

Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon and Jail Use: An Overview of Firearm-Related Bookings in Charleston County

Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

Use of Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon – Description and History

Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon is just one of many charges utilized by law enforcement agencies in Charleston County involving firearm possession violations. Within the scope of these gun-related charges, *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* (SC Code Annotated, Section 16-23-20) has been identified as the top reoccurring charge throughout multiple categories monitored by the Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) for 2023.

Over the past two years, firearm possession violations have led the most frequently occurring charges at the Sheriff Al Cannon Detention Center (SACDC) and were the second most frequent occurring charges in both 2020 and 2019 (CJCC Annual Report, 2022).

The Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council's (CJCC) Divert & Deflect Workgroup has identified *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* as a charge where circumstances need to be further explored. Of the 1,332 individuals who have been booked within SACDC this year on at least one of the 26 gun-related charges observed, 56% of those are *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon*.

Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon – The Most Frequently Booked Charge

Between January and October 2023, the most frequently booked charge (*Figure 1*) and most frequently booked single charge at the SACDC is *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon*. Most frequently booked single charge is defined as an instance where the charge of *Unlawful Carrying* is the sole charge present on the booking submission for a defendant. As of October 31 2023, these charges appear as follows:

- *Unlawful Carrying as a Most Frequently Booked Charge Count: 742.*
- *Unlawful Carrying as a Most Frequently Booked Single Charge Count: 245.*

Reader Note. Data spans from January 1, 2023 – October 31, 2023, unless otherwise specified. Data derives from the Sheriff Al Cannon Detention Center (SACDC) and represents adult (18+) bookings/charges. Charge descriptions are reflective of SACDC records. Individuals may be processed into the detention center on multiple charges or bookings at the same time.

Most Frequently Booked Charges: Year to Date 2023

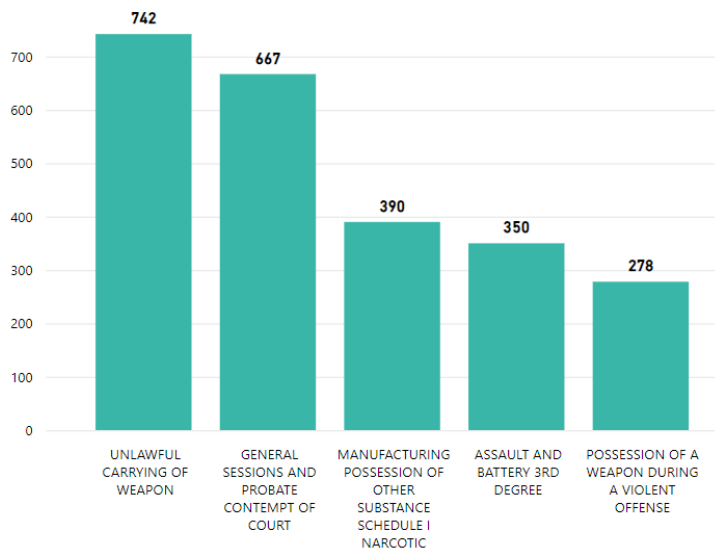


Figure 1. Most Frequently Booked Charges

Individual Most Frequently Booked Charges: Year to Date 2023

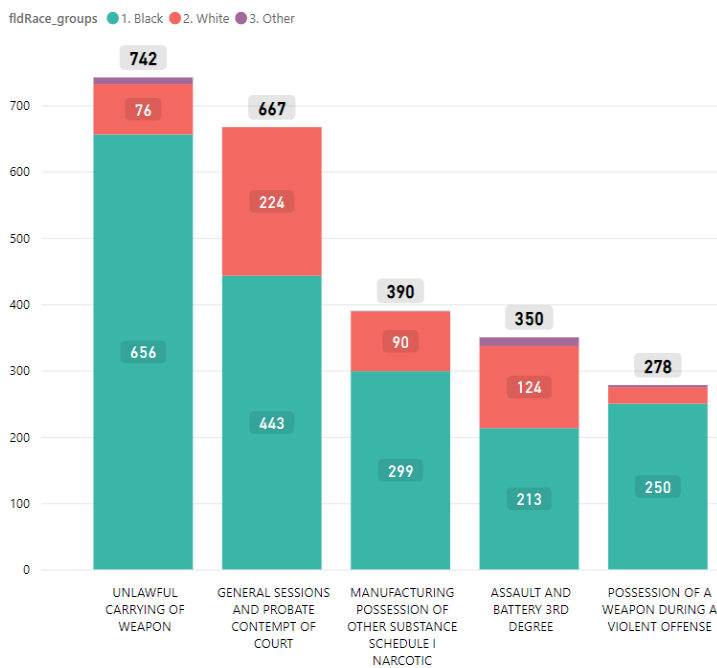


Figure 2. Individual Most Frequently Booked Charges

As noted in previous CJCC Annual Report publications, an individual may be booked into the detention center on multiple charges. Therefore, it is important to also review the use of *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* at the individual level (Figure 2). Of those booked into SACDC on *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* charges, individuals are predominately male (90-92%) and Black (88-91%).

In examining the age of those booked into the detention center, *Table 1* demonstrates *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* as the most frequently booked charge across all age groups, comprising a total of 31% of all incoming charges to date. Further, *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* is the most frequent charge for those 34 years old and younger and the most frequently booked single charge for those under 44 years old.

Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon – SACDC Year to Date			
		Single Charge Use	Most Frequent Charge Use
Gender	Male	90%	92%
	Female	10%	8%
	Other	<1%	< 1%
Race	Black	91%	88%
	White	7%	10%
	Other	2%	1%
Age Range	< 25	49%	47%
	25-34	27%	32%
	35-44	29%	18%
	> 44	-	-
Total (Top Five)			31%

Table 1. Percentages are based upon the top five booking charges for each age group. Decimals rounded to the nearest whole number. No *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* charges were recorded for Ages >44. Bold font represents where *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* charge was the top booking charge for the identified category.

Evidence to Action – Next Steps to Consider

Examining Charleston County’s current jail use provides insight into how data can inform action to the pursuit of public safety. This insight provides a basic awareness of booking activity at the local level, but it is necessary to look at circumstances within the community to expand our perspective involving *Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon* charges. For example, the data discussed is comprised of adult (18+) bookings and does not capture numbers involving juveniles, which could reveal to be a significant proportion of activity within the area. In addition, missing from snapshot information, is the ability to explore underlying socioeconomic factors and determinants not traditionally incorporated into standard data entry platforms. This additional type of information would require undertaking qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, to draw out factors not easily quantified.

The ability to better explore how and why the *Unlawful Carry* charge is used locally will help determine appropriate tactics, such as evaluating the need for firearm-possession education or identifying underlying causes and motivations as to why firearms are being unlawfully possessed. This would include exploring how firearms are accessed and effective deterrents from unlawful possession. Ultimately, additional insight into the *Unlawful Carry* charge can influence legislation, which guides how laws are enforced and the subsequent penalties for violations.

Moving forward, the CJCC is committed to continuing data collaboration efforts and fostering partnerships at the local level. Data sharing amongst stakeholders will help fill in the gaps to identify additional questions, needed answers, and clear next steps. Through such evidence-based practices, Charleston County and its citizens will be better served.

To learn more about the Charleston County CJCC and view previous publications, visit cjcc.charlestoncounty.org

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