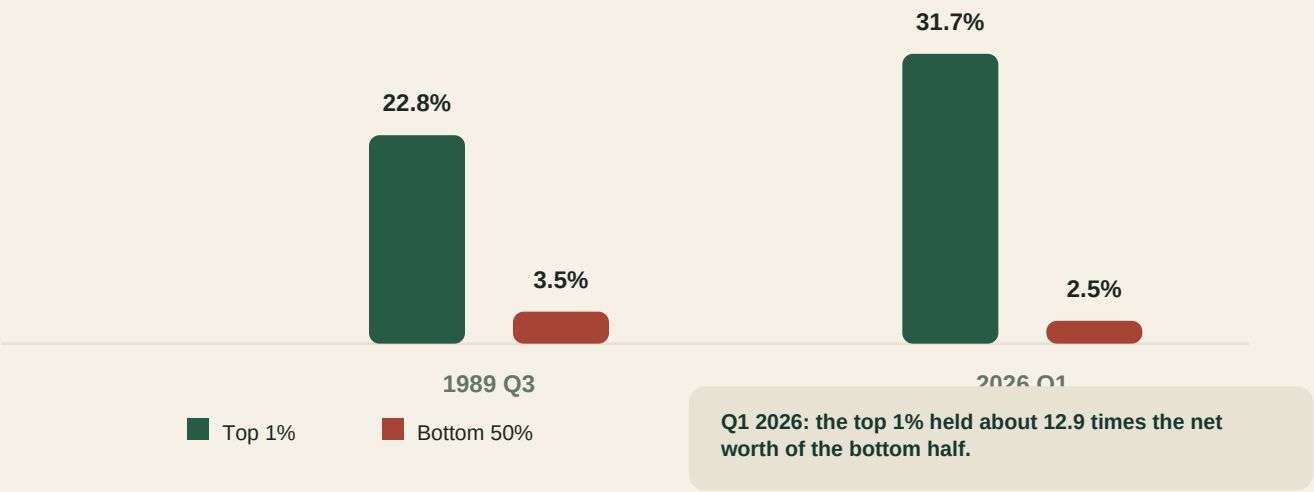
BOTTOM 50% · NET WORTH

13.6 → 16.8 yrs

INDIANAPOLIS LIFE GAP

SHARE OF U.S. HOUSEHOLD NET WORTH

1989 Q3 compared with 2026 Q1 · Federal Reserve Distributional Financial Accounts



Flanner House Homes, 500 block of W. Drake Street, photographed 2011. Neighborhood context, not a property in this investigation. Photo: Nyttend, public domain.

THE LOCAL GAP GREW

Indianapolis metro, longest- vs shortest-living ZIP

2009–2013

13.6 years

2014–2018

16.8 years

+3.2 years

only 17 miles apart

Where household money goes

Reported amounts are kept separate because the periods and accounting categories differ. Fees and financing charges are not the same as profit.

PAYDAY CREDIT: THE PRICE IS SET BY LAW

Annual percentage rate allowed in Indiana, compared with the general small-loan cap

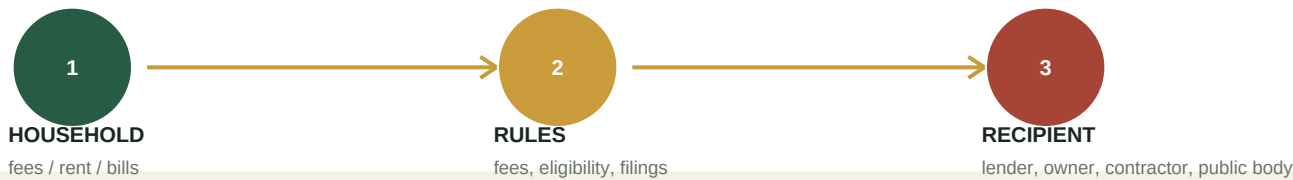


A DOCUMENTED COST STREAM

>\$300M estimated finance charges
from Hoosier payday loans over five years

~60% of borrowers take a new loan the day they pay off the last one

THE HOUSEHOLD-TO-INSTITUTION PATH



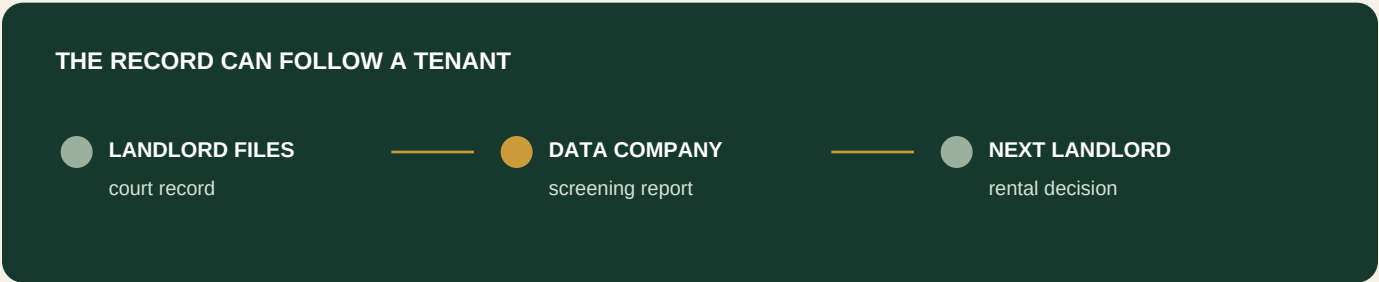
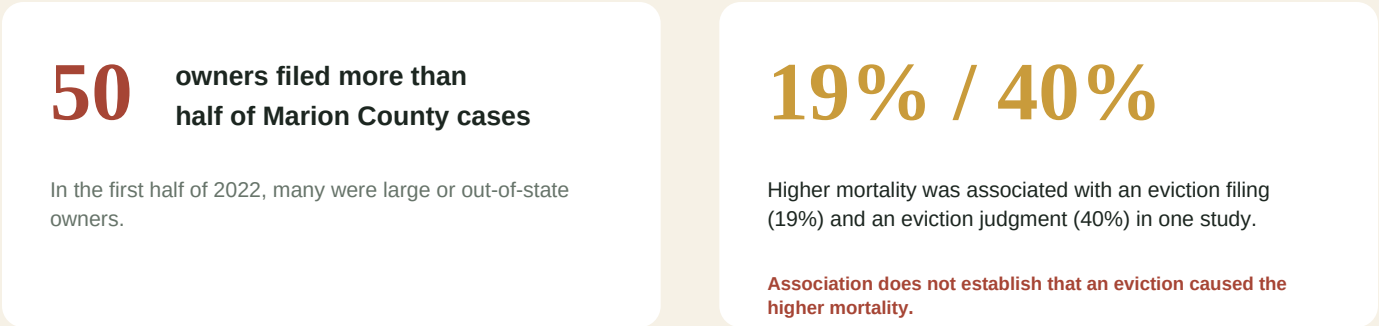
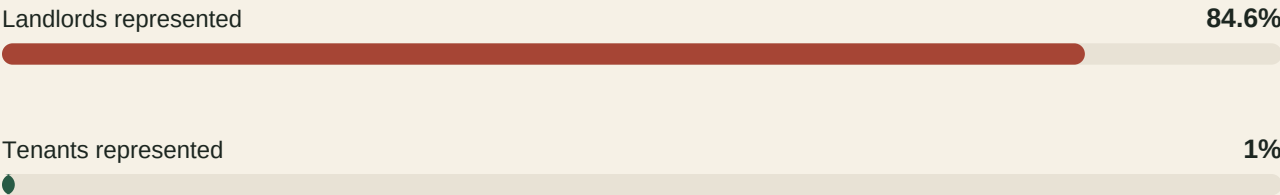
The docket is not evenly shared

Eviction filings can create costs that travel beyond the courtroom. These measures show concentration and access to representation, not the dollar value of a landlord’s profit.



REPRESENTATION IN MARION COUNTY EVICTION CASES

Legal Services Corporation reports 22,844 cases disposed in 2024.



be dangerous. Scoring systems use that data to decide who gets help and who gets watched. Then punishment puts some people on display as examples of carelessness or danger.

I used three terms in a narrow way.

- **Predictive intelligence** means any system that uses a person's past to guess their future or judge their worth, including credit scores, tenant screening reports, health risk scores, fraud flags, automatic eligibility checks, and police cameras. A score is a guess about the odds. It proves nothing about what one person did, and I checked whether these systems treat it as proof anyway.
- **Public executions** means the state putting someone to death, and I looked at that on its own. **Figurative public punishment** means public court records that follow a person, benefit cutoffs, eviction, and humiliating exposure. I connected the two only where the facts connect them.
- **Dehumanization** means a set of steps institutions take. A person gets reduced to a cost, a score, a debt, a missed deadline, or a threat; being poor gets read as bad character; help comes only after intrusive checking; and the punishment itself gets held up as proof the person deserved to be shut out.

The table shows which links appear in each story.

Case	Contracting or private control	Data and classification	Prediction shapes access	Public punishment
2. IBM eligibility	Documented	Documented	Documented: automated "failure to cooperate"	No: private notices
3. POWER accounts	Documented: managed care plans	Documented	Partly: payment history sets benefit tier	No
4 and 6. Eviction record	Documented: private owners, data vendors	Documented	Documented: screening reports	Yes: public filing, resold
5 and 8. Payday credit	Documented	Documented: subprime bureau	Likely, not documented in Indiana	Partly: credit record

Case	Contracting or private control	Data and classification	Prediction shapes access	Public punishment
7. 2027 work requirements	Documented: vendor history, purchased payroll data	Documented	Documented design: failed match triggers proof demand	No
8. Plate readers	Documented: Flock contract	Documented	Not shown: no person-based scoring found	No
Executions	No	No	No	Hidden from public view

The first three links are well documented and often run together. The fourth link, punishment put on public display, shows up fully only with eviction records. So the whole chain holds in the rental housing market, and Cases 6 and 7 carry most of the weight.

National causes before 1994

Indianapolis borrowed its tools from national policy. Four changes in federal law and political thinking were already in place when Stephen Goldsmith became mayor in 1992, and this part comes from standard policy history.

1. **The tax code moved housing aid into private hands.** The Tax Reform Act of 1986 created the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, which pays for affordable housing by selling tax credits to investors. Ownership, fees, and depreciation went to syndicators and developers, while affordability rules were set to expire after a compliance period.
2. **Reinventing government made contracting a civic virtue.** David Osborne and Ted Gaebler's 1992 book *Reinventing Government* gave mayors and governors a vocabulary of steering rather than rowing. Goldsmith became its best-known practitioner.
3. **Medicaid shifted to managed care.** Through the 1990s, states used federal waivers, and then the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, to pay private plans a fixed amount per enrollee per month. The plan keeps what it does not spend on care, within limits later set by medical-loss-ratio rules.
4. **Welfare became a contract to be managed.** The 1996 welfare law replaced open-ended cash aid with block grants and opened eligibility and case management to private firms. Indiana's 2006 IBM contract grew out of this opening.

Together these changes turned public duties into payment streams that contractors, investors, and health plans could bid on. Whether that helped or hurt people depended on what each contract actually paid for, and the stories below show both.

Case 1: Water and sewer, from Goldsmith's contract to Citizens Energy

Goldsmith's sewer plant contract saved real money, and it is the best evidence I found against my own argument. The full story is harder, because sewer bills stayed flat through the 1990s, while raw sewage kept pouring into the White River, and households paid for fixing that two decades later.

What happened

Indianapolis ran two award-winning treatment plants, Belmont and Southport, at about \$30.1 million a year in 1993. Before bidding, the city hired Ernst & Young, which estimated contracting could save about 5 percent. Goldsmith's team set that estimate aside and bid the work anyway ([Probe case study, 2000](#); [Goldsmith in City Journal](#)). City employees bid too, offering \$12 million in savings over five years with cuts by attrition only. The White River Environmental Partnership won with an offer near \$65 million. IWC Resources, the parent of the private Indianapolis Water Company, owned 52 percent of WREP. United Water owned 43 percent, and Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux owned 5 percent.

WREP took over on January 31, 1994. The contract was extended in 1997 for ten more years, and WREP added sewer collection in 1996 ([Water Online, 1997](#)).

Follow the money

Question	Answer	Grade
Who paid	Sewer ratepayers through a city sanitary fund	Documented
Who received	WREP: a base fee of \$14.4M a year at first, \$15.4M by 2000, plus cost-plus-11% on corrective work and cost-plus-14% on extra services	Documented (contract as quoted in the Probe study)
Who owned	The city kept the plants and paid for capital work	Documented

Question	Answer	Grade
Who bore risk	WREP carried permit fines and negligence; the city carried capital and combined-sewer overflow risk	Documented
Tax advantage	Public ownership kept tax-exempt bond financing, which federal rules then tied to contracts of five years or less	Documented
Who decided	Mayor and Department of Public Works; public meetings came only after signing	Documented

Most of the savings were real. The city budgeted \$19.3 million for the plants in 1994 and WREP billed \$17.6 million. By February 1999 the city said it had saved \$72.8 million ([Probe](#)), though that number compares the contract to what the city guessed it would have spent on its own, so it is an estimate. Ernst & Young had predicted 5 percent savings, and that turned out far too low.

The plant workers absorbed most of the change. The staff went from 328 people in 1993 to 157 by 1998. Of the workers let go in 1994, 67 moved to other city jobs, 43 found jobs through a \$300,000 placement program WREP paid for, 10 found work on their own, and 5 retired. WREP's own figures say the workers who stayed earned 9 to 28 percent more than they had with the city, and the union later teamed up with WREP to bid on the sewer pipe work. Permit violations dropped, and accidents fell by about 80 percent.

Where the cost moved

Three facts make the success story harder to tell.

- **Sewer money paid for other things.** About \$20 million from the sewer fund went to the police and fire pension fund as a payment in place of taxes, and \$30 million went into the citywide Building Better Neighborhoods program ([Probe](#)). Sewer bills are based on water use, and renters with little income pay them too, so people paying sewer bills covered costs that property taxpayers would otherwise have carried. The transfers are on paper. Who carried the cost is my reading of them.
- **The overflow problem waited.** The average sewer bill stayed at \$7.71 a month from 1985 to 1999, while old combined sewers kept dumping raw sewage into the White River every time it rained hard. In 2006 the city signed a federal consent decree with the

EPA. After Citizens Energy took over, state regulators approved a 30 percent sewer increase in 2016, when the average bill was about \$35, and Citizens asked for 27 percent more in 2018, when the average was \$49.72 ([IBJ, 2016](#); [IBJ, 2018](#)). Federal clean water law drove those increases. What I can't answer yet is whether keeping bills flat in the 1990s pushed a cost onto the low-income households who paid it later.

- **The water side went badly.** In 2002, under Mayor Bart Peterson, the city bought Indianapolis Water from NiSource for about \$515 million and hired the French company Veolia under a 20-year contract worth about \$1 billion ([Indianapolis Encyclopedia](#); [IBJ](#)). A consultant working for state regulators, CH2M, found the city's volunteer waterworks board kept overruling its own staff in Veolia's favor. In 2007 the city changed the contract to take on retiree costs after Veolia said it was losing money ([IBJ](#)). Ending Veolia's contract later cost the city \$29 million.

The 2011 transfer to a charitable trust

In 2011 the City-County Council voted 19 to 10 to hand water and sewer to Citizens Energy Group in a deal valued at \$1.9 billion. Citizens took on about \$1.5 billion of debt, and the city got about \$425 million for streets and other projects ([IBJ](#)). Citizens is a public charitable trust with no shareholders. Its board picks its own members, and nobody elects them. Sewer rates moved from the City-County Council to the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission. Council minority leader Joanne Sanders said the deal left the public with too little say.

At the plant gate the contract worked. WREP earned its fee doing real work, and the plants put cleaner water back in the river for less money. Over thirty years the picture changes. The city used a service nobody can live without as a source of cash three times: the pension transfers in the 1990s, the \$425 million payment in 2011, and the debt ratepayers now pay off. Each time, people paying sewer bills paid for things beyond sewers, and none of them got a vote.

Case 2: Indiana's welfare modernization contract with IBM

Indiana paid an IBM-led team more than \$440 million before ending a \$1.3 billion contract in 2009, and the families applying for food stamps, cash help, and Medicaid paid in lost benefits. IBM never made the profit it expected, because the state later won in court, but the cost of the failure fell first on the people asking for help.

What happened

In 2006 Governor Mitch Daniels signed a ten-year contract with IBM, with Affiliated Computer Services (ACS) as a major partner, to automate eligibility for food stamps, Medicaid, and cash aid. Caseworkers who had known families in county offices were replaced by regional call centers and a task-based workflow system. Daniels described the old system as among the worst in the nation, and IBM later used his words in its defense.

Virginia Eubanks, in *Automating Inequality*, reports that about a million applications were denied in the first three years, a 54 percent rise over the prior three years. Most denials gave the catch-all reason "failure to cooperate in establishing eligibility" ([NPR, 2018](#)). Omega Young of Evansville called to say she was in the hospital with cancer, and she lost her Medicaid that way anyway. She died on March 1, 2009. The state ended the contract in October 2009, citing long waits, lost documents, and improper denials ([IBJ](#)).

Follow the money

Question	Answer	Grade
Who paid	State and federal taxpayers, through FSSA	Documented
Who received	IBM-led vendor team, more than \$440M paid before termination	Documented (Indiana Lawyer)
Who owned	Systems and processes were built by the vendors; the state took them back after 2009	Documented
Who bore risk	Applicants bore the first risk, through wrongful denials; the state bore litigation and rebuild costs	Documented and interpretation
Tax advantage	None specific to the contract	None found
Who decided	Governor and FSSA leadership; no applicant role in design	Documented

The courts did hold the vendor responsible. The Indiana Supreme Court ruled in March 2016 that IBM breached the contract. A trial court set the state's damages at \$128 million and subtracted \$49.5 million in fees the state owed IBM, for a net judgment of \$78.2

million. The Supreme Court affirmed in 2019, and the state said the total with interest came to about \$96 million ([Indiana Lawyer, 2019](#); [Case Clips](#)).

That recovery comes to roughly a fifth of what the state had paid. The state replaced IBM with a more expensive "hybrid" system that put more human caseworkers back in the process. The Court of Appeals called that system essentially the same as IBM's, and IBM argued it should not pay for the state's more costly choice.

What the money cannot show

No court or audit ever counted what families lost. A household wrongly denied food stamps got no back pay for the weeks or months it went without, and a gap in Medicaid meant doctor visits and prescriptions went unpaid or never happened. None of that shows up in the court's numbers.

IBM's version of efficiency moved work from paid state caseworkers onto applicants, who had to send their papers again, wait on hold, and prove they qualified over and over. IBM lost money on the deal, and the state got part of its money back. The applicants paid the most, and they never had a say in how the system was built.

Case 3: Medicaid managed care and the POWER account

Indiana asked its poorest adults to pay into a health account every month as a lesson in personal responsibility, and about 60,000 people, 29 percent of those charged, lost coverage or never got it because they didn't pay. A federal judge threw out the requirement in 2024. Of all eight stories, this is where the word "saving" does the most work.

The POWER account

The Healthy Indiana Plan began under Governor Daniels in 2007 and became Indiana's Medicaid expansion, HIP 2.0, in 2015. Members held a Personal Wellness and Responsibility (POWER) account valued at \$2,500, run like a health savings account ([Lewin interim evaluation](#)). Adults who paid monthly contributions, set near 2 percent of income, got HIP Plus with dental and vision. Those below the poverty line who missed payments dropped to HIP Basic, and those above it were disenrolled and locked out for six months.

Members paid small amounts, often with help from churches, nonprofits, and hospitals that covered some or all of the bill. The federal government paid about 90 percent of the program's cost. Private health plans collected the payments and kept track of them.

What the evaluations found

The state's own evaluator, the Lewin Group, found more than 90 percent of HIP Plus members kept paying. The state pointed to that, and to fewer emergency room visits among people who paid, as proof the design worked ([FSSA response](#)). People who can pay every month are probably healthier and more settled to begin with, so that comparison says less than the state claimed.

On June 27, 2024, Chief Judge James Boasberg vacated the federal approval. He cited evidence that nearly 60,000 Hoosiers, 29 percent of those subject to premiums, were disenrolled or never enrolled because of nonpayment, and that over half missed at least one payment in 2015 and 2016 ([IBJ](#); [Indiana Primary Health Care Association](#)). From 2017 to 2018, another 26,037 HIP Plus members were disenrolled for failure to pay ([IBJ](#)).

HIP member Mulugeta Wolfe told reporters the hard part was remembering the payment, not the amount. State Rep. Ed Clere, a Republican who chairs the House Medicaid subcommittee, said the pandemic pause showed the accounts added nothing but confusion, administrative expense, and disenrollment. Advocates noted that FSSA and the managed care plans reported saving money while collections were paused ([Indiana Capital Chronicle](#)).

The payments are still on hold. On July 6, 2026, FSSA announced that work requirements for HIP start phasing in on January 1, 2027 ([FSSA](#)). The paperwork moves from paying a bill to reporting hours.

The managed care layer

Indiana pays private plans a fixed monthly amount per member, called capitation. Anthem, CareSource, Managed Health Services (Centene), UnitedHealthcare, and Humana hold the contracts ([FSSA](#)). The plans keep what they do not spend, subject to a federal medical-loss-ratio floor of 85 percent.

The facts on the health plans cut both ways.

- **Against extraction:** Health Management Associates reported Indiana's four Medicaid plans averaged a 91.5 percent medical loss ratio in 2022, meaning about 91 cents of each premium dollar went to care ([HMA, 2024](#)). *Estimate drawn from plan filings.*

- **For friction:** FSSA's own reporting for the PathWays for Aging program shows pharmacy claim denial rates near 38 to 53 percent each month from July 2025 to May 2026, and professional-claim denials of 20 to 27 percent at Humana. Denied claims include duplicates and technical rejections that are later fixed, so a denial is not the same as care refused. Nobody has published how many were overturned.
- **Oversight gap:** The HHS Inspector General announced an audit of Indiana's managed-care remittances in September 2024 and canceled it on June 5, 2025 ([HHS-OIG](#)). An earlier audit found Indiana paid plans for members after they died ([HHS-OIG, 2020](#)).

The POWER account is the best test I found of whether "saving" works for people with no spare money. The state showed that most members paid. The federal court showed that nearly a third of the people charged lost coverage, and the people closest to it, members like Mulugeta Wolfe and a Republican committee chair, said the payments mostly caused confusion. The health plans do spend most of their money on care, which weakens my claim for that part of the system. I still can't tell how much of the plans' overhead goes to denials and paperwork instead of helping people get care.

Case 4: Housing, from charitable apartments to the eviction docket

Rent is the biggest bill a low-income household pays and the hardest one to skip, and in Indianapolis the courts have become part of how some landlords collect it. Two stories show it most clearly: a nonprofit landlord that kept a charitable tax break while its tenants lost their water, and a small group of owners who file most of the county's evictions.

The charitable landlord

JPC Charities and its affiliates owned several Indianapolis complexes as nonprofit, low-income housing, which qualified them for a charitable property-tax exemption. Lakeside Pointe at Nora had paid no property tax for more than ten years. A lawyer for the owners described the complex as housing for residents at or below 60 percent of area median income ([FOX59](#)).

In 2021 the Marion County Health Department handed out more than 200 repair orders at Lakeside Pointe. The county's Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals suspended and then revoked the exemption, producing a tax bill of about \$400,000 ([FOX59](#)). Inspectors opened 25 cases at Crystal Bay, 29 at Fox Club, and 56 at Woods at Oak Crossing, all tied to the same owner, in under five months of 2021.

In February 2022, Citizens Energy shut off water at Berkley Commons and Capital Place for the owner’s unpaid bills, while tenants were still paying rent. The city paid Citizens \$850,000 to restore water. In a settlement with the city, Citizens, and the Attorney General, JPC Affordable Housing agreed to sell its four remaining properties to unaffiliated buyers and stop owning residential property in Indiana ([Weekly View](#); [WRTV](#)).

Question	Answer	Grade
Who paid	Tenants paid rent; taxpayers gave up property tax and then paid \$850,000 for water	Documented
Who received	The nonprofit owner and related LLCs, through rent	Documented; how rent moved between entities is not public
Who owned	Nonprofit corporations with out-of-state related companies (Farah-Fox Lake, Aloft management)	Documented
Who bore risk	Tenants, through unsafe units and utility shutoffs	Documented
Tax advantage	Full charitable property-tax exemption for more than a decade	Documented
Who decided	The owner’s board, outside Indiana; no tenant voice	Documented and interpretation

Marion County Assessor Joseph O’Connor said the county’s tax appeals board and the General Assembly are the only bodies that can grant or take away these exemptions, and the county inspects each property in person once every four years ([WFIU](#)). For JPC, nonprofit status meant a tax break, and the public only stepped in after a health department sweep, water shutoffs, and three lawsuits.

The eviction docket

Indianapolis has one of the highest eviction filing rates in the country. Landlords filed more than 25,000 cases in Marion County in 2024 and nearly 19,000 in the first nine months of 2025. That works out to about 14 filings for every 100 renter households ([WFYI, 2025](#); [WFYI, 2026](#)). Indiana requires only ten days’ notice before filing for unpaid rent.

The filings concentrate. In the first half of 2022, 75 percent came from owners who filed ten or more cases in six months, and 65 percent came from large complexes that house 14 percent of renter households. Fifty owners filed more than half of all cases, many of them out-of-state private equity firms and REITs ([Polis Center](#)). Matt Nowlin and Erik Steiner wrote that eviction filing was becoming a debt-collection strategy for corporate owners, and one equity firm's properties showed a 22 percent eviction rate ([WFYI](#)).

In 2024, 84.6 percent of landlords had a lawyer in Marion County eviction cases and 1 percent of tenants did ([Legal Services Corporation](#)).

An eviction filing costs a landlord a court fee and gives a fast, public way to collect rent and late fees, while the tenant carries a court record that follows them even when the case gets dismissed. The same owners filing against the same households in the same buildings, month after month, matches what I called steady payments from people with no slack. The numbers show which owners file and how often. They can't show whether those owners make more money than other landlords, because rent rolls, mortgage payments, and owner profits are private.

Case 5: Payday lending, a legislated exception

Indiana makes it a felony to lend money at 72 percent interest a year or more, and since 2002 it has carved out two-week payday loans, which can legally reach 391 percent. Borrowers have a median income around \$19,000, and most of the fees go to companies based outside Indiana. The payments fit my argument closely. The profits are harder to pin down than the advocates suggest.

What the law allows

Under the 2002 exemption, a lender may advance up to 20 percent of a borrower's monthly income, capped at \$605, with fees equal to as much as 391 percent APR ([Indianapolis Urban League](#)). A report from the Indiana Institute for Working Families counted 29 licensed payday lenders. Eleven were based out of state and ran 86 percent of storefronts, and five out-of-state firms ran 79 percent of the 262 stores.

Follow the money

Question	Answer	Grade
Who paid	Borrowers, median income just over \$19,000	Estimate (Clarity Services data cited by IIWF)
How much	More than \$300 million in finance charges over five years, roughly \$60–70 million a year	Estimate (IIWF)
Who received	Mostly out-of-state lenders	Documented by license records as reported
Repeat use	About 60 percent re-borrow the same day they repay; about 80 percent within a month; typical borrower takes 8 to 10 loans	Estimate (IIWF, Center for Responsible Lending)
Who bore risk	Borrowers, through bank-account loss, missed bills, and bankruptcy; lenders through defaults priced into fees	Interpretation supported by CRL research
Who decided	The General Assembly, which created the exemption and has not given a 36 percent cap a floor vote	Documented

The Institute figured borrowers would have kept \$291 million over five years if payday loans had to follow the 36 percent cap on other small loans ([Indiana Public Radio](#)). That figure assumes people would have borrowed the same amounts at 36 percent, and many lenders say they wouldn't lend at that rate, so it is an estimate of what might have been.

The vote

In February 2019 the Indiana Senate voted 22 to 27 against Sen. Greg Walker's bill to cap payday loans at 36 percent. The same day it voted 26 to 23 for Senate Bill 613, which would have kept 391 percent loans and added installment products with rates up to 99 percent ([IBJ](#)). SB 613 died in the House. Cap bills from Walker, Sen. Ron Alting, and Rep. Carey Hamilton have since gone without hearings, while a 2018 poll for the Institute found 88

percent of Hoosiers supported a 36 percent cap ([Indiana Public Radio](#)). The Indiana Catholic Conference supports the cap because its charities end up helping families caught in the loans.

The case against the extraction reading

State Rep. Woody Burton argued the loans meet a real need and that the high fees cover the lender's risk. A 2005 FDIC paper by Mark Flannery and Katherine Samolyk found payday fees mostly paid for running storefronts and covering unpaid loans, and that typical stores did not make unusually high profits. I'm citing that study from memory and haven't pulled it yet, so treat it as approximate. If it holds in Indiana, borrowers lose a lot while each lender makes a modest amount, which makes this a costly system more than a lucrative one.

The payments look exactly like what I described at the start: a fee due every two weeks, borrowers taking a new loan the same day they pay off the old one, and a law written to protect the business. The profit side stays open until someone gets the lenders' Indiana filings, which the Department of Financial Institutions collects but doesn't publish in detail.

Case 6: The eviction record, from a court filing to a screening score

An eviction filing is the one place where I could trace every link of the chain on paper. A landlord files, the court posts the case publicly, a data company buys the case and turns it into a score, and the next landlord turns the person away. Indiana has also passed two laws that cut that chain, so this story shows both how the system works and how it can be stopped.

How a filing becomes a judgment about a person

Indiana landlords may file after ten days' notice for unpaid rent, and many cases end once the tenant catches up. Jenny Terry of Indiana Legal Services described the usual pattern: the filing comes the moment a tenant falls behind; then rental assistance or a little more time lets the tenant pay, and the case ends. Some landlords still read that record as an eviction even though the tenant never left ([Indiana News Service via WMNC](#)).

The filing doesn't stay at the courthouse. TransUnion Rental Screening Solutions bought eviction records from LexisNexis Risk and Information Analytics Group and sold reports to landlords, property managers, and employers. In 2023 the FTC and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau charged that it listed one case as several evictions,

misreported dismissed cases, mislabeled dollar amounts, and included records courts had sealed. TransUnion settled for \$15 million, \$11 million of it for consumers, without admitting wrongdoing ([FTC](#); [Multifamily Dive](#)). The CFPB also found the company told people the records came straight from courts, while it actually bought them from a vendor it did not name.

Question	Answer	Grade
Whose behavior is measured	Renters, by court filings, many of them dismissed	Documented
What counts as risk	Any eviction filing, regardless of outcome, in the reports cited by regulators	Documented for TransUnion before 2021
Who profits from classification	Data vendors (LexisNexis) and screening firms (TransUnion), paid per report by landlords or applicant fees	Documented business model; Indiana revenue unknown
Who decides	The landlord, often relying on a screening score that gives no reason	Testimony
Can the person contest it	Only after the harm, through the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, and only if they learn which vendor supplied the record	Documented

Brandon Beeler of Indiana Legal Services said corporate landlords rely on screening systems that do not always tell them why a tenant was rejected ([FOX59](#)). Jessica Savage of Hoosier Action, rejected over a filing that never went further, said that in Indiana an eviction record means you might as well give up. Homer Bland, at a sealing clinic in Indianapolis, said nobody wants to take a chance on you with an eviction hanging over your head ([WTHR](#)).

Where Indiana cut the chain

In 2022 the General Assembly, with one dissenting vote, let tenants petition to seal eviction cases that were dismissed or that they won ([Indiana Lawyer](#)). A law that took effect on July 1, 2025, made sealing automatic for dismissed cases, tenant wins, and

judgments reversed on appeal. It also let tenants who had paid off a judgment ask the court to seal their case ([WTWO](#)). Sealed records are not supposed to be visible to landlords during screening.

Tenant screening turns a filing, which is only a landlord's claim, into a score that gets read as proof of bad character. The renter is the one being scored, never the owner who files case after case. The 2023 settlement and Indiana's sealing laws show the law can break the chain. Nobody knows yet whether data companies that bought Indiana cases before they were sealed ever delete them, and that question is on the list of missing documents.

Case 7: Proving eligibility, from IBM to the 2027 work requirements

For twenty years Indiana has run the front door to its benefits through private contractors and purchased data, and each new rule has asked poor adults to prove they deserve help. When Indiana's Inspector General looked at fraud inside the eligibility system in 2018, the cases it described were committed by contractor and state employees.

The contractor stayed after IBM left

When Indiana fired IBM in 2009, it kept IBM's partner. In 2009 FSSA hired ACS Human Services, then a Xerox company, for intake, data collection, and other eligibility work. FSSA extended the contract several times and renamed it when ACS became Conduent in 2017 ([Indiana Inspector General, 2018](#)). ACS was also the lead company in the 2010 parking-meter lease. Indiana replaced its old eligibility software with a new system, IEDSS, beginning in April 2019 ([FSSA](#)). I couldn't confirm which company built IEDSS or runs it today.

Whose data, and who sells it

FSSA checks applicants' wages against The Work Number, a payroll database Equifax sells ([Inspector General](#)). Employers feed it, and the state pays to read it. The person being verified does not consent to the sale and usually learns about a mismatch only when a notice arrives. I couldn't find what Indiana pays Equifax.

Who committed the fraud

The Inspector General's 2018 report describes three fraud cases from inside the eligibility system. One vendor eligibility specialist forged about 97 power-outage replacement claims, a loss of more than \$53,000. Another vendor employee, herself a SNAP recipient,

forged pay stubs and leases for herself and friends, and a court ordered \$79,489 in restitution. In the third case, a state consultant hid in a closet when agents arrived, and the state later hired the vendor employee involved.

The Inspector General recommended that future contracts hold vendors responsible for their employees' fraud, because the contract didn't clearly say so. That report only looked at employee fraud, so it can't tell us how often applicants cheat. What stands out is how differently people were treated. Employee fraud got traced to named workers and handled one case at a time, while in the IBM years a million applicants got a label, "failure to cooperate," with no finding that any of them did anything wrong.

2027: the burden moves to hours

Starting January 1, 2027, HIP members who are not exempt must log 80 hours a month of work, training, school, or service, or earn at least \$580 a month. Applicants in January 2027 must show compliance for October through December 2026. The state will check wage data quarterly and send a notice when it cannot verify hours electronically ([FSSA, July 6, 2026](#)). Members who lose HIP this way cannot get help paying for a Marketplace plan instead ([FSSA notice](#)). FSSA Secretary Mitch Roob said HIP is a benefit "that must be earned through personal responsibility."

The nearest test of this design is Arkansas. In 2018 it removed about 18,000 adults from Medicaid under work requirements within months, and a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* by Benjamin Sommers and colleagues found no rise in employment. *I'm citing that from memory, and it needs checking.*

Question	Answer	Grade
Whose behavior is measured	Low-income adults' wages and hours	Documented
What counts as risk	Missing data is treated as noncompliance until the member proves otherwise	Documented design
Who profits from classification	Eligibility contractors (ACS/Conduent) and data sellers (Equifax); amounts not public	Documented relationships; amounts missing
Who decides	FSSA under state law and federal approval	Documented

Question	Answer	Grade
Can the person contest it	Through notices, document uploads, and fair hearings, after the cutoff is triggered	Documented process; reversal rates not public

No computer program here calls anyone a cheat. The system simply assumes a person doesn't qualify whenever the data doesn't match, and the person has to prove otherwise. One link of the chain is missing, because these cutoffs arrive by private letter. This story shows people being shut out more than people being shamed in public.

Case 8: Risk scores in credit, health care, and policing

Three more scoring systems reach low-income people in Indianapolis. For each one I can name who gets measured and who gets paid, but what the system does to any one person's life stays hard to see. These are shorter findings, and two lean partly on national research.

Credit for people outside mainstream credit

The borrower income figure in Case 5 came from Clarity Services, a credit bureau for people with thin or damaged credit files, now owned by Experian. Payday and installment lenders report to it and buy from it. The same market that charges up to 391 percent APR also produces the data that classifies its customers for the next lender. *I know the ownership from memory, and Indiana sales figures aren't public.*

Health-care risk models

Hospitals and insurers, including Medicaid plans, use algorithms to decide which patients get extra care management. A 2019 study in *Science* by Ziad Obermeyer and colleagues found a widely used commercial algorithm predicted future health-care **cost** as a stand-in for health **need**. Because less money had been spent on Black patients at the same level of illness, the model ranked them as healthier than they were. *I'm citing this study from memory.* I couldn't find which risk models Indiana's Medicaid plans use, and members have no way to see or challenge their score.

Policing by camera and sensor

Indianapolis has moved toward surveillance more than prediction. In 2022 IMPD used federal pandemic relief money to test gunshot detection from ShotSpotter, Flock Safety, and J&M Security on the east and near east sides ([WTHR](#)). IMPD then signed a no-bid contract of about \$6 million with Flock, mostly to lease license plate cameras, with gunshot detection and drones included as options ([Mirror Indy](#)). Volunteers counted 649 plate readers in Marion County as of September 4, 2026, the most of any Indiana county. IMPD tightened its rules after an officer was found tracking plates for personal reasons and was recommended for firing ([Axios Indianapolis](#)).

I found no sign that Indianapolis police use a score that predicts which people will commit crimes. I also found no study of whether the cameras cluster in poor neighborhoods, and one news report said the city had not disclosed how many it installed.

System	Who is measured	Who is paid	Can people inspect or contest it
Subprime credit bureau	Borrowers outside mainstream credit	Bureau, through lender subscriptions	Federal credit-report disputes, if the person knows the bureau exists
Health risk model	Patients, by past spending	Model vendors, plans, hospitals	No member-facing process found
Plate readers and gunshot sensors	Everyone who drives or lives near a sensor	Flock Safety; ShotSpotter (piloted)	No individual process; council oversight only

These systems measure the things poverty makes visible: borrowing at high rates, past medical bills, living where the sensors go. Each one turns a pattern into odds, and the Obermeyer study shows how odds can turn past underspending on someone’s care into a judgment that they need less care. None of these tools puts people on public display. They sort and watch quietly.

Public punishment, literal and figurative, kept apart

The words “public executions” cover two different things, and I kept them apart. Indiana’s actual executions have moved further out of sight. The punishments that land on poor households, especially the eviction record, have become more public and last longer

because companies sell the data. The facts don't support treating the two as the same.

Literal executions

Indiana executed Joseph Corcoran in December 2024, its first execution since 2009. It executed Benjamin Ritchie in May 2025 and Roy Lee Ward on October 10, 2025, each with a single drug, pentobarbital ([Indiana Capital Chronicle, 2026](#)). The state paid at least \$1.275 million for the drug, at \$275,000 to \$300,000 a dose, and about \$600,000 of that went to doses that expired before anyone used them ([Indiana Capital Chronicle, 2025](#)). Witnesses said Ritchie lifted violently off the gurney. Ward's lawyers had to press public records requests to learn how the drug was sourced and stored, and the *Capital Chronicle*, which witnessed Corcoran's execution, was not invited to Ritchie's ([Indiana Capital Chronicle](#)).

The history runs toward secrecy. American executions moved from town squares into prisons over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* reads that move as a shift from public spectacle to hidden discipline. *This history comes from general scholarship, not documents I pulled.*

I found nothing tying Indiana's three executions to the money stories in this report, and I am not claiming a tie. There is a large national body of research on capital defendants' poverty, appointed lawyers, and race, and it deserves its own study.

Figurative public punishment

The clearest documented case is the eviction filing in Case 6. It is public by default, sold to data vendors, and has followed people even after dismissal, which is why Indiana passed two sealing laws. Benefit terminations under the IBM system, POWER account lockouts, and coming work-requirement cutoffs are private. Each one arrives as a letter to a single household, so it punishes without any public display.

Form	Public?	Durable?	Shown here
Execution	Witnessed by a few; supply secret	Final	Yes
Eviction filing	Public court record, resold	Until sealed, if ever	Yes

Form	Public?	Durable?	Shown here
Benefit termination	Private notice	Until the person reapplies	Yes
Payday default	Credit-bureau record	Years	Partly
Humiliating arrest or mugshot publication	Not examined here	Not examined	No

My second question assumed punishment gets put on display as a lesson. What I found is narrower. The state hides its harshest punishment, and the public mark that follows poor people comes mostly from a court record turned into a product. If there is a lesson, a screening report teaches it to the next landlord.

Who gets discretion

The clearest evidence of people being treated as less than human comes from comparing how organizations and households were treated in the same programs. When organizations failed, they got time, hearings, private settlements, and a way out. When poor households missed a step, they got cut off by letter or marked by a public court record.

Program	When an organization failed	When a household failed
Welfare eligibility	IBM breached its contract and got ten years of litigation, a trial judge who accepted its excuses, appeals, and an argument over interest on its fees	About a million applicants were denied for "failure to cooperate" with no finding of wrongdoing; Omega Young lost Medicaid while hospitalized
Eligibility fraud	Vendor employees' fraud was investigated case by case; the Inspector General asked FSSA to write contractor liability into future contracts	Applicants carry the full burden of proof when a data match fails

Program	When an organization failed	When a household failed
Charitable housing	JPC kept its tax exemption for more than a decade of violations, then settled, sold its buildings, and left Indiana	Tenants lost water while paying rent; filings against them were public until Indiana passed sealing laws
Credit records	Under federal credit-reporting rules, most negative credit items and bankruptcies drop off after seven to ten years	An Indiana eviction record had no end date until the 2022 and 2025 sealing laws, and supporters cited exactly this gap (WMNC)
Water and sewer	The Veolia contract was amended in the company's favor after it said it was losing money	Average sewer bills rose about 30% in 2016 and Citizens sought 27% more in 2018
Health coverage	Medicaid plans kept receiving capitation, including some payments for members who had died	HIP members who missed a payment were locked out for six months

None of this requires anyone to mean harm. Contracts, courts, and tax law give organizations a lawyer's kind of time: a notice, a chance to fix the problem, a hearing, an appeal. Benefit rules, eviction law, and screening reports give households a deadline. When the same state treats a vendor's failure as a contract dispute and an applicant's missing signature as a judgment about character, it is deciding whose time and whose story count.

Two things would weaken this. If many households who appeal a cutoff win, that would show they get real process too. If vendor contracts show real penalties paid, that would show organizations are held to account. Neither is public, and both are on the list of missing documents.

Does deprivation kill? The mortality evidence

Losing health coverage and losing a home are both tied to dying earlier, and the gap in years of life across the Indianapolis area is wide and getting wider. The Medicaid research is the strongest and shows cause. The housing research shows a strong link, and its authors say plainly they have not shown the eviction itself causes the deaths. That supports a claim about who dies early. It doesn't support a claim that anyone set out to kill.

The Indianapolis gap

The Fairbanks School of Public Health and the Polis Center measured life expectancy across the metro by ZIP code. In the original report, a northeast suburb reached 83.7 years, while a neighborhood just south of Monument Circle reached 69.4, a gap of about 14 years over 28 miles ([SAVI, Worlds Apart](#)). An update covering 2014 to 2018 found the gap between Fishers and the shortest-living ZIP code inside Indianapolis had widened from 13.6 to 16.8 years, a 23.5 percent increase, and the two places sit just 17 miles apart ([SAVI update](#)). The 46225 ZIP code on the near south side had the lowest life expectancy in Marion County, just under 70 years ([WISH-TV](#)).

Tamara Leech, who studies how neighborhoods affect health, said no single cause explains why people in poorer neighborhoods die younger ([WFYI](#)). The gap itself is measured. Which policies cause it is my reading.

Coverage and death

Sarah Miller, Norman Johnson, and Laura Wherry linked federal survey data to death records. They found that low-income adults near retirement age in states that expanded Medicaid saw annual mortality fall 9.4 percent relative to non-expansion states, an effect driven by fewer disease-related deaths and growing over time ([NBER / Quarterly Journal of Economics, 2021](#)). Their estimate was about 19,200 deaths averted from 2014 to 2017 in expansion states ([University of Michigan IHPI](#)).

This finding is contested. A Mercatus Center analysis notes that randomized insurance experiments, including Oregon's, found little effect on mortality, and argues the reductions did not fall mainly on people who had been uninsured ([Mercatus](#)).

Indiana expanded Medicaid through HIP, so this study counts Indiana as a state where coverage helped. Nobody has studied the reverse for Indiana: what happened to the roughly 60,000 people the POWER account pushed out or kept out, and what will happen to people who lose coverage under the 2027 work requirements. Applying the national number to them would mean guessing across different age groups, so I haven't done it.

Housing and death

Nick Graetz, Matthew Desmond, and colleagues at Princeton's Eviction Lab linked eviction records to death records from 2000 to 2019. An eviction filing without a judgment was associated with 19 percent higher mortality, and an eviction judgment with 40 percent higher. Rent burden of 70 percent of income, compared with 30 percent, was

associated with 12 percent higher mortality ([Social Science & Medicine, 2023](#)). In a second study in *JAMA*, renters facing eviction from January 2020 through August 2021 died at 2.6 times the rate of the general population, and their average age was 36 ([CNN via KTVZ](#)).

Graetz said directly that his team is not claiming the eviction itself causes the deaths, since a filing also signals money trouble ([PBS NewsHour](#)). That still matters for Case 4. Even an eviction filing that never becomes a judgment marks a person whose risk of dying is measurably higher, and Marion County landlords filed more than 25,000 of them in 2024.

What the evidence supports

Claim	What the research shows	What it can't show
People in poor Indianapolis neighborhoods die years earlier	A 16.8-year gap between ZIP codes, and the gap is growing	Which policies cause it
Losing or lacking Medicaid raises the risk of death	About 9.4% fewer deaths among low-income adults where Medicaid expanded	How big the effect really is, since Oregon's randomized study found little change in deaths
An eviction marks a person at higher risk of death	19% higher death rates with a filing, 40% with a judgment	Whether the eviction itself causes the deaths
Indiana's POWER account or work requirements cost lives	No one has studied it	Anything yet
Someone meant for these deaths to happen	No evidence of that	Motives, since these studies measure outcomes

The facts support a claim about **who dies early**: choices about health coverage, rent, and eviction line up closely with which neighborhoods lose the most years. They don't support a claim about **intent**. Mortocracy names the first one.

Shorter findings: philanthropy and economic-development tax deals

Philanthropy and tax deals don't charge poor families directly. They move money toward the poor or toward growth, and they still shift who gets to decide, so I checked them for that.

Professional philanthropy

Lilly Endowment reported total assets of about \$79.9 billion on its most recent Form 990-PF ([ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer](#)). Most of that wealth comes from Eli Lilly and Company stock, and a private foundation that size pays a small federal tax on its investment income instead of income or capital gains tax on its growth. That tax break is legal, and it is written into federal law.

The Endowment's education grants show how a donor shapes public institutions. Lilly gave The Mind Trust more than \$23 million in its first decade, including \$7.17 million in 2017 to grow Innovation Network Schools and to recruit Teach For America and TNTP teachers into Indianapolis Public Schools ([Mind Trust, 2017](#); [Inside Indiana Business](#)). By the 2021–22 school year, 12,608 students, or 40 percent of IPS enrollment, attended Innovation Network Schools, which have their own independent boards ([Mind Trust, 2022](#)). In 2011 The Mind Trust also brought Stand for Children, a group active in school board campaigns, to Indianapolis.

None of this money comes out of poor families' pockets, and the schools may have served children well; I didn't study their results. The question here is who decided. A private foundation, answerable to its own board, paid for the group that redesigned how a school district serving mostly low-income families is run. Parents could vote for school board members. They had no vote over what Lilly or The Mind Trust funded. The grants are public. The point about power is my reading of them.

Economic-development tax deals

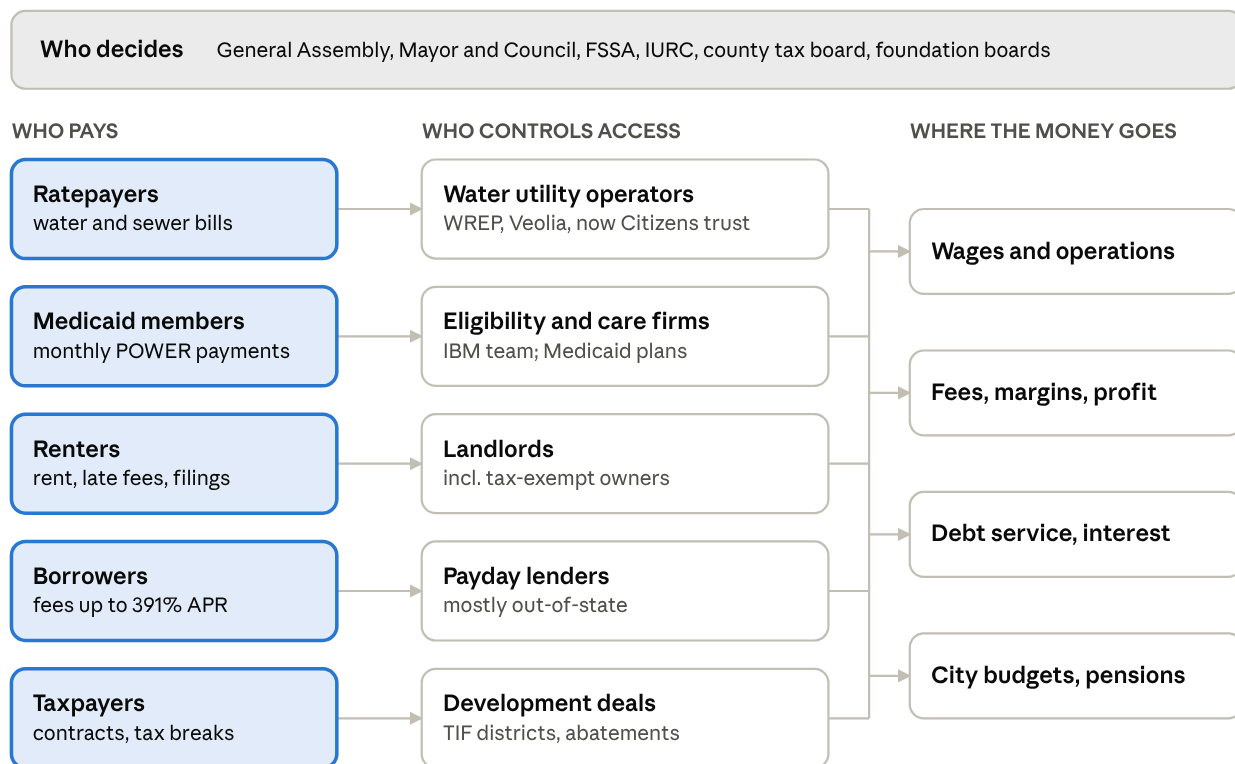
Tax-increment financing captures growth in property taxes inside a district and uses it to pay off development debt. Indianapolis's downtown TIF held about \$2.6 billion of assessed value and captured \$63.5 million of property tax in one year. It was also the only district exempted from a 2014 state law dissolving pre-1995 TIFs by 2025 ([IBJ](#); [IBJ](#)). Part of a tax increase IPS levied for school buildings was captured by the downtown TIF.

TIF debt paid subsidies for projects such as the JW Marriott and the Dow AgroSciences campus ([IBJ](#)). Meanwhile nine of 30 active TIF districts were not covering their debt at one point, leaving the city on the hook ([IBJ](#)). A 2016 Ball State study by Michael Hicks and colleagues found TIF had no major effect on development or property values across Indiana and diverted as much as \$320 million from local governments ([WFYI](#)).

Poor households don't make the payments in either case. What these share with the other stories is who loses control. Schools, libraries, and township services used by low-income residents give up money or decision-making to boards and districts those residents don't elect. Indiana's 2008 property tax caps made that worse, because every dollar a TIF district captures is a dollar a capped school or library can't make back.

Money-flow map

Households pay at the necessity; others set the terms



Household payments are documented. How each intermediary splits them among wages, overhead, interest, and profit is mostly unpublished; see Missing records.

money-flow map · 5 payers, 5 gatekeepers, 4 destinations

Each box on the left is a payment a household can't easily skip, and each box in the middle is who stands between that household and what it needs. The right column shows where the money ends up, though for most of these companies and agencies the split isn't public.

Ledger of public costs and private benefits

This table sets what each story cost the public and households beside what it gave to private and institutional players. I didn't add up the rows, because the numbers come from different years and different kinds of evidence.

Case	Public or household cost	Private or institutional benefit	Grade	Who decided
Wastewater, 1994–2007	171 plant jobs cut (328 to 157); about \$20M of sewer funds moved to police and fire pensions	WREP base fees of \$14.4–15.4M a year plus cost-plus 11–14% on extra work; city counted \$72.8M saved by 1999	Documented fees; savings are counterfactual	Mayor and Public Works
Water, 2002–2011	City paid about \$515M to buy the utility; took on retiree costs in 2007; \$29M to end Veolia's contract	Veolia: 20-year contract of about \$1B	Documented	Mayor, volunteer waterworks board

Case	Public or household cost	Private or institutional benefit	Grade	Who decided
Water and sewer transfer, 2011	About \$1.5B of debt now serviced by ratepayers; sewer rates up 30% in 2016 with another 27% sought in 2018	City got about \$425M up front; Citizens, a charitable trust, gained the utilities	Documented	Council 19–10; rates now set by IURC
Welfare eligibility, 2006–2009	About 1M denials in three years; more than \$440M paid to vendors	IBM team paid more than \$440M; state later won about \$96M with interest	Documented payments; denial count from Eubanks's research	Governor, FSSA
HIP POWER accounts, 2015–2024	About 60,000 people, 29% of those charged, lost or never got coverage	Administrative work for managed care plans; state savings from fewer enrollees not measured	Documented in federal court	FSSA, CMS waiver
Charitable apartments, to 2022	More than a decade of forgone property tax; city paid \$850K to restore tenants' water	Nonprofit owner and related LLCs kept rent	Documented	Owner's board; county exemption board

Case	Public or household cost	Private or institutional benefit	Grade	Who decided
Evictions, 2022–2025	More than 25,000 filings in 2024; 1% of tenants had lawyers	Fifty owners filed more than half of cases in early 2022	Documented counts; owner returns unknown	Owners; General Assembly sets notice rules
Payday loans, 2002–present	More than \$300M in fees over five years from borrowers near \$19,000 income	Mostly out-of-state lenders running 86% of stores	Estimate (advocacy research)	General Assembly
TIF and philanthropy	Captured property tax, including part of an IPS levy; one study puts statewide diversion near \$320M	Hotels, corporate campuses, and grantees; foundation pays excise tax, not income tax, on ~\$79.9B	Documented capture; diversion is an estimate	Development commission; foundation boards

One pattern runs down the last column. In every row, the people who carried the cost had no direct part in the decision, and their only lever was a ballot for officials who decide many other things too.

What goes against my argument

The strongest version of my argument says institutions come to depend on poverty without doing anything to reduce it. The facts I found don't prove that, and several go against it.

1. **Some privatization delivered verified public benefit.** The wastewater contract cut operating cost by roughly 40 percent, improved discharge compliance, cut accidents about 80 percent, and paid remaining workers more. The city's own in-house bid

promised far less. The 2010 parking meter lease drew plenty of critics, but it used a revenue share, and the city's net meter revenue rose from about \$339,000 in 2010 to about \$3.1 million in 2013 ([Reason Foundation](#)). That source favors privatization, and the figures come from the city and the concessionaire, but they have not been refuted.

2. **Rate increases bought real cleanup.** Citizens Energy's sewer increases paid for the DigIndy tunnels, which by 2018 had kept more than 500 million gallons of sewage out of the White River and Eagle Creek ([Citizens](#)). Federal law required that work, and Citizens has no shareholders to pay.
3. **Medicaid plans spend most of their revenue on care.** A 91.5 percent average medical-loss ratio in 2022 leaves an administrative and profit margin under 9 percent, well within federal rules.
4. **The state recovered money from IBM.** Courts held the vendor responsible, which shows accountability can work, though slowly and only in part.
5. **High fees can reflect high costs.** Payday lending research suggests fees mostly cover storefront costs and defaults, so borrowers lose a great deal while lenders do not necessarily earn outsized profit.
6. **Unequal outcomes do not prove coordination.** Nothing reviewed here shows that contractors, lenders, landlords, and funders acted together. Each responded to rules, tax law, and incentives set mostly by legislators.

Two parts of my argument hold across most of the stories. Payments from people with the least money to spare keep coming, because what they're paying for is something they can't do without, and the penalty for missing a payment is harsh: no water, no coverage, an eviction filing, another fee. And the people setting those payments sit on boards, in the legislature, and inside contractors that the payers don't control. The third part, that institutions depend on poverty, holds only in pieces: eviction filing used as routine rent collection, a payday business built on repeat loans, and a nonprofit landlord that kept a charitable tax break while its tenants lost water.

What goes against the second question

1. **The chain can be cut, and Indiana cut it.** The General Assembly passed eviction sealing in 2022 with one dissenting vote and made sealing automatic in 2025. Federal regulators fined TransUnion's screening arm for reporting sealed and dismissed cases.
2. **Data matching can help people keep coverage.** The same wage data that triggers a work-requirement notice can also confirm compliance without paperwork. The harm depends on what happens when a match fails, which the 2027 appeal records will show.

3. **No person-based predictive policing was found.** Indianapolis has bought plate readers and tested gunshot sensors. That is mass surveillance, and the misuse case shows its risk, but it is not a scheme that scores poor individuals.
4. **The state hides its harshest punishment.** Indiana's executions have become less public, which runs against the idea that punishment is staged as a public lesson.
5. **Fraud does happen.** The Inspector General documented real welfare fraud, some by people who also received benefits. Checking eligibility is a legitimate public duty; the question is how the burden of proof is set.
6. **No coordination is shown.** Screening firms, eligibility vendors, and lawmakers act on separate incentives. The chain works through shared data and rules, not shared intent.

What holds up is narrower than the full chain, but solid. When the data doesn't match, the poor person has to prove they qualify, and the only public mark I found is the one a company sells.

Documents still missing

These are the documents that would settle what I could only estimate. Most are public, or can be requested under Indiana's Access to Public Records Act or federal law.

Record	Holder	What it would answer	How to get it
Ernst & Young 1993 wastewater study	City of Indianapolis, Dept. of Public Works	What the expected savings were before the bid	APRA request
WREP annual reports and audited statements, 1994–2007	City; United Water / Suez	Fee, cost-plus billings, and contractor margin	APRA; corporate filings
Veolia–Indianapolis contract and 2007 amendment	Citizens Energy; IURC case files	Who paid which retiree and capital costs	IURC docket
Citizens Energy rate-case filings, 2011–2026	IURC	Split of revenue into debt service, operations, and executive pay	IURC docket; OUCC testimony

Record	Holder	What it would answer	How to get it
IBM master services agreement and invoices	FSSA; Marion Superior Court record	How the \$440M+ was spent, by function and subcontractor (including ACS)	Court record; Indiana Transparency Portal
Lewin POWER account cost assessment	FSSA	The cost of running the accounts against what members paid in	FSSA; CMS waiver files
Medicaid MCE medical-loss-ratio reports and remittances	FSSA; CMS	Each plan's admin share, profit, and any money returned	APRA; the canceled HHS-OIG audit OAS-24-07-008
PathWays claim-denial overturn rates	FSSA	Whether denials became care refused	APRA
JPC and Fox Lake Form 990s and related-party transactions	IRS; Indiana Attorney General	Where tenant rent went	IRS Form 990 (ProPublica); AG settlement file
Eviction judgments with fee and late-fee amounts	Marion County courts	What filings collect beyond rent	MyCase bulk data; court request
Payday lender Indiana loan volumes and charge-offs	Indiana Dept. of Financial Institutions	Fees, losses, and margins by lender	DFI annual reports; APRA
TIF annual reports, bond schedules, and released increment	Indy Bond Bank; Metropolitan Development Commission	Who received subsidies and how much tax was diverted	Department of Local Government Finance TIF reports

Record	Holder	What it would answer	How to get it
Tax-abatement compliance filings (CF-1 forms)	Marion County Auditor	Whether promised jobs and wages appeared	APRA
Lilly Endowment and Mind Trust grant agreements	Grantees; 990-PF Schedule I	Conditions attached to education grants	Form 990s; request to grantees

Documents for the second question:

Record	Holder	What it would answer	How to get it
IEDSS build and operations contracts, and the current ACS/Conduent contract	FSSA; Indiana Department of Administration	Who runs the eligibility gate today and what it costs	Indiana Transparency Portal; APRA
The Work Number and other data-matching contracts	FSSA	What Indiana pays Equifax and others to verify applicants	APRA
HIP and SNAP fair-hearing filings and reversal rates, 2019–2027	FSSA Office of Hearings and Appeals	How often a cutoff turns out wrong	APRA; federal reports
Work-requirement termination counts by reason, from 2027	FSSA; CMS	Whether people lose coverage for not working or for paperwork	FSSA monthly reports
Screening firms used by large Marion County landlords	Landlords; applicants' adverse-action notices	Which vendors score Indianapolis renters	Tenant interviews; FCRA file requests

Record	Holder	What it would answer	How to get it
Whether data vendors purge records after Indiana sealing	LexisNexis Risk, TransUnion, others	Whether the 2025 law reaches resold data	FCRA consumer file requests by sealed tenants
Medicaid plans' care-management risk models	MCEs; FSSA	Which algorithm ranks members, and on what measure	APRA; contract exhibits
Flock contract, camera locations, and audit logs	IMPD; Board of Public Health and Safety	Where surveillance concentrates and who queries it	APRA
Execution drug supplier and contracts	Department of Correction	Who is paid and under what terms	APRA; litigation records

Reforms

Each reform below comes out of one of the stories. Each one either lowers a charge on people with no money to spare or moves a decision closer to the people who pay.

Reduce the charges

1. **Cap small loans at 36 percent APR**, the rate federal law already applies to active-duty military borrowers and that Indiana applies to other small loans. Pair it with credit-union and employer small-dollar programs, such as the 18 percent loans HomesteadCS offers.
2. **End premium-style payments for Medicaid adults below poverty**. The POWER account cost people their coverage and cost the state paperwork, with no proven health gain. Build HIP work-requirement reporting so that missing a form never ends coverage for someone who meets the rule.
3. **Slow and price eviction filings**. Require a longer notice that states the amount owed, seal dismissed filings, and fund a right to counsel. Polis Center researchers said making filing slower and more costly for owners is the clearest fix for serial filing.

4. **Set affordability rates for necessities.** Ask the IURC to require income-based water and sewer rates, so that federally mandated cleanup is paid in proportion to ability to pay.

Tie public benefits to public duties

5. **Make charitable property-tax exemptions conditional on habitability.** Inspect exempt rental properties yearly, suspend the exemption automatically after unresolved health orders, and require exempt owners to file related-party payments with the county.
6. **Write privatization contracts the way the wastewater contract was written.** Keep public ownership, transfer measurable performance risk, publish fees and cost-plus billings, and protect workers' pay. Add a rule the 1994 contract lacked: no transfer of utility revenue to unrelated budgets without a public vote.
7. **Sunset and report every TIF and abatement.** Require annual public reports on increment captured, debt paid, and released value, and claw back abatements when promised jobs and wages fail to appear.

Move decisions to the people who pay

8. **Seat affected residents on the boards that set their payments,** including the Citizens Energy trust, the waterworks successor, county exemption boards, and the FSSA advisory bodies for managed care.
9. **Publish managed care finances by plan,** including medical-loss ratios, denial overturn rates, and remittances, and restore the canceled federal audit.
10. **Ask large foundations to share grant decisions.** Participatory grantmaking, where neighborhood committees decide a share of funds, has worked in Indianapolis before through resident-led grant committees. Foundations funding public-school governance could publish their grant conditions and give parents a formal role in how those grants are set.

Limit prediction and public marking

11. **Make every data-match failure a question, not a cutoff.** Before ending HIP or SNAP for a failed wage or hours match, require a caseworker contact and a grace period, and publish monthly counts of terminations reversed on appeal.
12. **Put fraud liability on vendors in writing,** as Indiana's Inspector General recommended in 2018, and publish what each eligibility and data vendor is paid.

13. **Make sealing reach the data market.** Require screening firms that sell Indiana reports to purge sealed cases on a set schedule and certify it to the Attorney General, and give tenants a free notice naming the vendor behind any rejection.
14. **Require plain-language model disclosure** for any risk model a Medicaid plan uses to ration care, including what it predicts and whether it uses past spending as a stand-in for need.
15. **Put surveillance under council rules.** Require public camera maps, retention limits, audit logs of every query, and an annual report on where cameras sit compared with neighborhood income.
16. **Give households the process organizations already get:** notice, time to cure, a hearing before loss, and a record that ends.

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