

Milwaukee County 2016 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

We've got a problem to fix:

- Nearly half of all of Milwaukee's 33,000 plus jail bookings arise from misdemeanor arrests.
- Roughly a third of the jail population is on psychotropic medication to help address mental health issues, some of which are exacerbated by the recent increase in opiate abuse.
- There is also a high level of trauma in the community that significantly impacts the jail population; for example, the District Attorney's office reviews, on average, 7,500 misdemeanor domestic violence cases every year.
- What's more, more than a third (38 percent) of Milwaukee County's jail population is pretrial, with an average length of stay for those awaiting trial rising to 25 days in 2014.
- African Americans and Hispanics make up just under half (41%) the population of Milwaukee County, and yet comprise almost 70% of the local jail population.
- In recent years (2013-2015), nearly half (44 percent) of crisis dispatches and calls for mental health service have originated from African American residents in the city.

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

- To address the overuse of jails, Milwaukee County will be using the \$2 million awarded by the Safety and Justice Challenge over the next two years to reduce its average daily jail population by focusing on three policy areas that will: reduce the length of stay for low-level non-violent misdemeanants; divert individuals with mental health and substance abuse issues to alternatives that will help prevent them from cycling in and out of Milwaukee's criminal justice system; and provide more trauma-informed response, education and options to justice system stakeholders.
- For example, this will include employing a number of innovative and commonsense strategies such as implementing a book and release program in Milwaukee city for low-level non-violent misdemeanor offenses that is already in use in Milwaukee's suburban districts, and taking an integrated approach to mental health services that will allow the county to share data across agencies and provide law-enforcement with enhanced resources and alternatives other than arrest and jail.
- Milwaukee will also develop and implement a new trauma strategy which is unprecedented and expected to make headway in addressing racial and ethnic disparities in the system while also helping to appropriately drive down the county's overall jail population.

Who is helping to affect change?

- This reform effort is being led by the Milwaukee Community Justice Council, which is made up of a diverse group of stakeholders and champions, they include: Chief Judge Hon. Maxine A. White, Milwaukee City Police Department Chief of Police Edward A. Flynn, District Attorney John T. Chisholm, Wisconsin State Public Defender Tom Reed, House of Correction Superintendent Michael Hafemann, Department of Corrections Regional Chief Niel Thoreson, County Executive Chris Abele, Mayor Tom Barrett, Behavioral Health Director Hector Colon, community leaders, and many others. This important group of community leaders worked diligently and collaboratively during Phase I to develop a strong plan to support the strategic reform efforts.