

The Safety and Justice Challenge

Jail populations have more than tripled since the 1980s, as have cumulative expenditures related to building and running them. Despite growing national attention to the large number of Americans confined in state and federal prisons, significantly less attention has been paid to local justice systems, where the criminal justice system primarily operates and where over-incarceration begins.

The Safety and Justice Challenge is a major new initiative supported by the MacArthur Foundation to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. Through the Challenge, the Foundation is making an initial five-year \$75 million investment in local reform, research, experimentation, and communications in an effort to create national demand for local justice reform as a means of reducing over-incarceration in America.

At the center of the Challenge is a competition to support jurisdictions across the country working to safely reduce over-reliance on jails, with a particular focus on addressing disproportionate impact on low-income individuals and communities of color. The Foundation is funding 20 jurisdictions to design and implement plans for creating fairer, more effective local justice systems using innovative, collaborative, and evidence-based solutions.

The Challenge is engaging a diverse range of organizations and individuals—law enforcement, judges, prosecutors, defenders, policymakers, academia, advocates, and funders—to lend their insights and participation to this effort.

Why Jails?

There are nearly 12 million local jail admissions every year—almost 20 times the number of prison admissions, and equivalent to the populations of Los Angeles and New York City combined. While the primary purpose of jails is to detain those awaiting court proceedings who are a danger to public safety or a flight risk, they now hold many who are neither. Jails too often serve as warehouses for those too poor to post bail, nonviolent offenders, or people with mental illness.

- Most jail inmates—three out of five—are legally presumed innocent, awaiting trial or disposition through a plea in facilities that are often overcrowded and chaotic.
- Nearly 75 percent of the population of both sentenced offenders and pretrial detainees are in jail for nonviolent traffic, property, drug, or public order offenses.

Research shows that only a few days in jail can increase the likelihood of a sentence of incarceration, make such a sentence harsher, reduce economic viability, and promote future criminal behavior—making jail a gateway to further involvement with the criminal justice system. In thinking about the problem of over-incarceration, it is critical that we begin to focus on the contribution that local jails, and the systems that fill them, make.

For more information on the Challenge, please visit www.SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org.

What is the Safety and Justice Challenge Network?

The Safety and Justice Challenge supports a network of 20 competitively selected local jurisdictions committed to reducing the overreliance on jails in their communities. With support from the MacArthur Foundation and help from a consortium of national experts and technical assistance providers, Challenge Network sites will make policy, practice, and system alignment changes designed to reduce the use of jail incarceration, with a particular focus on addressing disproportionate impact on low-income individuals and communities of color.

The Challenge Network is comprised of 16 counties, three cities, and one state-wide system. Collectively, the jurisdictions account for 11 percent of the national confined population in jails.

The 20 Challenge Network sites are:

- Ada County, ID
- Charleston County, SC
- Cook County, IL
- Harris County, TX
- Los Angeles County, CA
- Lucas County, OH
- Mecklenburg County, NC
- Mesa County, CO
- Milwaukee County, WI
- Multnomah County, OR
- New Orleans, LA
- New York, NY
- Palm Beach County, FL
- Pennington County, SD
- Philadelphia, PA
- Pima County, AZ
- St. Louis County, MO
- Shelby County, TN
- Spokane County, WA
- State of Connecticut

How does the Safety and Justice Challenge Network work?

The Challenge Network sites were selected from a competitive pool of 191 applications from jurisdictions across 45 states and territories, with the help of external expert consultants. The 20 selected jurisdictions will receive a grant of \$150,000 and expert consulting help during a six-month collaborative planning round, during which they will build plans to create more fair and effective local justice systems. Beginning in 2016, as many as 10 of these jurisdictions will be selected for a second round of funding of up to \$2 million annually to support implementation of their jail reduction plans over two years.

What kinds of reforms are you hoping to see in selected jurisdictions?

The changes that will result from this work will be determined by the jurisdictions themselves, based upon their evaluations of problems, opportunities, and potential solutions within their local justice systems. Their work will reveal new and better ways of targeting resources, more effective risk assessment to determine if confinement is really necessary, and approaches that foster collaboration among justice system actors, as well as better public safety returns and social outcomes.

Which organizations are providing technical assistance to grantees?

Several of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations will provide technical assistance and counsel to Safety and Justice Challenge jurisdictions: the Center for Court Innovation, the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, and the Vera Institute of Justice.

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