

## Charleston County 2016 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

### *We've got a problem to fix:*

- The average daily population in jails across South Carolina has exceeded capacity since 1989. Although Charleston County has been working to buck this statewide trend, decreasing its daily jail population by 40 percent between 2008 and 2015 (down to 1,118), it is certainly not immune to the problem of overuse and misuse of jails facing America.
- The main drivers of the Charleston County's jail population are bookings for low-level offenses such as public intoxication, driving under suspension or simple possession of marijuana, and extended jail stays due to use of financial bonds and court processing delays. In fact, as much as 70 percent of Charleston County's average jail population is awaiting trial, sometimes for as long as 191 days, largely due to their inability to post bail.
- Many of these drivers also have a disproportionate impact on people of color. For example, in Charleston County, African Americans are arrested nearly three times as often as Whites. The disproportionality is even greater for offenses such as simple possession of marijuana, loitering or trespassing, with African Americans arrested nearly seven times as often as Whites.
- People suffering from mental illness, substance abuse and homelessness are among the most frequent users of the jail, often cycling through multiple times for low-level offenses. In 2013-2014, 631 of these chronic users occupied 78,345 bed-days in the jail, each being detained an average of 62 days a year.

### *There are proposed solutions to create a fairer, more effective local justice system:*

- To transform how our community uses jail in Charleston County, the CJCC will improve policing practices, increase alternatives to jail for people dealing with mental illness, substance abuse issues and homelessness, pilot an automated court reminder system, minimize inappropriate abuse of financial bonds, and improve case processing efficiency. These reforms, supported by \$2.25 million from the Safety and Justice Challenge, will help reduce Charleston County's average daily jail population by 25 percent over the next two years while also making our system fairer and more efficient.
- For example, Charleston County is developing a risk-based decision tool to guide law enforcement discretion at the point of arrest for low level offenses. Usage of this tool will ensure police decisions are based on standardized, validated assessments of risk and, as a result, reduce bookings for the most frequent charges where racial disproportionalities are greatest, such as driver offenses.
- Charleston County will open a Triage Center where officers can take individuals in crisis instead of jail to receive treatment and other services pre- and post-booking. The Center will reduce jail detention among individuals dealing with mental illness and substance issues as well as those who are homeless.
- Charleston County will launch a risk-based pretrial management system to ensure the decision for pretrial release or detention is based on standardized assessments of risk. The county will also launch an indigence screening to reduce inappropriate use of financial bonds, improve access to counsel, reduce time to disposition, and support public safety.
- Throughout all of the above, Charleston County will also improve the system's use of data for continuous improvement and accountability.

### *Who is helping to affect change?*

- While the Charleston County Sheriff's Office serves as the administrative lead, the reforms outlined in the Safety and Justice Challenge are being implemented by the Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, a diverse group of stakeholders and champions, including county council members, the new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of South Carolina, chiefs of police, probation and parole, summary and circuit court leadership, various community leaders and many more.