

Multnomah County

2020 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

We've got a problem to fix:

- Since joining the MacArthur Foundation Safety and Justice Challenge in 2015, Multnomah County has made marked progress identifying and implementing specific strategies aimed at eliminating system inequities and safely reducing the local jail population by over 10 percent.
- Despite the continual reduction in jail use, there remains an over-reliance on incarceration. This over-reliance continues to impact the most marginalized members of our community, including people of color and those struggling with mental illness, addiction, poverty, and homelessness.
- [According to a 2019 report](#) by the W. Haywood Burns Institute, prevalent and persistent racial disparities impact communities of color at every decision point in Multnomah County's public safety system. Those disparities combined with system inefficiencies in the County's pretrial system — which is a critical point in a defendant's right to due process — create undue harm.
- While all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty, the County's pretrial system is meant to detain defendants awaiting trial who are a flight risk or a danger to public safety if released. But all too often, the pretrial system holds defendants who are neither due to antiquated policies and data systems.
- Multnomah County's pretrial system is decades old and every public safety partner agrees it is inefficient and duplicative. In extreme cases, defendants may cycle through the pretrial system, further compounding costly and time-consuming court appearances, as well as the defendant's struggles with issues like poverty and addiction.

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

- Supported with an additional \$2 million from the MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge, Multnomah County will address a long-standing need to reevaluate and improve the pretrial system to align with national best practices in pretrial justice.
- This effort will be informed by a comprehensive, pretrial system assessment designed to thoroughly evaluate pretrial release policies, identify the pretrial practices best suited for local needs, and overall pretrial release decision-making.
- This work builds on previously implemented strategies — ranging from pre-booking to post-adjudication — aimed at creating a more just and equitable public safety system. Through participation in the MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge, the County has made continual reductions in jail use through programs and practices focused on pre-arrest diversion, case processing improvements, and post-adjudication community supervision. This includes the launch of innovative programs such as the [Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program, or LEAD®](#) and [the Diane Wade House](#).
- These efforts have resulted in the reduction of jail use by over 10 percent and hundreds of individuals diverted from jail — before and after arrest — with a focus on providing jail alternatives for those struggling with addiction, mental health, poverty, and homelessness.

- The County will continue to safely reduce jail use over the next two years, by implementing national best practices, streamlining pretrial release decision-making, and improving system efficiencies. This work will result in the overall reduction goal of 14.4 percent over the next two years while keeping the jail population at safe and well-managed levels at 85 percent of current budgeted capacity.
- Guided by the 2019 Burns Report, the County will also re-launch a Racial and Ethnic Disparities subcommittee — made up of equal parts community members and policymakers — to identify opportunities to address this prevailing issue.

Who is helping to affect change?

- The strategies and initiatives outlined in the Safety and Justice Challenge are led by the Local Public Safety Coordinating Council, which includes the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, the Multnomah County Health Department (Corrections Health and Mental Health and Addictions), the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, Metropolitan Public Defenders, Multnomah County Circuit Courts/the Oregon Judicial Department, the Police Bureaus of Portland and Gresham, and the Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity.
- Additional stakeholders involved in this effort include community-based service organizations, and members of the local business community.
- The new grant award from the MacArthur Foundation includes \$125,000 to support ongoing community engagement efforts, led by the Local Public Safety Coordinating Council, that were launched in 2018 with the hiring for a newly-created Community Engagement Specialist position within LPSCC. These efforts aim to engage community members, including those with lived experience in the criminal justice system, in shared decision-making and planning for system reform.