

Charleston County 2018 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

At the start of the Safety and Justice Challenge we dissected our use of the local criminal justice system and our local jail population of 1,111 individuals (Calendar Year 2014). We analyzed the drivers of jail use, rethought the status quo, and set forth to improve our local criminal justice system with the implementation of six core strategies to help make our system more efficient, effective, and equitable. Through strong collaboration, leadership, and increasing data capacity; as of October 2018, our local jail population has been reduced by 18% to 909 individuals. Key milestones to-date include:

- Built a robust data warehouse combining data from across the criminal justice system to provide ongoing analysis and identification of areas for improvement;
- Supported law enforcement's use of jail alternatives such as citation-and-release for individuals charged with five, low-level non-violent crimes including simple possession of marijuana, open container, misdemeanor shoplifting, trespassing, and public intoxication;
- Collaborated with multiple local agencies to reopen the Tri-county Crisis Stabilization Center with a triage service for law enforcement. The center provides an immediate connection to treatment for those living with mental illness, substance use disorders, and/or homelessness rather than placing them in jail or costly emergency departments;
- Started providing text message reminders to defendants with upcoming court appearances to help improve the use of valuable court time and reduce bench warrants for missing court;
- Implemented a pretrial services report to inform bond-setting judges and provide better information regarding the risks to safety and/or failing to appear;
- Accelerated key aspects of case processing with the implementation of cost-effective technology for more efficient delivery of discovery; improved the timeliness of assignment of prosecution and defense counsel; and implemented the first-ever initiation of public defender representation in Central Bond Court for poor defendants that qualify;
- Provided support to effectively place docket management under the court under the leadership of a Chief Judge for Administrative Purposes; and
- Conducted extensive analysis and issued several comprehensive reports to inform and update the community about its criminal justice system, progress to-date, and areas for further improvement.

We continue to learn from implementation progress and our increased data capacity. In addition to refining our existing efforts in the years to come, key challenges our work will tackle moving forward include:

Pretrial Justice

- Our locally held jail population (excluding non-local detainees on Federal, Immigration, and/or out-of-county uses of jail) is mostly pretrial; approximately 90%-98% detainees are awaiting trial. The ability to pay a financial bond amount often determines whom is released and whom is held pretrial. Nearly all financial bonds (approximately 96-98%) cost more than \$1,000.
- A first-of-its-kind baseline pretrial outcome study to assess the effectiveness of status quo pretrial practices found that 85% of releases on financial bonds compared to 53% releases on personal recognizance returned to jail (new arrests) while awaiting the resolution of their cases. We also learned the majority of the returns to jail were driven by 46% of the individuals released, often returning to jail more than once in the pretrial period. In other words, the status quo practices resulted in ineffective pretrial outcomes that must be improved.
- Since the start of 2018, pretrial professionals have been providing the bond court with a report of individualized information on key factors listed in the South Carolina law relevant to bond setting decisions, and the results of an actuarial pretrial risk assessment. This provides the bond setting judges with more and better information than ever before to aid in their decision-making process, in addition to the traditional information provided by the state, victim, and/or defense.
- Moving forward, the county will be working to increase the reach rate for the pretrial reports going to the bond court. We will also be phasing in appropriate options to help improve the poor pretrial outcomes of the past, improving safety and appearance rates, and continually working to reduce the time it takes to bring cases to justice.

Repeat Offending

- People living with mental illness, substance use disorders, and homelessness have been among the most frequent users of the jail, oftentimes with low-level charges. We made great strides over the last few years to divert individuals in need of treatment from our jail and into treatment.
- On average, the number of individuals with three or more bookings in the past two years that cycled through our jail each month in 2017 was 42% less than in 2014, down to 175 individuals per month in 2017 from a high of 302 in 2014.
- Despite the significant advancements to-date, there is more work to be done at decision points later in the system, from post-booking through reentry from incarceration, particularly for individuals most prone to reoffending.

- Moving forward, a Sequential Intercept Mapping process and more extensive analysis of repeat offending patterns will be completed. The results will help our community to prioritize important gaps in recidivism reduction at later stages in the justice system, and advance needed reforms in these areas.

Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality and/or Disparity (REDD) in the Criminal Justice System

- As of 2017, 28% of Charleston County's general population was African American while 73% of the local jail population was African American, a relative rate index of 7.65 African Americans to 1 white individual incarcerated.
- We conducted a comprehensive analysis of REDD throughout our local criminal justice system to help better understand what was driving REDD in our system. While the amount of disproportionality in our system overall has reduced since 2014, we found the highest amounts continue to be upon entry into the local justice system. After entry into the system, the amount of disproportionality reduces significantly through bond setting and disposition. We also found differing results among men and women, and plan to further expand REDD analysis as more data becomes available (e.g., sentencing, crime severity, criminal history, etc.).
- We also conducted an extensive review of relevant literature about racial and ethnic disproportionality and/or disparity (REDD) in the criminal justice system and best practices for reducing REDD to help ground our work in research as we move forward. Researchers attribute many of the differences in justice system involvement to elevated risk factors among people of color, who trail white people on measures of objective well-being that support positive life outcomes locally and nationally, such as income, health, and education. REDD has serious consequences for individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole. In addition to the financial costs, there are costs to public safety, legal and political costs, civil consequences, and intergenerational effects; reducing REDD will require deeper community engagement efforts.
- We will be further advancing our REDD reduction efforts through a specifically dedicated strategy that will combine the lessons learned from our REDD analysis, relevant literature, and significantly increased community engagement.

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 collaboration of elected and senior officials, law enforcement leaders, judicial and court leadership, victim advocates, behavioral health professionals, various community leaders and many more. The CJCC works collaboratively to improve the administration of justice and promotion of public safety through planning, research, education, and system-wide coordination of criminal justice initiatives.