

Milwaukee County

2017 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

We have a problem to fix:

- In one year, Milwaukee County has more than 33,000 jail bookings. Nearly half of them arise from misdemeanor arrests.
- African Americans and Hispanics make up just under half (41 percent) of the population of Milwaukee County and yet comprise almost 70 percent of the local jail population.
- Roughly a third of the jail population is on psychotropic medication to help address mental health issues, some of which are exacerbated by the recent increase in opiate abuse.
- In recent years (2013-2017), nearly half (44 percent) of crisis dispatches and calls for mental health service have originated from African American residents in the city.
- There is also a high level of trauma in the community that significantly impacts the jail population. For example, many justice-involved individuals have personally experienced and/or are currently engaged in the system due to domestic violence—an all-too-common issue which results in an average of 7,500 cases reviewed annually by the District Attorney's Office.

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

- To address the overuse of jails, Milwaukee County is using the \$2 million awarded by the Safety and Justice Challenge to focus on three policy areas: (1) expanding the countywide presence of the Crisis Assessment Response Team (CART), which pairs a behavioral health division (BHD) clinician with a law enforcement officer to handle complex mental health crisis situations; (2) diverting individuals with mental health and substance abuse issues to treatment in an effort to prevent them from cycling in and out of Milwaukee's criminal justice system; and (3) providing more trauma-informed responses, education, and options to justice system stakeholders.
- This will include a number of innovative and commonsense strategies, such as connecting individuals with mental health needs to housing and community services and providing law enforcement with enhanced community alternatives to arrest. This initiative is also implementing a program to divert those charged with low-level, non-violent misdemeanor offenses in the City of Milwaukee to a district police station for release with a citation rather than a jail booking, a process which already happens in surrounding districts.
- Milwaukee developed and is implementing an unprecedented trauma strategy, which is expected to impact racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system while reducing the over-reliance on criminal justice sanctions to respond to trauma. As of August 1, 2017, Milwaukee trained 237 criminal justice stakeholders in trauma-informed care. Eight additional trainings are scheduled for the remainder of the year. By the end of 2017, Milwaukee will have 40 local stakeholders trained to conduct trauma trainings.
- The Early Intervention Program now grants diversions and deferred prosecution agreements for individuals involved in family violence. These agreements require the completion of a batterer's intervention program and offer to reduce or dismiss charges for participants who complete requirements as agreed and remain crime-free throughout their monitoring period. Since January 2017, there have been over 50 domestic violence deferred prosecution agreements entered. Of those who completed the agreement, none have been rearrested for a new offense.

Who is helping to affect change?

- This reform effort is being led by the Milwaukee Community Justice Council, a diverse group of stakeholders and champions, including: Chief Judge Maxine A. White, City of Milwaukee Police Department Chief Edward A. Flynn, District Attorney John T. Chisholm, Wisconsin State Public Defender Tom Reed, House of Correction Superintendent Michael Hafemann, Department of Corrections Regional Chief Niel Thoreson, County Executive Chris Abele, Mayor Tom Barrett, Director of Housing Jim Mathy, the Behavioral Health Division, community leaders, and many others. This group of leaders worked diligently and collaboratively during Phase I of the Safety and Justice Challenge to develop a strong plan to support strategic reform efforts, and they continue to invest their expertise and agency resources to ensure its success.