

Buncombe County - 2018 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

We've got a problem to fix:

- Despite significant diversion efforts by Buncombe County and its partners, jail population numbers have risen to historically high levels. Data suggests that the female jail population will exceed capacity as soon as 2020.
- Pretrial defendants and length of stay are main drivers of the jail population. In 2017, 64.9% of the jail population were pretrial defendants, spending an average of 13 days in jail.
- An estimated 38% of the jail population has been identified as having a mental health issue. Individuals with mental health issues who enter the county's jail spend an average of 30 days longer in pretrial detention than other defendants.
- The impact of jail use takes an especially heavy toll on people of color. Despite making up 6.4% of the local population, African-Americans make up 26% of the jail population, on average.
- Detention causes disruption in the stability of arrestees' families and communities, leads to higher re-arrest rates, and produces worse-case outcomes, including future episodes of detention.

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

- Supported with \$1.75 million from the Safety and Justice Challenge, Buncombe County will implement forward-looking, smart solutions to address the overuse of jail in the county and further reduce the local jail population by 15% over the next two years.
- To continue reducing the jail population safely, the county plans to implement four key strategies aimed at addressing system inefficiencies and disparities, meeting the needs of those with behavioral health and substance abuse issues, and instituting non-jail options for lower-risk offenders.
- Key strategies that will focus on the front-end of the local justice system include deflection at arrest and booking, diverting individuals to behavioral health and substance abuse treatment, enhancing pretrial services, and increasing efficiencies in case processing.
- Strategies will touch all points of the system, ranging from pre-booking diversion to criminal case processing. These policy-driven innovations will reduce jail bed usage while ensuring jail resources are reserved for those individuals who present a threat to public safety.
- Key strategies will be complemented by three supportive strategies aimed at reducing racial and ethnic disparities, improving data integration, and enhancing community engagement in the local justice system.

Who is helping to affect change?

- The strategies and initiatives supported by the Safety and Justice Challenge are being led by Buncombe County Government in partnership with the Justice Resource Advisory Council, which is comprised of District and Superior Court Judges, Clerk of Court, Magistrate, District Attorney, Public and Private Defense, Law Enforcement, Bureau of Identification, Pretrial Services, Community Corrections, Juvenile Justice, Behavioral Health Managed Care Organization, and representatives from the Office of the County Manager and Board of Commissioners.
- Subcommittees include area service providers and community stakeholders who will collaborate with the Advisory Council to implement strategies to safely reduce Buncombe County's jail population.
- The work will be staffed by Buncombe County's Department of Strategic Partnerships with a focus on data-driven strategies, effective programs, racial and ethnic disparities, and cultivating authentic partnerships with communities.