

Palm Beach County

2020 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

We've made progress since 2015, but we still have problems to fix:

- Since 2015, our jail population is down 25 percent, resulting in 581 less people in jail on any given day (from 2,283 to 1,702).
- The average length of stay for pretrial inmates in the jail, particularly for people of color, is also down: the African American population decreased from 47 to 37 days, the Latino population decreased from 44 to 31 days, and the white population decreased from 21 to 18 days.
- Despite having an incarceration rate 36 percent below the national average, there is still more room for reducing the Palm Beach County jail population.
- Studies show that pretrial detention causes disruption in the stability of the incarcerated person, their family, and communities. It can lead to higher re-arrest rates and can produce worse case outcomes with more incarceration.
- Palm Beach County's jail costs taxpayers 14 cents of every county tax dollar.
- African Americans are significantly overrepresented in the county jail, making up 19 percent of the county population but 54 percent of the jail population.
- Some people frequent the jail with no clear path for ending their cycle. In 2019, 450 individuals were admitted to the jail three or more times using 16,124 bed days, staying 61 days on average, and costing county taxpayers \$2,176,740 (number of bed days x \$135 per day). One-third of these individuals were experiencing homelessness.
- In 2019, 3,417 people were admitted to the Palm Beach County jail for a Failure to Appear, representing 13 percent of all jail admissions. The underlying charges for most of these individuals were non-violent felonies or lower-level charges.
- In 2019, about one-third of defendants on either pretrial or probation supervision violate the terms of their supervision by missing appointments with their supervision officers. These missed appointments often result in a warrant for their arrest and reentry to the jail.

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

- Supported with \$3.7 million from the Safety and Justice Challenge, Palm Beach County is continuing to implement forward-looking, smart solutions to safely reduce the jail population and reduce racial and ethnic disparities.
- Strategies focus on major decision-points in the system, ranging from pretrial release to case processing and are embraced across public safety and community partners. These data-driven innovations are working to reduce jail usage and address disparities, while also prioritizing public safety and access to critically needed services for those most in need.
- Palm Beach County will continue to adjust and improve previous strategies while implementing new and innovative initiatives, including:
 - An increased focus on smart release options for pretrial inmates that began September 2017;
 - Improved case processing efficiencies for individuals who remain incarcerated while awaiting trial through continued process improvements to reduce the length of stay;
 - Quicker release and connection to services for those experiencing homelessness or suffering from substance misuse or behavior disorders through the Public Defender's Office;

- Expansion of Palm Beach County’s text message-based court data notification system to reach more individuals, including those on pretrial and probation supervision, which will not only reduce failures to appear for court but also to reduce violations of supervision;
- Expansion of our new PalmFUSE (Frequent Users Systems Engagement) project which began taking clients in the summer of 2019 to break the cycle of incarceration and homelessness for frequent low-level defendants with behavioral health challenges;
- Taking the location for felony probation reporting closer to defendants making it more convenient for them through a mobile reporting unit in order to reduce violations for missed appointments and reentry to jail; and,
- Measures to reduce racial and ethnic disparities, including additional implicit bias trainings for local criminal justice agencies.

Who is helping to affect change?

- The strategies and initiatives outlined in the Safety and Justice Challenge are being led by the Palm Beach County Criminal Justice Commission and its member organizations including the offices of the State Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriff, Judiciary, Clerk of Court, County Commission, Municipal Law Enforcement, Florida Department of Corrections, and School District, along with other government and community organizations.