

Milwaukee County Joins Behavioral Health-Focused Expansion of Local Criminal Justice Reform Efforts

Milwaukee County joins ten other communities in a collaborative effort to maximize learning about how to advance behavioral health reform and diversion across the criminal justice system

MILWAUKEE — July 14, 2021 – Today, Milwaukee County announced its selection to the IMPACT Network, a behavioral health-focused expansion of the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#) (SJC) supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The SJC IMPACT Network will use a peer-to-peer model to maximize what jurisdictions like Milwaukee County have learned about how to advance behavioral health reform and diversion across the criminal justice system.

Since joining the SJC initiative, criminal justice and behavioral health partners have introduced multiple strategies to support persons with mental health needs in Milwaukee County:

- Funded the first Crisis Assessment Response Team (CART) with countywide jurisdiction to prevent jail bookings tied to mental health crises;
- Created a mental health diversion process and recruited a behavioral health liaison to conduct assessments in custody and link people to community resources; and,
- Sponsored training and contracted for peer support services to help system-involved persons with mental health conditions.

Through the IMPACT Network, Milwaukee County will exchange lessons learned with other jurisdictions and conduct data analyses to better understand the needs of individuals who cycle through the criminal justice system, focusing on persons whose system involvement is connected to behavioral health. The information gained from the network will be used by system and community stakeholders to further coordinate resources and introduce policies, with the goal of improving and expanding the continuum of interventions for system-involved persons with mental health needs in Milwaukee County.

The SJC is a \$258 million national initiative funded by the MacArthur Foundation to support collaboration among local leaders and communities to reduce over-incarceration and eliminate racial disparities in local criminal justice systems by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. More than five years after its launch, the [Safety and Justice Challenge Network](#) has grown to 57 sites across 32 states modeling reform. Participating cities and counties are using data to identify key drivers of incarceration and racial inequities and working with diverse groups of community members, individuals who work in the justice system, and people with lived experience to develop impactful reforms. Milwaukee County joined the Safety and Justice Challenge in 2016.

The SJC Impact Network will integrate six cities and counties new to the SJC: Eau Claire County (WI), West Texas Centers/Howard County (TX), San Juan County (NM), Middlesex County (MA), Orange County (CA), and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. The six new cities and counties will join five communities already working to reduce over-incarceration of individuals with behavioral health needs in local criminal justice systems—Allegheny County (PA), East Baton Rouge (LA), Charleston County (SC), Milwaukee County (WI), and Pennington County (SD).

“For people suffering from serious mental illness, gaps in our services too often lead to contact with the criminal justice system,” said the executive leadership of the [Milwaukee Community Justice Council](#), the lead agency of the SJC initiative in Milwaukee County. “This is unnecessary, harmful, and avoidable. Our partnership with the MacArthur Foundation has allowed us to make great progress on this issue. We look forward to working alongside our new partners in the IMPACT Network, as we continue on our long journey towards addressing the challenges impacting the most vulnerable members of our community.”

The Safety and Justice Challenge brings together many of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations to provide technical assistance and counsel to the jurisdictions. [Policy Research, Inc.](#) (PRI) will oversee technical assistance to the behavioral health-focused IMPACT Network sites, in collaboration with multiple SJC partners.

"We know that men and women involved in the criminal justice system, and in local jails in particular, have rates of mental illness and other behavioral health needs that are several times that of the general population. PRI is excited to work with IMPACT Network sites to continue the SJC's vital work around community-based responses to the involvement of people with mental and substance use disorders in the criminal justice system," said Ashley Krider, Senior Project Associate at PRI.

"Jails were never intended to serve as warehouses for people with behavioral health needs, yet too many people end up there because of a lack of community services and access to care and treatment," said Laurie Garduque, MacArthur Foundation's Director of Criminal Justice. "Over the past five years, the Safety and Justice Challenge has safely reduced the ineffective and harmful use of jails, and we are committed to supporting cities and counties as they reimagine how people with behavioral health challenges can remain in the community."

More information about the work underway in Milwaukee County can be found on the [Milwaukee Community Justice Council website](#) as well as on www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org.

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About the Milwaukee Community Justice Council

Created by Milwaukee County Board resolution in 2007, the Milwaukee Community Justice Council (CJC) is made up of Milwaukee-area criminal justice agencies, local governments, and residents working collaboratively to ensure a fair, efficient, and effective justice system that enhances public safety and quality of life in our community. Though initially created to enhance coordination and collaboration among criminal justice agencies, local leadership included "community justice" in the CJC name to emphasize the importance of including community and community priorities in its work. The CJC is committed to fostering opportunities for diverse perspectives to be heard and establishing collaborative, transparent decision-making around criminal justice policy. The Council is governed by an Executive Committee, comprised of the leadership from participating criminal justice organizations. Milwaukee County Circuit Court Chief Judge Mary Triggiano is the current CJC chair. The Council hosts bi-monthly meetings, which are open to the public. More information on the Council can be found at milwaukee.gov/cjc.

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