

Allegheny County

2018 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

We've got a problem to fix:

- For many years, Allegheny County has been committed to making improvements to the local justice system. Though there has been marked progress, the data shows there is still more to be done to address disparities in the system and improve efficiency, particularly in case processing for those who are incarcerated.
- Admissions to the jail are down, but lengths of stay are up. From 2000 to 2018, the average length of stay at the jail increased from 38 to 70 days.
- The overuse of the jail takes an especially heavy toll on people of color. Despite making up only 13% of the local population, African Americans make up 49% of the jail population.
- The average length of supervision is 42 months, which is significantly longer than the national average of 22 months.
- Roughly 75% of the jail population has been identified as having a mental health or substance abuse issue. Those with a history of mental health treatment spend an average of 14 days longer in jail than those without that background.
- Overuse of detention causes disruption in the stability of arrestees' families and communities; it leads to higher re-arrest rates; and produces worse case outcomes with more back-end incarceration. 53% of men and 61% of women in the Allegheny County Jail are parents.

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

- Supported with \$2 million from the Safety and Justice Challenge, Allegheny County will implement additional forward-looking, smart solutions to address the misuse and overuse of the county jail and further reduce the local jail population by 20% over the next two years.
- To continue safely reducing the jail population, the county plans to implement at least seven key strategies aimed at addressing system inefficiencies and disparities, reducing admissions and length of stay, and better meeting the needs of those with behavioral health and substance abuse issues.
 - Key strategies will focus on increasing efficiencies in case processing, expanding public defense at bail hearings, diverting individuals to behavioral health and substance abuse treatment, and expanding pretrial assessments.
 - Strategies will touch all points of the system, ranging from providing representation at preliminary arraignment to requesting early probation termination for non-violent offenders. Our public safety partners have embraced strategies for diversion and more informed charging decisions. These policy-driven innovations will reduce jail usage while ensuring the county advances its commitment to increasing public safety.
 - Over the next two years the county will employ: 1) public representation and pretrial assessment to prevent unnecessary jail entries; 2) an increased focus on fair and efficient court processes that will reduce lengths of stay in the jail; 3) expanded diversion options for individuals with behavioral health issues; and 4) measures to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.
- In partnership with key stakeholders across the local justice system, the county will continue to evaluate our data dashboards for points of disparity to keep improving and effecting change.

- The county will also begin implementing additional strategies to reduce disparities and more deeply involve the community in local justice system reform. The goal is to have a jail that is physically changed and, when it is, will also consider using that unneeded space for other public goods that improve safety and justice.

Who is helping to affect change?

- The strategies and initiatives supported by the Safety and Justice Challenge are being led by Allegheny County – specifically, the County Executive and the President Judge who serve as Co-Chairs of the Criminal Justice Advisory and its other members, as well as the county’s Criminal Justice System Panel, which is composed of civic and community leaders.