

## **Harris County**

### **2016 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet**

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

- Harris County operates one of the largest jails in the U.S. and is one of the most diverse counties in the nation. Fifteen percent of the county's average daily jail population, which ranges between 8,500 to 8,700 people, are individuals held on behalf of the state.
- Twenty percent of pretrial detainees in Harris County are charged with low-level, nonviolent felony offenses such as drug possession and theft. Fifty-one percent of these offenders in jail are African American and 21 percent are Hispanic.
- When placed in detention, nearly 70 percent of offenders charged with a low-level, nonviolent felony reoffended and cycled back through jail, but when diverted from jail with supervision and appropriate interventions, recidivism dropped to 28 percent.
- Twenty-nine percent of individuals held in Harris County for a misdemeanor have a documented mental illness.
- Harris County spent \$52 each day for every person in jail in FY 2014, according to a report by the Vera Institute for Justice.

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

- To address the misuse and overuse of jails in Harris County, the county will invest \$3.4 million over the next two years to reduce the average daily jail population by 21 percent. In addition, the county will receive \$2 million from the Safety and Justice Challenge.
- Harris County will launch a new "Reintegration Impact Court" to handle about 8,000 low-level, non-violent felony cases a year, reduce jail usage and maximize diversion.
- Harris County will adopt and train stakeholders on a new pretrial risk assessment to insure that low-risk offenders are diverted from the system at the earliest opportunity.
- Harris County will also implement several initiatives to tackle racial and ethnic disparities in its justice system the county, including establishing a new racial and ethnic disparity coordinator to facilitate community forums, improve dialogue between communities and criminal justice stakeholders, and coordinate trainings for stakeholders and their departments on disparities that exist in the local justice system.
- Harris County will also expand the First Chance Intervention Program to help first-time misdemeanor marijuana and retail theft offenders avoid detention and charges by completing community service or an education class.

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

- The reforms outlined in the Safety and Justice Challenge are being led by Harris County's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. The Council is an interagency collaborative of 17 stakeholders, including two County Commissioners, the Mayor of Houston, District Attorney, Sheriff, the presiding judges of various court divisions, Chief Public Defender, and heads of other justice-involved agencies from across the local justice system. The District Attorney currently serves as its Chair.