

Milwaukee County

2019 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

We have a problem to solve:

- In 2015, Milwaukee County had more than 33,500 jail bookings per year.
- African Americans and Hispanics made up less than half (41 percent) of the population of Milwaukee County and yet comprised almost 70 percent of the local jail population.
- Between October 2017 - September 2018, 26 percent of the pretrial jail population screened positive for a history of mental health conditions.
- Felony violations of probation were among the top ten most frequent reasons for jail bookings between May 2017 – April 2018.

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

Since joining the Safety and Justice Challenge, Milwaukee County has made demonstrable gains in resources, partnerships, and policy improvements:

- Milwaukee had a 9 percent reduction in its jail population since 2015 and a total decline of 33 percent since 2008, when the county launched significant system improvements.
- To create more equitable processes across the county, the Milwaukee Police Department introduced a policy to divert individuals arrested for non-violent misdemeanors to a district station for booking, release, and referral to the District Attorney's Office.
- The first countywide Crisis Assessment Response Team (CART) was introduced, which pairs a behavioral health clinician with members of law enforcement to respond to crisis calls, ultimately linking individuals with community resources and preventing jail admissions tied to mental health crises. By December 2018, 2,722 contacts were made across all crisis response teams. The number of CART contacts ending in emergency detention or arrest dropped by 10 percent between 2017 and 2018.
- Milwaukee County enrolled 143 individuals into Post-Booking Stabilization (PBS). This mental health diversion program aims to prevent cyclical involvement in the criminal justice system by connecting participants to mental health treatment and support in the community.
- With the goal of becoming a trauma-informed criminal justice system, 30 local stakeholders were trained to facilitate trauma trainings for system personnel. By the end of 2018, Milwaukee County trained 495 stakeholders, including 80 percent of its criminal division judges, on how being trauma-informed improves system outcomes.
- The Early Intervention Program began granting deferred prosecution agreements (DPAs) for individuals involved in family violence. Upon receiving consent from the victim, defendants may enter agreements, which require completion of a domestic violence offender program and reduce or dismiss charges for participants who complete requirements as agreed and remain crime-free during the monitoring period. By December 2018, 187 DPAs had been entered. Among closed DPAs, 87 percent of participants have successfully completed their agreements.
- The Milwaukee Community Justice Council is nearing completion of data dashboards that track changes in the local jail population, as well as racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system, and identify additional opportunities for improvements.

Using an additional \$2.3 million awarded by the MacArthur Foundation in 2019, Milwaukee County seeks to further reduce overreliance on the jail by focusing on four areas:

- *Refined Case Processing* increases efficiency and streamlines movement of cases through the criminal justice system;
- *Mental Health Diversion* identifies people with mental health conditions and links them to community-based resources in lieu of spending additional time in custody awaiting trial;
- *Reentry Support* introduces community-based interventions to prevent persons from reentering the criminal justice system after incarceration; and
- *Expanded Data Capacity* enables local stakeholders to monitor and address trends at various points in the criminal justice process, gain a deeper understanding of the jail population, and analyze disparities in order to create fairer, more effective solutions.

In this next phase of work, Milwaukee Community Justice Council partners will:

- Expand opportunities for diversion through the existing Early Intervention Program.
- Launch an enhanced court hearing reminder program to increase appearance rates among persons charged with criminal misdemeanor offenses.
- Through a cross-disciplinary team, analyze data and identify community-based interventions to meet the needs of system-involved persons with mental health conditions.
- Hire new staff to conduct mental health assessments in the jail and facilitate successful reentry into the community for persons who have competency hearings.
- Partner with a health care provider and the Transitions Clinic Network to provide peer support and assistance to individuals navigating health and social challenges, as they return to the community after incarceration.
- Work with additional data personnel to capture strategy progress and foster a better understanding of the system-involved population through data.

Significant investment will also be made in community engagement, including:

- Facilitated discussions between policymakers and persons who are formerly incarcerated to learn from their experiences and identify opportunities for system improvements;
- Subgrants to organizations to fund community-led work that aligns with local Challenge goals;
- Resource fairs and peer support for persons returning to the community post-incarceration; and
- Funding to improve police-community relations.

Who is helping to affect change?

This effort is led by the Milwaukee Community Justice Council, a diverse group of stakeholders and champions, including Chief Judge Maxine White, Wisconsin State Public Defender Tom Reed, District Attorney John Chisholm, Milwaukee County Sheriff Earnell Lucas, Milwaukee Police Department Chief Alfonso Morales, House of Correction Superintendent Michael Hafemann, Department of Corrections Regional Chief Niel Thoreson, County Executive Chris Abele, Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division, community leaders, and many others. This group of leaders worked diligently and collaboratively during the first phase 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.