

Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) 2016 Safety and Justice Challenge Fact Sheet

We've got a problem to fix:

- The average daily population in jails across South Carolina has exceeded capacity since 1989. Although Charleston County has been working to buck this statewide trend, decreasing its daily jail population by 40 percent between 2008 and 2015 (down to 1,118), it is focused on creating a more effective criminal justice system and further reducing the population of its jail.
- The main drivers of the Charleston County's jail population are bookings for low-level offenses such as public intoxication, driving under suspension or simple possession of marijuana, and extended jail stays due to use of financial bonds and court processing delays. In fact, as much as 70 percent of Charleston County's average jail population is awaiting trial, sometimes for as long as 191 days.
- Many of these drivers also have a disproportionate impact on African Americans, who are arrested nearly three times as often as Whites in Charleston County. The disproportionality is even greater for offenses such as simple possession of marijuana, loitering or trespassing, with African Americans arrested nearly seven times as often as Whites.
- People suffering from mental illness, substance abuse and homelessness are among the most frequent users of the jail, often cycling through multiple times for low-level offenses. In 2013-2014, 631 of these chronic users occupied 78,345 bed-days in the jail, each being detained an average of 62 days a year.

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

- To transform how our community uses jail in Charleston County, the CJCC will refine policing practices, increase alternatives to jail for people suffering from mental illness, substance abuse and homelessness, pilot an automated court reminder system, enhance the bond setting process, increase expedite access to counsel, and improve case processing efficiency. These reforms, supported by \$2.25 million from the Safety and Justice Challenge, will help reduce Charleston County's average daily jail population by 25 percent over the next three years, while also making our system fairer and more effective.
- For example, Charleston County is developing a risk-based decision tool to provide law enforcement a uniform approach during decisions to arrest for low level offenses. Usage of this tool will ensure law enforcement decisions are based on standardized, validated assessments of risk and, as a result, reduce bookings for the most frequent charges where racial disproportionalities are greatest, such as driver offenses. This strategy also includes neighborhood-based problem-solving with local residents.
- Charleston County will launch a Triage Center service, where access to jail alternatives are provided for individuals suffering from mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness during pre- and post-booking.
- Charleston County will launch a risk-based pretrial management system to ensure the decision for pretrial release or detention is based on standardized assessments of risk. The county will also expedite indigence screening, improve access to counsel, reduce time to disposition, and support public safety.
- Throughout all of the above, Charleston County will also improve the system's use of data for continuous improvement and accountability.

Who is helping to affect change?

- While the Charleston County Sheriff's Office serves as the administrative lead, the reforms outlined in the Safety and Justice Challenge are being implemented by the Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, a diverse group of stakeholders and champions, including elected and appointed officials, law enforcement leaders, judicial and court leadership, behavioral health professionals, various community leaders and many more.