

Reducing the Revolving Door of Incarceration and Homelessness in the District of Columbia: Cost of Services

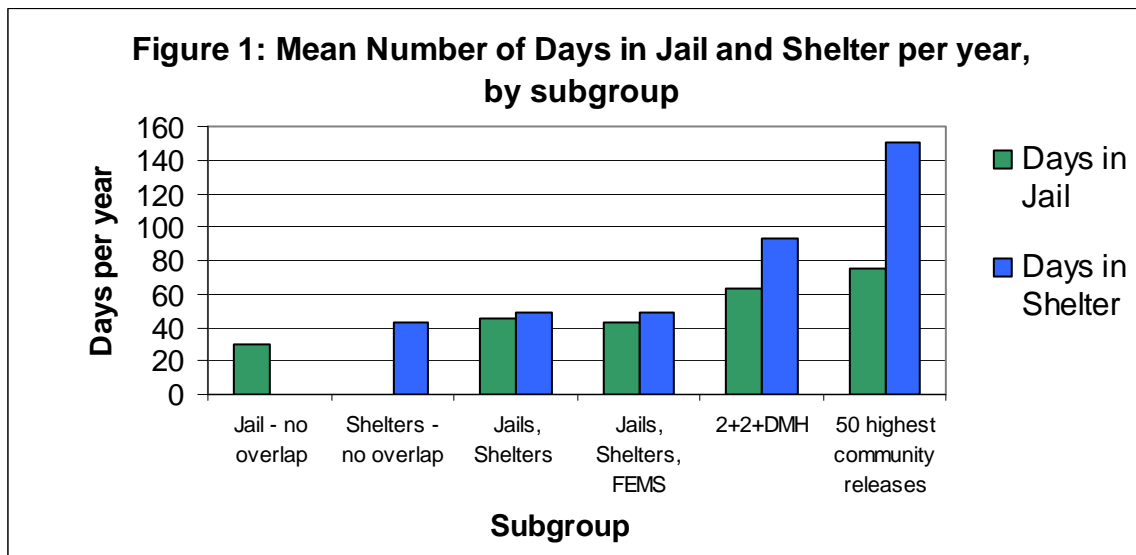
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To calculate the cost of jail, shelter, and FEMS services for people who are likely to use two or all three systems, and to use them frequently, we first need to know how much service they use, and then what each unit of service costs.

Table 1 shows how many days, on average, people with different patterns of service use spent in jail and shelter during the months covered by available data. Figure 1 shows the average days in jail and shelter for the different groups, per person per year.

Table 1: Time and Money				
For people who use:	Average days in jail, per person (over 42 months)	Average days in shelters, per person (over 24 months)	Average cost per person per year for these services ¹	Average total cost per person for these services ¹
1. Jail only	108	--	\$ 3,408	\$12,269
2. Shelter only	--	86	\$ 519	\$ 1,038
3. Jail and shelter, no FEMS	118	98	\$ 5,728	\$14,588
4. All three	148	99	\$ 8,719 ²	\$21,070 ²
5. 2+ jail, 2+ shelter, and DMH eligible	219	186	\$12,312 ³	\$27,386 ³
6. 50 highest users who went to the community on latest release	257	300	\$15,261 ⁴	\$33,287 ⁴

¹Does *not* include cost of health, mental health, or other care/treatment while homeless and is calculated using slightly more than 24 months of shelter use.
²Average of 4 FEMS calls a year; ³Average of 0.35 FEMS calls a year; ⁴Average of 0.62 FEMS calls a year.



Details for Table 1:

1. The 30,340 people who only stayed in jail (i.e., did not use public shelters) were in jail an average of 108 days over 42 months, and each cost DOC \$12,269.
2. The 26,709 people who only stayed in shelters (i.e., had no jail time during the observation period) used shelters an average of 86 days over 24 months, and each cost DHS \$1,038.
3. The 1,924 people who stayed in both jail and shelters, but had no FEMS record, on average used 118 days of jail in 42 months and 98 days of shelter in 24 months, and each cost DOC and DHS \$14,588 for the time covered by the data.
4. The 317 people who stayed in both jail and shelters and DID have an FEMS record on average used 148 days of jail in 42 months, 99 days of shelter in 24 months, and had 4 FEMS calls¹ a year. They each cost the three systems a total of \$21,070 for the time covered by the data.
5. The 206 people with more than one stay in jail and more than one stay in shelter, who were also DMH eligible, used an average of 219 jail days in 42 months, 186 shelter days in 24 months, and 0.35 FEMS calls a year, and each cost the three systems \$27,386 for the time covered by the data.
6. The 50 people with the highest combined jail and shelter use (at least 160 days in jail and 100 in shelter) who went to the community at their most recent release used an average of 257 jail days in 42 months, 300 shelter days in 24 months, and 0.62 FEMS calls a year. They each cost the three systems \$33,287 for the time covered by the data.

How we calculated Days of Service Use:

Because our data sets cover different time periods—FY2005–FY2007 and half of FY2008 for DOC, FY2006–FY2007 for HMIS, and 8 months of 2008 for FEMS— we transformed all information into “average yearly use.” We divided an individual’s total number of days spent in jail and shelter over the total number of days possible within the time frame of our data sets and multiplied the results by 365 days. For shelters, this is the average number of days spent in shelter per year for the two years of HMIS data we have. For jail data, we knew total number of days in jail during FY2005–FY2007 and the first half of FY2008 for those who exited by March 31, 2008 and calculated accordingly.

How we calculated Per Year Cost

Using the average number of days in shelter and jail during the scope of our data, it is possible to get a sense of the relative per person costs to the District of Columbia. Averaging DOC costs per inmate over the years in question, the Urban Institute found the average daily cost to be approximately \$113 a day, including housing, healthcare, and food expenses. The Community Partnership puts the average daily cost per client of emergency shelter at \$12.08. FEMS estimates that for all calls it responds to, 60% result in a transport, for which 64% require Basic Life Support (BLS) and 35% require Advanced Life Support (ALS). FEMS estimates that BLS and ALS transports cost an average of \$1000 and \$1,200, respectively, and non-transport costs are on average around \$300. These numbers are informal estimates, however, and are used here only to provide an approximate cost. From these cost estimates, Urban Institute researchers multiplied out overall costs per year, multiplying per day and call costs and average number of days and calls per subgroup. The estimates provided today are well below the true cost of each subgroup, however, and should be used for relative comparisons only. Public outlays for medical, mental health, and other treatment/care costs associated with the shelter, FEMS, and jail populations would significantly increase the estimates.

¹ FEMS calls have been annualized based on the 8 month period of data used in this analysis.