

SAFETY AND JUSTICE CHALLENGE CASE STUDY

Using Data to Change the Use of Jails

Implementation Lessons from Charleston County, South Carolina, and St. Louis County, Missouri

Jesse Jannetta
May 2022

Storm Ervin



ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Urban Institute is a leading research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people's lives and strengthen communities. For 50 years, Urban has been the trusted source for rigorous analysis of complex social and economic issues; strategic advice to policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners; and new, promising ideas that expand opportunities for all. Our work inspires effective decisions that advance fairness and enhance the well-being of people and places.



**CUNY INSTITUTE
FOR STATE & LOCAL
GOVERNANCE**

ABOUT THE CUNY INSTITUTE FOR STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

ISLG is committed to partnering with today's and tomorrow's leaders to ensure government and public institutions work and operate more equitably, effectively, and efficiently. These leaders are the critical voices within and around government and public institutions—elected officials, policymakers, and senior staff at government agencies, and the community-based organizations who help social policies and systems respond to on-the-ground needs and realities. We develop the research, policies, partnerships, training, and infrastructure to help them govern better.



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

This report was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

www.SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org

Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Using Data to Change the Use of Jails	1
Use of Data in Charleston County	4
Enhancing Local Data Capacity in Charleston County	5
Data Analysis to Guide Strategy Development	6
Measuring Performance and Communicating Using Data	12
Use of Data and System Impacts in Charleston County	14
Use of Data in St. Louis County	18
Enhancing Local Data Capacity	19
Data and the Jail Population Review Team	20
Public Communication of Data	24
Use of Data and System Impacts	25
Common Themes from Charleston and St. Louis Counties	27
Notes	31
References	32
About the Authors	33
Statement of Independence	34

Acknowledgments

This case study was funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, and developed in collaboration with the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples.

We thank the SJC partners in Charleston and St. Louis Counties for their partnership in developing this case study. We are grateful to everyone who participated in the interviews. The authors appreciate the partnership from the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance, from the early stages of conceptualizing this work through assistance with relevant system data and review and advice on the case study. We would also like to extend our special thanks to Ashlin Oglesby-Neal for providing review and feedback on this case study.

Using Data to Change the Use of Jails

Millions of people enter and exit local jails in the United States each year, making jail incarceration the country's most common type of incarceration experience. Even brief periods of jail incarceration have a wide range of negative effects (such as disruption to employment and family connections) on people who experience it (Dobbie, Goldin, and Yang 2018; Lowenkamp, VanNostrand, and Holsinger 2013; Stevenson 2018s).¹ Moreover, jails in many places are antiquated, understaffed, and unsafe, resulting in high rates of victimization for people incarcerated in them. And although racial disparities in jail populations have decreased in recent years, these disparities are still very high, as Black people are jailed at a rate of 600 per 100,000 Black US residents, Latinx people at a rate of 176 per 100,000 Latinx US residents, and white people at a rate of 184 per 100,000 white US residents (Zheng and Minton 2021). For these reasons, many local justice reform efforts are focusing on rethinking how jails are used and reducing jail populations and disparities.

Among the most prominent of these reform efforts is the Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC), a multiyear, multisite effort funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to change how jails are used in the United States (box 1). The central goals of the SJC are reducing jail populations and reducing racial and ethnic disparities in jail populations. For SJC sites to realize those goals locally they need to understand what drives their jail populations, where to target interventions to address those dynamics, whether interventions are functioning as intended, and whether interventions are generating system impact. They also need to communicate what they are doing to the broader public to secure and maintain buy-in and support system accountability. Effective use of data is necessary for all of these efforts.

BOX 1

The Safety and Justice Challenge Implementation Case Studies

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation launched the Safety and Justice Challenge in 2015 to address the misuse and overuse of jails, a main driver of mass incarceration in the United States. The cities, counties, and states participating in the SJC are working to rethink their local justice systems with strategies that are intended to be data driven, equity focused, and community informed and that safely reduce jail populations, eliminate ineffective and unfair practices, and reduce racial disparities. This case study is part of a series that examines how SJC network jurisdictions that received significant, sustained grant investment in comprehensive system reform worked to change the way they use jails. The case studies provide practical insights for other localities seeking to realize similar reforms.

Data relevant to these questions have to come from multiple data systems covering a jurisdiction's jail (or jails), courts, law enforcement, community supervision, and various social services systems. Local crime levels, law enforcement arrest practices and enforcement priorities, parole and probation responses to supervision violations, and availability of effective services to address issues such as addiction, mental health crises, or homelessness all affect a jurisdiction's levels of jail bookings. And pretrial release practices, speed of case processing, sentencing decisions, and supervision revocation decisions all affect how long people stay in jail. The complexity of system factors affecting the jail population requires collaboration and the integration of data across multiple systems.

For these reasons, understanding what facilitated or challenged SJC local reform work in a jurisdiction requires understanding how data were used. This case study examines how Charleston County, South Carolina, and St. Louis County, Missouri, use data to inform their work to reduce jail populations there (box 2 discusses other cross-site data analysis and evaluation activities related to the work in SJC sites). Each jurisdiction enhanced its capacity to obtain, integrate, analyze, and distribute data through SJC participation and used its data capacity to change its jail population. To develop this case study, we conducted semistructured interviews with stakeholders involved in the SJC work in both jurisdictions from May through August 2021. The interviews, which were typically an hour in length and conducted virtually,² covered local reform and SJC context, collaboration and partner roles, operational elements of data use (collection, analysis, integration), engagement of stakeholders and the public around data, facilitators of and barriers to using the data, and perceived impacts of the use of data on local justice practice and outcomes. The interview sample was identified in consultation with local SJC site coordinators and via recommendations from interview participants. Urban conducted 11 interviews in Charleston County and 7 in St. Louis County. Interview participants had different

connections to local justice reform efforts and jail use, including via the courts, prosecutors' and defenders' offices, law enforcement, jail, criminal justice coordinating councils (CJCCs), pretrial services, community advocacy organizations, and SJC technical assistance providers. We supplemented the interviews with reviews of internal and public-facing reports, Charleston County CJCC publications and minutes, and other relevant documentation of progress.

Charleston and St. Louis Counties strengthened their local reform efforts through the way they operationalized data. They used data to define problems, create shared understandings of those problems among partners from different agencies, define populations of focus, guide the development of jail population reduction strategies, set foundations for measuring performance, and contribute to community engagement around the SJC work. We begin this case study by focusing on each of the two featured jurisdictions, discussing how they built data capacity and used data in their SJC work and summarizing the system impacts of their use of data. We conclude by synthesizing common themes and lessons across both sites.

BOX 2

Cross-Site Data Analysis and Evaluation in the Safety and Justice Challenge

This case study focuses on local use of data, but it is important to note that local data analysis in SJC sites is complemented by a number of cross-site investments in the gathering and reporting of data to better understand that work from a nationwide perspective.

Sites receiving the highest level of grant support in the SJC are required to submit case-level data to the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, which uses this data to develop and report metrics around key system decision points that have a substantial impact on the jail population, including measures of disparities at those points. It reported these metrics for 14 SJC sites in a 2020 report covering postbaseline changes over the first three years of SJC implementation (ISLG 2020). It has also produced public analyses of the relationship between jail incarceration and public safety (ISLG 2021a) and jail population trends during the COVID-19 pandemic (ISLG 2021b).

Moreover, several research and evaluation efforts have examined the work done in the SJC sites. RTI International evaluated the SJC as a whole early in its implementation, comparing its impacts on justice measures in SJC sites with comparison sites, and it also examined public awareness of issues related to jail populations and support for local justice reform.^a Subsequently, this evaluation effort has been continued and expanded by NORC at the University of Chicago. In addition, the MacArthur Foundation has created a research consortium to undertake more focused research and evaluation studies of work in the SJC sites. Several studies are underway, and consortium partners have produced reports on the impact of bail reform in Cook County (Stemen and Olson 2020) and misdemeanor diversion in Durham County (Lawrence et al. 2021).

All these publications are accessible at safetyandjusticechallenge.org, where subsequent research reports analyzing impacts and trends in the SJC sites will also be released.

^a A report covering findings from that evaluation is available at <https://safetyandjusticechallenge.org/resources/reducing-the-misuse-and-overuse-of-jails-in-safety-and-justice-challenge-sites/>.

Use of Data in Charleston County

Charleston County laid the groundwork for mobilizing data to guide local reform in 2015 when it formed a criminal justice coordinating council, established a CJCC charter, received a Safety and Justice Challenge grant, and hired a project director to guide that work (Charleston County CJCC 2016). In addition, its early SJC work substantially enhanced its infrastructure for system-level cross-agency collaboration, which interview respondents described as having been minimal in Charleston County before 2015. Charleston County partners adopted six initial core strategies for changing the use of jail in their SJC efforts (Charleston County CJCC 2017):

1. implement a risk assessment for law enforcement to support greater uniformity in arrest decisions for low-level charges
2. identify and create appropriate real-time alternatives to jail for individuals living with addictions, mental illness, and/or homelessness through a triage service located within the Tri-County Crisis Stabilization Center
3. launch an automated court date reminder system to increase court appearances and lower the need for criminal bench warrants
4. implement a pretrial risk assessment for bond setting to be more risk based and less dependent upon the financial circumstance of defendants and make public defenders available to provide representation at bond hearings for those who qualify
5. redesign expectations for the timeliness of case processing in felony and high-level-misdemeanor cases
6. create a centralized database where all agencies can share information and use data analysis to guide ongoing improvements

Ensuring the “right” people were in jail was a primary motivation for Charleston County's decision to reduce its jail population and address jail incarceration disparities. County stakeholders shared a concern that the jail was holding people whose incarceration had little public safety benefit, including

those with low-level alleged offenses, those experiencing adverse social factors (such as unaddressed mental health problems) that were driving their criminal legal system involvement, and people experiencing poverty who could not afford to post bond for pretrial release. Although jail overcrowding was not a motivation (the Sheriff Al Cannon Detention Center population was below capacity and some stakeholders described it as having been “overbuilt”), some stakeholders saw a financial incentive for the county to reduce the jail population. In addition to these motivations specific to the jail population, stakeholders described feeling a need for a collective reexamining of local justice in Charleston County in the aftermath of two traumatic local incidents: the murders of nine Black people who attended the Mother Emanuel AME Church and the killing of Walter Scott by police officer Michael Slager in North Charleston.

Enhancing Local Data Capacity in Charleston County

In addition to setting up the data warehouse that was its sixth SJC strategy, Charleston County enhanced its capacity for making data-driven change by hiring CJCC staff to integrate, analyze, and communicate data and by obtaining commitments from multiple agencies to share those data (Charleston County CJCC 2017).

The CJCC staff worked with contributing agencies to ensure that the data were in a usable, consistent, and shareable form. Stakeholders reported that the datasets they needed existed but that many of the data systems were designed to monitor what was happening in individual cases, and getting the data into a form that could be used for analysis to guide system-level understanding took substantial work in the early stages of SJC participation. By the end of 2016, there were a dozen different data systems contributing to the CJCC’s data warehouse, and by 2021 this had expanded to 15 (table 1).

We had to start with what data was available and we realized that a lot of data is there, but is not collected in a way that’s useable. –Charleston County stakeholder

TABLE 1

Sources of Data for the Charleston County CJCC Data Warehouse

Area	Data sources
Law enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Charleston Police Department ▪ Charleston County Sheriff's Office ▪ Mount Pleasant Police Department ▪ North Charleston Police Department
Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Charleston County clerk of court ▪ Charleston County magistrates ▪ Charleston Municipal Court ▪ Mount Pleasant Municipal Court ▪ North Charleston Municipal Court ▪ Ninth Circuit Defender's Office ▪ Ninth Circuit Solicitor's Office
Jail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sheriff Al Cannon Detention Center (Charleston County Sheriff's Office)
Pretrial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Court Reminder System^a ▪ Pretrial Services Database^a
Community-based services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Charleston Dorchester Mental Health Department

Sources: Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council 2016 and 2021 annual reports.

Notes: CJCC = Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.

^a Added after initial warehouse launch.

Data Analysis to Guide Strategy Development

Charleston County began its SJC efforts to reduce its jail population and change the way it used its jail with an extensive analysis of data on the local justice system, and followed that foundational analysis work with subsequent efforts to shape the initial SJC strategies (table 2). Through this work, supported by the initial SJC planning grant in 2015, the county examined 2014 data to guide the development of strategies and set a baseline to measure progress and change against. This analysis relied heavily on external consultants from the Justice Management Institute, which put 500 hours into the analysis, and involved collaboration with CJCC and partner agency staff (Charleston County CJCC 2017). An external analytical partner was necessary in part because Charleston County's CJCC was in the early stages of building the data capacity that would allow the CJCC to lead data collection and analysis work in subsequent years.

The county used results of that analysis to develop core SJC strategies on several fronts. One particularly catalytic finding was low-level charges constituted a substantial proportion (22 percent) of jail bookings (Charleston County CJCC 2016). The analysis zeroed in on the five most prevalent low-level charges: loitering, misdemeanor shoplifting, simple possession of marijuana, trespassing, and possession of an open container of alcohol. These common booking charges were not only of minimal public safety import according to interview respondents, they were also characterized by large racial

disparities. Black people were booked for simple possession of marijuana and loitering/trespassing 6.9 times as often as white people and for misdemeanor shoplifting and possessing open containers of alcohol more than twice as often (Charleston County CJCC 2016).

Stakeholders we interviewed for this case study highlighted the importance of these findings and emphasized how they led directly to a cite-and-release strategy that impacted jail bookings. Some recalled being surprised by what the analysis showed about who was being held in the jail, and others recalled how sharing the data with leaders in the local Black community elicited an intense emotional reaction from them, which one respondent said involved “Grown men crying...The emotion was so real and honest.” This response added motivation for translating the analysis into action.

Not bringing people for lower-level stuff. Data drove that hands down. It was also reinforced when we looked at it from a race lens. –Charleston County interview participant

The initial analysis also focused on people who were experiencing frequent jail stays. Examining the jail population on a single day, 16 percent of individuals detained were found to have met the “chronic offender” (later, “familiar faces”) criterion of having experienced five or more jail bookings in a two-year period,³ and another 30 percent were at risk of meeting it (Charleston County CJCC 2016). Among individuals booked into the jail five or more times in 2013 and 2014, just over a third had been assessed by a mental health professional while incarcerated in the jail, and 73 percent of those assessed had been referred for services. Of the people booked five or more times in 2013 and 2014, 70 percent were Black. The county responded to those findings with an SJC strategy focused on providing alternatives to jail at the point of law enforcement contact (through triage) for people experiencing addiction, mental illness, and/or homelessness; this strategy was later complemented by a pilot intervention to work with familiar faces in the jail. This familiar faces population was examined more deeply in a 2019 analysis that combined jail and pretrial services data to better understand its demographic characteristics and criminal histories.

Lastly, the initial analysis also focused on the related issues of pretrial detention and case processing, which were critical for reducing the jail population because 85 percent of Charleston County’s 2014 average daily jail population (or 79 percent when excluding the federal detention population) consisted of individuals detained pretrial (Charleston County CJCC 2021). One focus of the

analysis was the distribution of bond types for people detained pretrial between personal recognizance and financial bonds. The majority of 2014 bond hearings in the magistrate and municipal courts which handle lower-level charges resulted in personal recognizance bonds (though a slight majority of bonds in the North Charleston Municipal Court were financial), but in the General Sessions court where more serious charges are adjudicated, 80 percent of bonds were financial. Time to disposition was an acute issue for the General Sessions courts, where the median time to disposition was 325 days, meaning that people who were failing to post bond (or who took a long time to do so) might be held in the jail for a long time. The length of time it took for defendants to be assigned defense counsel, which was in turn related to whether they were screened for indigence in the jail, emerged from the analysis as an important additional driver of length of stay. These findings supported the development of two of Charleston's initial SJC strategies: one incorporating pretrial risk assessment and the assignment of counsel at bond hearings, and one aiming to making case processing for more serious charges faster.

Analysis of racial disparities in pretrial outcomes found small differences in rates at which financial bonds were imposed (as opposed to personal recognizance bonds), and in the bond amounts imposed when financial bonds were used. However, Black defendants were arrested for criminal bench warrants (i.e., arrests for failure to appear in court) five times as often as white defendants, which an initial SJC strategy to implement automatic court date reminders was intended to mitigate.

These analyses all provided important initial guidance for Charleston County's SJC strategies. They also surfaced gaps and shortcomings in the data relevant to each strategy (Charleston County CJCC 2016). Information needed to understand risk, need, and responsivity factors for everyone in the jail was not initially available, limiting the county's ability to identify the intervention targets that might mitigate frequent jail bookings. Data on Latinx identity among justice-involved people were too inconsistent to support efforts to understand disparities in their justice involvement equivalent to what was possible for Black and white people, which is a pervasive issue nationwide.⁴ In the analysis of case processing, the time it took for discovery was identified as a problem, but the available data did not support the tracking of timeliness for this part of the process. Addressing identified data gaps became part of the Charleston County CJCC's work, and as an example, a measure of time to discovery has been part of the CJCC's data tracking and public reporting for several years (Charleston County CJCC 2021). Identification of data gaps has also guided CJCC partner agencies in improving the data they capture. Such data improvements in the Ninth Circuit Solicitor's Office provided the basis for in-depth analysis of disparity in prosecution in Charleston.⁵

The Charleston County CJCC has devoted attention to using data to better understand the contours of racial disproportionality and disparity in the county's adult justice system,⁶ including a

deep-dive analysis on this topic examining data for 2017 (Charleston County CJCC 2018). That analysis included the calculation of the relative rate index (RRI), which compares measures of justice involvement for Black people relative to white people. An RRI greater than 1.0 for a particular outcome indicates that Black people experience that outcome at a higher rate than white people. The Charleston County CJCC examined topline measures such as jail incarceration (for which the Black incarceration rate was 7.7 times the white incarceration rate), as well as metrics associated with jail bookings for targeted low-level charges and arrests for criminal bench warrants, for which the RRIs for Black people were 2.6 and 5.2, respectively, relative to white people. The analysis also looked at bond-setting metrics such as bond type, bond amount, and length of stay for people for whom financial bond was set. RRIs on the bond-related measures were very close to 1.0 in most of these cases, indicating minimal disparity, and measures varied in the direction of the disparity. In 2020, the Charleston County CJCC convened a workgroup called the Community Engagement and Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality and Disparity Workgroup, and among their initiatives was to update the 2018 analysis of disproportionality and disparity.

TABLE 2

Charleston County’s Major SJC Data Collection and Analysis Efforts

Data collection and analysis effort	Included components	Charleston County SJC efforts based on results	Sources for more detail
Phase 1 data analysis (summer/fall 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prevalence of low-level single or double charges, and relative rate index by race ▪ Frequency of referrals for mental health services among those assessed by mental health professional while incarcerated in the jail ▪ Racial disparity in criminal bench warrants ▪ Type of bond imposed (personal recognizance versus financial), median amount of financial bond imposed, median time to case disposition ▪ Median time to case disposition 	<p>Development of initial six Charleston County SJC strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. assessment tool for law enforcement to support greater uniformity in arrest decisions for low-level charges 2. appropriate real-time alternatives to jail for individuals living with addiction, mental illness, and/or homelessness through a triage service 3. automated court date reminder system to increase court appearances and lower the need for criminal bench warrants 4. pretrial risk assessment for bond setting to be more risk-based and less dependent upon the financial circumstances of defendants and make public defenders available to provide representation at bond hearings for those who qualify 5. Redesigned expectations for the timeliness of case processing in felony and high-level-misdemeanor cases 6. Centralized database where all agencies can share information and use data analysis to guide ongoing improvements 	<p>Charleston County CJCC phase one final report</p> <p>Charleston County CJCC 2016 annual report</p>
Baseline pretrial outcome study (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ type of bonds set ▪ outcomes for people released pretrial by bond type ▪ reasons for return to jail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ introduction of PSR and training of and outreach to bond court stakeholders on analysis findings and expectations for PSR introduction ▪ development of FY 2021–23 strategic plan 	<p>Charleston County CJCC pretrial outcomes study infographic</p> <p>Charleston County CJCC 2017 annual report</p> <p>Charleston County CJCC data behind the development of FY 2021–23 strategic plan</p>

Data collection and analysis effort	Included components	Charleston County SJC efforts based on results	Sources for more detail
REDD analysis (2018)	Relative rate index for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ jail incarceration and bookings ▪ warrant bookings ▪ bond setting (type and amount) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ racial equity training in solicitor’s office ▪ study of impact of prosecutorial practices on REDD ▪ expanded community engagement efforts: addition of community representatives to the CJCC, Dialogue to Change process. ▪ development of FY 2021–23 strategic plan 	Charleston County CJCC midyear report 2018 Charleston County CJCC data behind the FY 2021–23 strategic plan
Dialogue to change process (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ large community discussions ▪ recurring small-group roundtable dialogues ▪ community survey 	<p>Used by work groups developing each of the four areas in the FY 2021–23 strategic plan</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. community engagement and addressing inequity 2. strengthening jail diversion and deflection from the criminal justice system 3. focusing on fairness and reentry 4. case processing advancements 	Charleston County CJCC FY 2021–23 strategic plan
Charleston County pretrial risk assessment development (2019)	Development and validation of prediction model to determine likelihood of defendant failure to appear in court and arrest for a new offense during a period of pretrial release	Implementation of the Charleston Pretrial Risk Assessment Instrument to inform pretrial decisionmaking	Report on the development of the Charleston Pretrial Risk Assessment Instrument

Source: Urban Institute.

Notes: CJCC = Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. PSR = Pretrial Service Report. REDD = reducing racial and ethnic disproportionality and/or disparity. SJC = Safety and Justice Challenge.

Measuring Performance and Communicating Using Data

Via the Charleston County CJCC, SJC partners established specific goals measurable through data for their strategies (see table 2), with the exception of the data warehouse development strategy, which supported the success of the other strategies. With the strategies and goals in place, the CJCC worked to regularly produce and disseminate performance measures. Charleston County CJCC workgroups were responsible for different strategy areas and were provided relevant metric data by the CJCC, and the CJCC's [website](#) made data on progress publicly available through annual and midyear reports, supplementary publications, and CJCC meeting minutes, which frequently included slide decks featuring data.

Stakeholders involved in the county's SJC work emphasized the importance of making data public to support transparency and accountability in their work. Some also cited the importance of having consistency in the data being brought before the CJCC and its working groups. This consistency "kept the pressure on" (as one stakeholder put it) to deliver progress, although some said it also meant the data could be "repetitive" and could show little variation from month to month. The consistency could be somewhat draining in areas where progress was not manifesting. For example, stakeholders noted that improving case processing time had remained challenging over the SJC period and that this was exacerbated by the pandemic. Some stakeholders expressed concern about "data overload," as the amount of data provided to CJCC members and the public in meeting presentations, public reports, and other materials is extensive. Identifying performance metrics specific to each CJCC working group helped members focus.

A challenge raised by stakeholders was that metrics in many areas can be complicated and some needed to be adjusted over time. Interviewees said this challenge affected the familiar faces work, for which metrics for success had to reflect that progress for a population that has been booked into the jail many times might mean fewer bookings rather than no bookings at all.

As Charleston County added SJC strategies and tools to its approach, it would revise its data tracking. For example, it launched a jail population review process in April 2020, and metrics for activity related to the jail population review lists generated by the CJCC were included in the 2020 CJCC annual report. Similarly, once the jurisdiction completed the development and implementation of the Charleston Pretrial Risk Assessment Instrument (CPRAI) in early 2020, data points related to bond setting and release outcomes by CPRAI risk level became part of regular reporting. These data points replaced prior metrics related to the previously used Virginia Pretrial Risk Assessment Instrument. (For

more detail about this process and the role of data in it, see our [SJC case study on risk assessment and structured decisionmaking](#)).

Community engagement became more central to the county's SJC reform work over time, making the question of whether data were being used effectively for communication with the general public of greater importance. Many stakeholders noted the extensive information and data about local reform efforts that were publicly available, but others questioned whether data sharing was an effective way of educating and engaging with the public and believed that only system actors understood what was happening. Community engagement events were one way the county improved its communication of data to the public and included them in determining future SJC strategies. In partnership with Everyday Democracy, the county undertook a process called Dialogue to Change that involved large community discussions, (with 450 participants, recurring small group roundtable dialogues (101 participants in 11 sessions) and community survey (650 participants) (CJCC 2021). Findings from this process were incorporated into the development of the four strategies in the Charleston County's 2021-2023 CJCC strategic plan.

Interview participants indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted community engagement efforts, but there was future work planned in this area. Charleston County established a partnership with Everyday Democracy to develop a two-year research study using community-engagement methods to better understand "racial and ethnic disproportionalities and disparities in the local criminal justice system" (Charleston County CJCC 2021, 17). This study will be complemented by quantitative research on the same topic, guided by a collaborative working group. These efforts could make the data the county uses to engage the community around local reform and elevate racial equity goals of that work more impactful, although the efforts are in their early stages as of this writing.

An important sustainability question for the data analysis and reporting component of local justice reform and operations in Charleston County was where the CJCC and its data functions should reside over the long term. Building capacity in the CJCC supported a new level of data integration and analysis in the county but also raised concerns about gatekeeping of that data and lines of authority. Neutrality and openness to the questions and concerns of all partners was important to stakeholders engaging with the data. One concrete question about CJCC governance was where it should be housed. The CJCC was located within the sheriff's office until July 2021 (when it was moved into County Administration), and although interview participants did not indicate any problems that had arisen from this arrangement, there was a shared sense that housing the CJCC under county government rather than under any single justice agency would support the CJCC's role at the center of cross-agency and community-wide data-driven collaboration over the long term.

Use of Data and System Impacts in Charleston County

Charleston County's efforts to increase and improve its use of data to drive local reform has impacted system operations and contributed to several outcomes related to the jail population and criminal legal system involvement. Even where targeted changes have not occurred, the enhanced data structure has made it easier to recognize this and potentially adjust course.

Charleston County has established a data warehouse mechanism for multiple partner agencies to contribute data and built needed infrastructure by hiring CJCC-based staff to analyze and disseminate it. Cross-agency collaboration has increased a lot according to stakeholders, and data sharing is both evidence of that and supports it by giving partners a common reference point on what is happening. To make data analysis possible, the county needed to boost system capacity, which it did by using external expertise from the Justice Management Institute in the early stages of SJC strategy development, hiring CJCC supervisory and analytical staff, and working to standardize data and enable data from different sources to be connected.

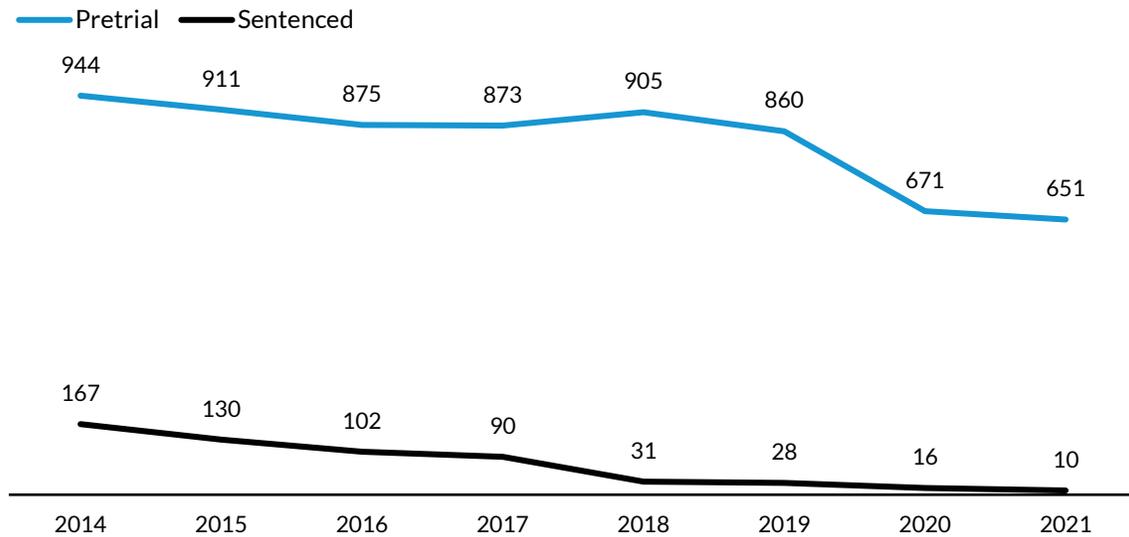
Charleston County appears to have built a shared culture around data-driven change among partners. Many stakeholders we interviewed were able to cite specific data points or describe drivers in terms of trends identified through data analysis. Stakeholders reported that sharing data and examining it together supported more effective collaboration. Having data available helped them develop a shared understanding of system dynamics, problems, and standards for progress, and it both prompted and helped ground difficult conversations among partners. Basing changes in evidence and tracking progress with data secured support from some partners who were not as ready to buy in to change.

[Data is] central to everything we do. It guides work throughout the year. It also creates an accountability and transparency component. –Charleston interview participant

Stakeholders believe data use has been necessary for progress on local reforms. They noted that the findings about the most frequent charges for which people were booked into the jail and racial disparities in those charges galvanized action and fed the county's cite-and-release strategy, which stakeholders saw as the most directly and immediately impactful reform.

Charleston County’s jail population declined before the pandemic, then dropped steeply during it. More specifically, this population fell steadily (by 20 percent) from the year prior to the county’s SJC participation through 2019, and then fell more steeply in 2020 as the pandemic broke out (figure 1) (Charleston County CJCC 2022). The pre-COVID decline included a steep drop in the sentenced population, which was not a primary focus of Charleston County’s strategies, and a substantial but more modest drop in the population of people detained pretrial, which fell by 9 percent from 2014 to 2019.⁷

FIGURE 1
Average Daily Pretrial and Sentenced Populations in the Charleston County Jail, 2014–2021

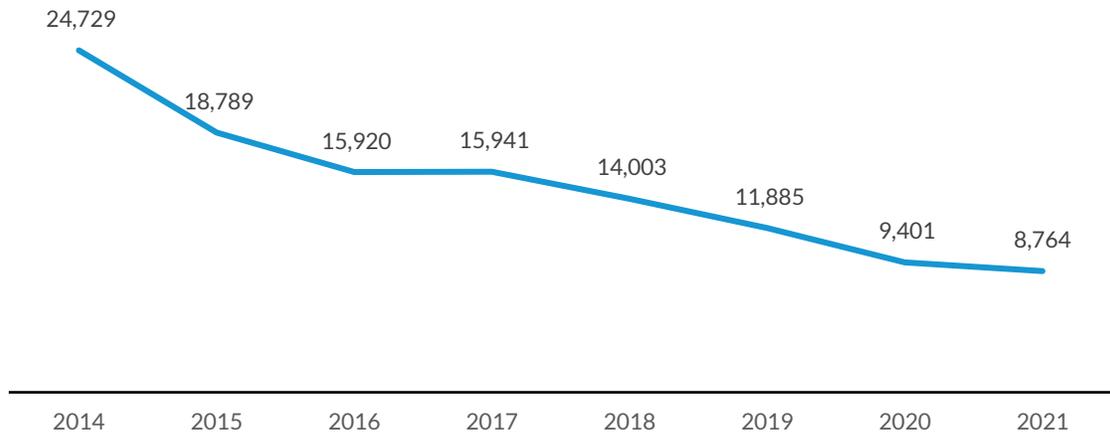


URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Annual Report 2021 (North Charleston, SC: Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2022).

Jail bookings declined substantially, with large declines in the low-level charges targeted by the cite-and-release intervention. Total bookings declined by 65 percent from 2014 to 2021, and a large decline occurred before COVID had any impact (figure 2). Bookings for the five low-level charges identified in the 2014 baseline analysis dropped precipitously from 2014 to 2016, before the cite-and-release strategy was implemented in 2017. But numbers of these bookings were consistent from 2016 to 2017 and then declined steadily from 2017 through 2021 (figure 3).

FIGURE 2
Charleston County Jail Bookings, 2014–2021

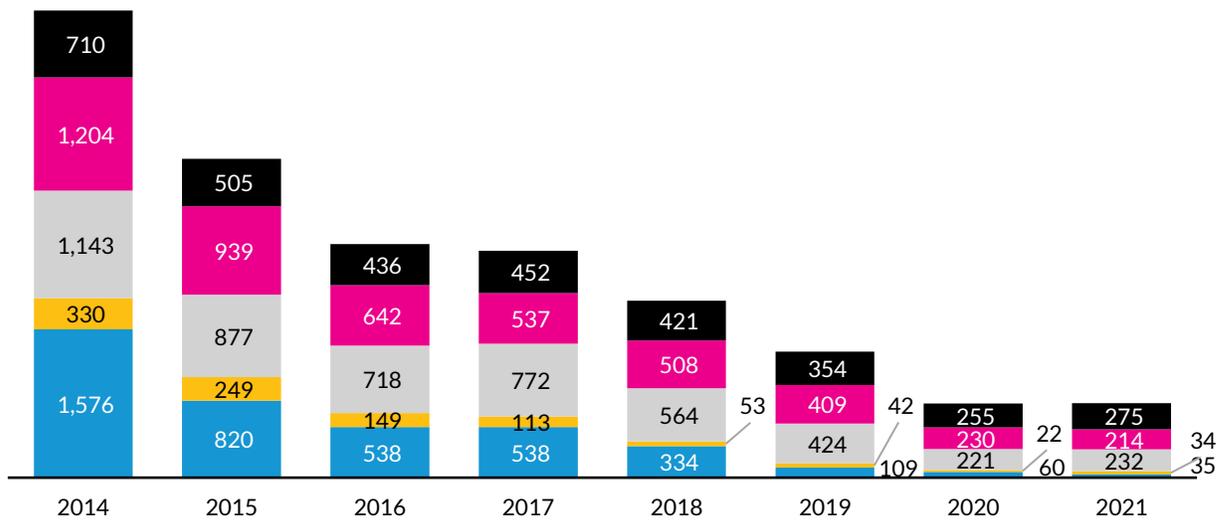


URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Annual Report 2021 (North Charleston, SC: Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2022).

FIGURE 3
Charleston County Jail Bookings by Cite-and-Release Target Charges, 2014–2021

■ Simple Poss Marijuana ■ Open Container ■ Public Intox ■ Misd. Shoplifting ■ Trespass



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Annual Report 2021 (North Charleston, SC: Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 2022).

Charleston County has documented some progress in reducing racial disparities in justice involvement. This has included declines in RRIs for targeted charges and modest declines in racial disparity in the jail population found in the 2017 deep-dive analysis of disparities. As reported by ISLG, the jail incarceration rate for people of color in Charleston County declined by 14 percent from the SJC baseline to early 2019, with a 23 percent reduction in booking rates for people of color.⁸ The RRI for the jail population declined from 8.0 to 6.5 from 2014 to 2021, but the RRI for bookings changed minimally over that same period (Charleston County CJCC 2022). Stakeholders reported in interviews that the disparity analyses have prompted some difficult but necessary conversations among system stakeholders and with the community. Some “uncomfortable” discussions engaged with how the practices of partner agencies might contribute to racial inequities; in these discussions, using data analysis to focus on the issue and ground it empirically became all the more important. One stakeholder noted it was important that data on racial disparities were reported in terms of systemwide performance to avoid singling out agencies in an unproductive way and to support broad ownership of the problem.

Charleston County made progress reducing the presence of familiar faces in the jail. Though people in the familiar faces population remained a substantial share of people moving through the jail, their jail involvement declined by 50 percent or more when measured by total releases, total charges, or total people experiencing jail incarceration.

Length of stay increased, likely because of the success of other strategies. Average length of stay for the pretrial population more than doubled from 2014 to 2019 (from 10 days to 22 days), and jumped even more for the sentenced population over the same period (from 19 to 72 days). Though reducing length of stay was indicated as a target early in the development of the county’s SJC strategy, other strategies, like reducing bookings for common low-level offenses, increasing use of personal recognizance bonds, and significantly reducing the sentenced population, may mean that those people remaining in the jail population are facing more serious charges and are therefore likely to remain in jail longer. This possibility illustrates the complexity of monitoring system-level reform performance when progress on some fronts may result in other metrics trending in an undesired direction.

Defendants are getting access to defense counsel faster, but no progress has been realized in time to disposition. The median time from arrest to assignment of defense counsel fell from 12 days in 2018 to 7 days in 2020 (Charleston County CJCC 2021). But median time to disposition for defendants in custody was nearly the same in 2019 as in 2014 after an initial decline, and for defendants out of custody it increased over that period. For both populations the median time to disposition jumped

further in 2020 as disruptions in court proceedings due to the pandemic further challenged case processing.

Use of Data in St. Louis County

Recent criminal justice reform efforts in St. Louis County were catalyzed after police officer Darren Wilson fatally shot Michael Brown Jr. on August 9th, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri (which is located in the county). The county witnessed mass uprisings and protests, and people from all over the country flocked to Ferguson to combat police brutality. In addition, advocates and organizers opposing police brutality began to unearth other injustices in the criminal legal system, such as the misuse of jails.

The events in Ferguson fundamentally changed St. Louis County.

—St. Louis stakeholder

As grassroots movements spiked in St. Louis County, local leaders grappled with how to respond and implement criminal justice reforms. In 2015, the jurisdiction applied for a grant from the Safety and Justice Challenge and proposed several reforms. Its approaches to changing the jail population evolved and it eventually arrived at the following six core strategies:⁹

- Population review team (PRT): A multidisciplinary PRT has been tasked with examining the jail population and its racial and ethnic composition, identifying factors related to long stays in jail, and improving case processing at every level, from individual cases to agencies to entire systems. The PRT serves as a voice for reform and a laboratory for innovative solutions for the criminal legal system.
- Enhanced pretrial reform: Two case managers at the jail currently provide enhanced pretrial supervision and support, and they connect people with the substance abuse and mental health services they need. In addition, a team of social workers from a local mental health treatment provider is embedded in the jail to assess the needs of people who are detained and work with jail staff to establish discharge plans based on what each person needs most.
- Pretrial assessment: The county adopted the Public Safety Assessment tool to more accurately identify people who can be safely released and supervised in the community, using evidence-

based criteria. The tool was rolled out in November 2019 and was officially launched in January 2020.¹⁰

- **Legal representation:** Safety and Justice Challenge funds support three attorneys who provide limited legal representation at arraignment and bond-reduction hearings, where they can advocate for reduced bond or release on recognizance. Funds also support an indigence specialist to work with the public defender's office to expedite indigency application reviews and case processing.
- **Expedited probation handling:** To decrease the average length of stay for people awaiting probation violation proceedings, a person booked on probation violation is screened in the jail to help staff identify the nature of the violation, reconnect them with probation, and fast-track the hearing process. The state probation and parole office has embedded two individuals in the jail to help with case processing and service linkage.
- **Community engagement:** Through a partnership between the criminal legal system and the community, the need for a community-based space for justice-involved people was identified. Launched in September 2020 in partnership with the St. Louis County Library and the Bail Project, the Tap In Center helps justice-involved people handle legal matters, address outstanding warrants, and connect with much-needed local services and supports.

Enhancing Local Data Capacity

To support the use of data to guide and monitor its local justice reform agenda, St. Louis County used SJC funding to enhance its capacity in concrete ways. Stakeholders noted that the hiring of a statistician to manage jail data was particularly important. Based in St. Louis County Justice Services (the agency that runs the jail), the statistician pulls data from the integrated jail management system and reviews who's being booked and released. They are responsible for maintaining the public data dashboards,¹¹ and they play a key role in the PRT. Before the statistician was hired in June 2020, a St. Louis County Justice Services supervisor would double as data manager when needed, which took that supervisor away from their job duties. One interview participant described the difference a dedicated statistician made: "It was crucial to have someone who can take on that duty because other people in the department were taking on that duty in ways that weren't maximized in their skill set." The St. Louis County SJC partnership has expanded the data analysis capacity of other agencies as well. In January 2020, the St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney's Office brought on a director of data and strategic partnerships, the first data-related position in the agency.

Throughout the St. Louis County SJC period, a critically important means of capacity enhancement was the partnership with Professor Beth Huebner of the University of Missouri–St. Louis. According to stakeholders, the county’s relationship with Huebner and the university was valuable because it supplemented the county’s data analysis capacity and because of Huebner’s credibility with partners as a criminologist and expert on corrections and reentry. It also created a connection to other data-related undertakings relevant to St. Louis County’s SJC work, particularly the Data Collaborative for Justice, through which Huebner and University of Missouri–St. Louis colleagues developed an extensive research report on jail population trends.¹²

As is common in local justice systems, St. Louis County faces difficulty tracking data across agencies and systems. Data are maintained by each agency (i.e., courts, law enforcement, and the jail) and the county does not have a unique identifier with which to track individual cases across agencies. For someone to track an individual case, they would need to know the person’s information and enter it into each separate agency’s data portal. Though St. Louis County has made substantial progress on optimizing the use of jail data to inform, measure, and refine its strategies, the cross-system data integration necessary to track cases and patterns more broadly remains a challenge. One stakeholder summarized the current situation: “Jail data is the closest we have to frontline data.”

Though the SJC grant funding has been important in building the capacity to carry forward the data analysis and the PRT work discussed in the next section, local funding will be necessary to carry that work forward. There has already been movement in that direction. The jail statistician position was entirely grant funded initially, but now funding for the position is split between grant and county funds.

Data and the Jail Population Review Team

Jail data are central in St. Louis County’s SJC work, and stakeholders said the PRT is one of the entities that primarily use and put those data to work. The PRT works collaboratively to attend to system-level trends and issues related to the jail population and to facilitate people’s release, and data guide both those activities. Through the PRT, stakeholders from across St. Louis County collaboratively review and resolve cases for people in the jail each week.¹³ The PRT includes representatives from the presiding judge’s office, the prosecutor’s office, the public defender’s office, the local jail, and parole and probation, and it also includes a private defense attorney, pretrial release caseworkers, and community service providers. The PRT is responsible for examining drivers of the jail population, reviewing individual cases for release, and providing alternatives to incarceration for those who are released.

Data review is a central facet of the PRT meetings. Each week, the PRT meeting begins with a review of the county's jail data, and the PRT devotes meeting time to a deeper dive into those data. The statistician reviews key metrics of the jail population, with a focus on the C, D, and E felony charges (which do not require imprisonment as a sanction and are primarily property and drug offenses) that are the focus of PRT release efforts and the racial composition of (and disparities within) the jail population. Once a month, the PRT meeting is centered on a "deep-data dive." As described by participants, during these meetings the statistician conducts an extended look at people who are in the jail for lower-level charges. These are primarily the C, D, and E felonies; the St. Louis County jail population consists almost entirely of people booked for felony offenses. The PRT looks at trends and patterns to set broad goals, which are then carried out in the weekly meetings.

Specific data points reviewed include the following:

- jail bookings
- jail release
- jail population and the proportion of people charged with C, D, and E felonies
 - » composition of the population detailed on C, D, and E felony charges by race, ethnicity, and gender
- ratio of Black people detained to white people by felony charge class
- length of stay
 - » by charge type
 - » by bond amount
- class/charge level
- bond amounts by race and charge type

To guide individual-level work, the statistician pulls around 15 cases for people in jail who have been charged with certain misdemeanors or C, D, and E felonies and sends them to the PRT in advance of the weekly meetings so the group can discuss a resolution for each case. In making the decision about release, the group considers several data points provided by the statistician, and how long a person has been detained is of particular interest to stakeholders. Two questions guide the consideration process for each case: What are the barriers to release? And are there alternatives to incarceration? For each case, barriers to release are discussed and justifications for alternatives are solicited.

For the PRT’s review of individual cases and of overall policy, stakeholders emphasized the importance of using data to inform decisions. The jail data pointed stakeholders to unique and common barriers faced by those being held pretrial. St. Louis County composed the PRT with executive-level representatives of the partner agencies to ensure they could make release decisions, and this composition also made the PRT a valuable forum for system-level strategic thinking. In particular, when stakeholders noticed that people were being held for extended periods, they looked into the reasons why. In this way, the data-driven identification of candidates for release resulted in individual releases where possible, but also in the collaborative identification of barriers to release that required system-level efforts to address. A specific example one interview participant cited was that many housing options available for people released from the jail were treatment placements, and were thus not appropriate for people who did not require treatment for behavioral health or substance use issues: “We were not getting people released...We had people that didn’t need specific mental health or drug facilities...We had people who didn’t have a place to live...We had to find places that would take people that aren’t drug addicted or mentally ill.” Recently, the PRT began working with a local agency that will help with reentry for individuals who struggle with housing insecurity and medical disabilities but who are not necessarily severely mentally ill or experiencing substance use disorders.

One implication of the PRT’s reliance on jail data to guide individual-level case decisions is that the ability of the PRT to track housing, treatment, job, and criminal justice outcomes is limited (aside from outcomes like rebooking to jail available via the jail management system). To track particular cases across systems, a person’s information must be entered into each system they touch, which makes any effort to track outcomes across systems cumbersome. Stakeholders noted that Huebner and the SJC project director, Miranda Gibson, were responsible for keeping track of the data necessary for determining the PRT’s success. One quantitative study they undertook examined the impacts of the PRT work on the total jail population, the population held for 100 days or more, and the population held for C, D, and E felonies, finding that implementation of the PRT was associated with declines in all three populations (Huebner, Lentz, and Gibson 2020).

[Data is] the driver for the car that we’re in that gets us to where we want to go.

—St. Louis stakeholder

Though many stakeholders noted the strength of the collaboration through the PRT, the team is not currently inclusive of all system partners. Several stakeholders mentioned that law enforcement representatives were initially present at PRT meetings but no longer participate. This may be related to the issue of not being able to track data across systems, as law enforcement data are not easily accessible and the available data do not speak directly to what law enforcement is doing. Stakeholders reported that the St. Louis County Police Department has six data analysts but that they do not participate in PRT meetings.

In terms of system-level data, stakeholders indicated a particular interest in the demographics of people being booked and released, length of stay, and the types of charges people are being held for. Furthermore, stakeholders noted that data are what hold them accountable for racial disparities (data on ethnicity are not captured in the jail's data system). Stakeholders mentioned that racial and ethnic disparities in the jail are discussed at each meeting, and they noted that most of the data points presented in those meetings are disaggregated by race. But there was not much mention of how these disparities are addressed, and stakeholders reported two main reasons for struggling to make progress on this front. First, they reported that the jail population is largely determined by what happens at the “front end” of the justice process. Stakeholders mentioned that they are not in control of who gets arrested and indicated that, in certain municipalities in St. Louis County, a person is more likely to get pulled over for being Black. Second, they mentioned that finding resolutions for complex cases is not easy and many jailed Black men have more serious charges. Though the data demonstrate greater disparities for more serious charges (largely the Class A and B felonies), stakeholders reported not having viable alternatives for reducing the population detained on these charges, unlike for those detained on C, D, and E felony charges. Given a large share of people are held for these more serious felony charges and disparities are concentrated there, making and sustaining progress reducing the jail population and reducing racial inequity may require the county to consider how to prevent and respond to more serious harm while relying less on jail incarceration.

Grappling with these issues has led to additional areas of analytical exploration. The analyses stakeholders have done include analyses of charges by zip code or municipality, which may serve as a basis for future engagement with law enforcement agencies that have custodial arrest patterns that contribute to observed disparities in the jail population.

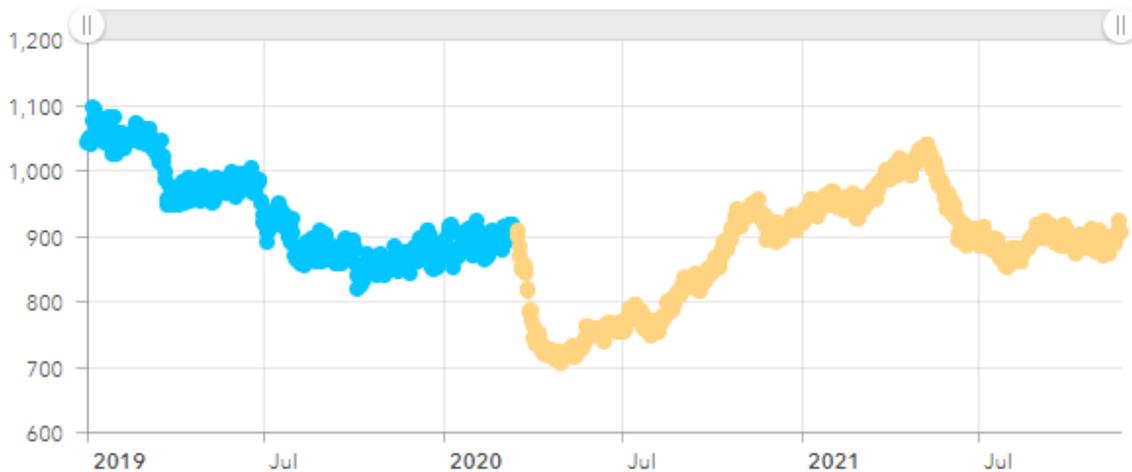
Public Communication of Data

Stakeholders in St. Louis County have publicly communicated data in different ways. The county makes jail population data available to the public through the portal that hosts eight data dashboards populated with monthly jail data from 2019 onwards, covering the following:

- bookings, by race and gender
- releases, by race and gender
- daily jail population (figure 4)
- average length of stay for people released, by race and gender
- instances of use of force in jail per 1,000 residents, by type
- monthly average jail population, by race and gender
- jail population by charge status (e.g., pretrial, sentenced, federal/contract, probation detainer)
- pretrial detained population by charge category (e.g., felony class)

St. Louis County does not have a criminal justice coordinating council to serve as a vehicle for communicating with the public, but the county does engage community members through the jail's community advisory board. This group is made up of two local university professors, a minister, and a local physician who is also the head of the region's COVID-19 task force. Meeting on a monthly basis, with the jail director and the chief operating officer of health care services for the St. Louis County Corrections System, the advisory board is tasked with responding to issues related to the jail population. It has pushed for more data about the jail to be made publicly available, and it weighs in on what data points get presented on the dashboards (see figure 4 for one of the eight dashboards). They are also tasked with being responsive to the community: the general public in St. Louis County can attend advisory board meetings or submit requests for it to consider. But the advisory board's scope of responsibility is particular to the jail, and there is no formal mechanism for it to interface with other justice system actors whose operations contribute to who is in the jail and for how long.

FIGURE 4
St. Louis County Daily Jail Population, 2019–2021



Source: St. Louis County Justice Services dashboard, available at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/eb2a32fce07e4f2888f955012f11a3f7>.
Notes: Blue represents the population before the COVID-19 pandemic and yellow represents the population since the beginning of the pandemic.

One challenge of publicly communicating through data is differences of opinion about what data should be made public and how to best communicate them. On the St. Louis County Justice Services dashboards, some information are presented in terms of averages and ratios. Some stakeholders feel these metrics are not accessible to the general public, whereas others are satisfied with (or at least did not indicate any concern about) the data points currently available. The dashboards and the portal through which they can be accessed do not include any explanatory or contextual text, which may impede how readily the general public can interpret the data. Some stakeholders reported having received several requests for data from community members despite the availability of the data via the dashboards, which may suggest that community members interested in the jail population may not know about the dashboards or may not consider them accessible.

Use of Data and System Impacts

St. Louis County’s strategies, which have been informed by its ongoing analysis of jail data, have resulted in or influenced several outcomes.

St. Louis County’s capacity to analyze and report jail data has increased considerably. The addition of a statistician to analyze and report jail data has provided foundational capacity for the PRT’s system-level and individual-level work. As one stakeholder put it, “Stuff we’re doing now, we weren’t

doing six years ago. We weren't even looking at all this data." But the fact that data are only routinely provided to the PRT from the jail's data system has been a limitation, and as a result, drivers of the jail population that are best understood using data from other systems are not part of that process.

St. Louis County's overall jail population has decreased since it became an SJC site. After an initial period of minimal change in the county's jail population, that population began to decline significantly starting in 2018 (figure 5). Though this progress has reversed somewhat since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is a measure of success for the overall work of the county through the SJC.

FIGURE 5
St. Louis County Jail Population, 2016–2021

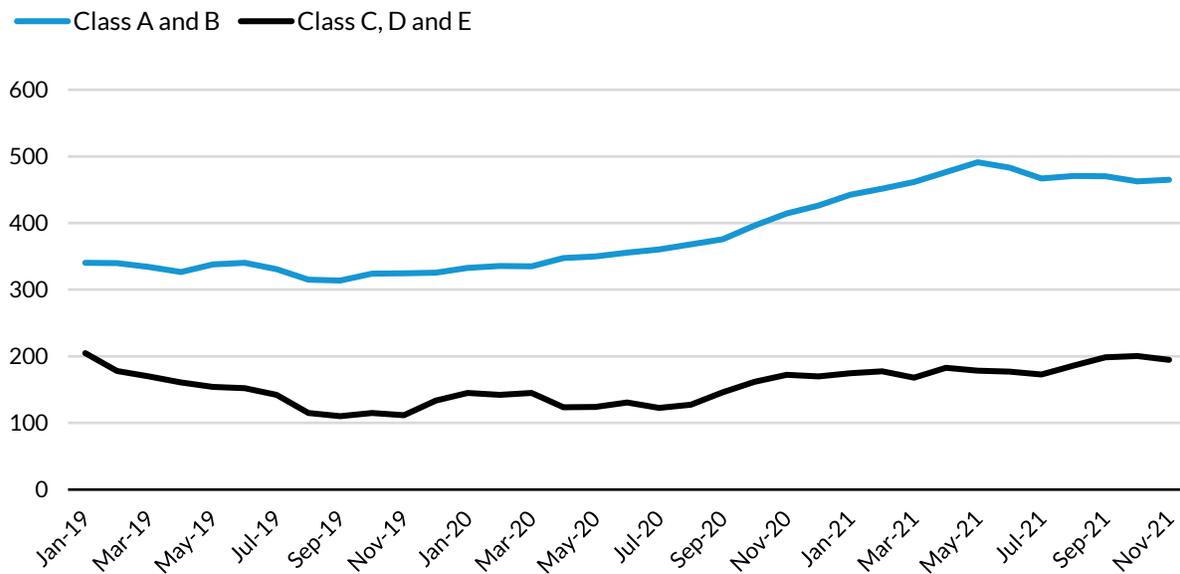


Source: CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance.

Jail detention for the targeted felony charges was trending downward, until COVID-19 hit. There was a general downward trend in the PRT's population of focus (people held for C, D, and E felony charges) throughout 2019 and into early 2020. During the pandemic, however, that trend has reversed and the population has steadily climbed since fall 2020 (figure 6).

FIGURE 6

St. Louis County Average Daily Pretrial Detention Population by Felony Charge Category, 2019–2021



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: St. Louis County Justice Services dashboard, available at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/eb2a32fce07e4f2888f955012f11a3f7>.

Notes: Missouri’s felony classes are defined by allowable sentence length, but C, D, and E felonies consist primarily of property and drug offenses, whereas A and B felonies are more serious and are more predominantly offenses against people.

Data have helped St. Louis County partners adjust their target population in response to success.

When the PRT began, it was looking at people who had been detained on Class C, D, or E felonies for 100 days or more. As of our stakeholder interviews, the threshold had been adjusted down to 14 days.

Common Themes from Charleston and St. Louis Counties

The successes and challenges associated with the use of data to inform local justice reform strategies in Charleston and St. Louis Counties provide several lessons and insights for other jurisdictions seeking to leverage data to change how their jails are used. In particular, interviews with stakeholders in both counties revealed that collecting, tracking, and operationalizing criminal justice data can aid overall jail reduction efforts. In this section, we discuss themes that emerged from both jurisdictions.

For partners, sharing data and looking at it together supported more effective collaboration.

Having data available helped stakeholders develop a shared understanding of system dynamics, problems, and standards for progress. It prompted and helped ground difficult conversations among

partners. Basing changes in evidence and tracking progress with data secured support from some partners who were not as ready to buy in to change.

With implementation site funding from the MacArthur Foundation through the SJC, each jurisdiction received an investment in its infrastructure that enabled it to support data analysis. Charleston County enhanced its data capacity by hiring CJCC staff to integrate, analyze, and communicate data, and it obtained commitments from multiple agencies to share that data. In St. Louis County, SJC funding made it possible to hire a statistician who analyzes and disseminates jail data both to criminal justice stakeholders and the general public via dashboards. This began as a 60 percent time position and within six months it was converted to a full-time position.

An iterative approach to data analysis supported quick reform progress. Charleston County began doing substantial data analysis early in its SJC participation period, even as the capacity enhancements mentioned above were still in progress. Though some data were unavailable or incomplete, stakeholders approached the analysis as an opportunity to produce as much data analysis as possible to guide local reform while identifying data gaps that should be filled to better refine strategies and measure their performance and impacts going forward. The PRT process in which members in St. Louis County monitored overall jail population trends and identified barriers through consultation on individual release decisions created a feedback loop for system improvement.

Examining data on people detained for low-level offenses spurred the implementation of reforms in both jurisdictions. Charleston County identified the prevalence of people detained for low-level charges in the jail, leading to the development of its cite-and-release effort targeting those charges. In St. Louis County, the PRT was formed in response to the long stays for people detained for C, D, and E felonies and certain misdemeanors.

We use the overall jail population counts as a way to assess how urgent it is to get specific subgroups of the population out. —St. Louis stakeholder

Both jurisdictions rely on data to understand racial and ethnic disparities. Though they have experienced some struggles developing solutions to those disparities, examining data has put a spotlight on the issue and motivated difficult conversations about how to reduce racialized inequities in levels of justice involvement and jail incarceration.

The sites took different approaches to making data publicly available, and each approach had different advantages and limitations. Charleston County provided a great deal of data via CJCC annual reports and other publications. These reports combined data with descriptive and interpretive text that provided useful context for understanding that data and what it means for the county’s SJC goals and its local reform goals. St. Louis County, by contrast, made data available primarily via its online dashboards of jail data. This enabled people to interact with the data, but there is no explanatory text and users have had to go elsewhere to contextualize the data. It is possible for a jurisdiction to make data available in both these ways, but as a practical matter, competing claims on local data analysis and communication capacity may make it difficult to do so.

Progress has been slower than people have wanted in both jurisdictions, which has created frustrations. Several stakeholders noted how slowly systems changes unfold and that this can be a source of frustration among partners. The routine review of data supports accountability, but for people looking at the data regularly, it also constantly reminds them how slowly some aspects of the strategies are advancing. One of the reasons the cite-and-release strategy in Charleston County was so important to partners may be that it was implemented quickly and substantial, measurable changes in practice showed up quickly. Quick wins like this, substantiated by data, may help mitigate frustration with changes that take longer.

Though there are differences in how Charleston and St. Louis Counties have been able to operationalize data—for instance, Charleston’s data infrastructure has allowed for more systemwide analysis—both have done so in ways that have strengthened their local reform efforts. The jail populations in both jurisdictions have decreased because of strategies they have adopted, and people engaged in that work were clear that the use of data has been indispensable in that success. Data have been used to define problems, create shared understandings of those problems among partners from different agencies, define populations of focus, guide development of jail population reduction strategies, set foundations for measuring performance, and contribute to community engagement around the SJC work.

Based on Charleston and St. Louis Counties’ experiences using data, we suggest the following broad recommendations for other jurisdictions seeking to reduce jail incarceration and long-standing inequities in who is incarcerated in jails:

- Centralize data and link across systems.
 - » Ensure demographic data are included so disparity analyses can be conducted for all populations of interest.

- Designate staff to maintain and analyze data.
- Create workgroups with members from different areas (e.g., criminal justice stakeholders, service providers, community members) to review data, identify issues, design and implement strategies, and track progress.
 - » Examine drivers of racial and ethnic disparities.
- Define metrics with which to track progress toward goals.
- Revise strategies and goals based on regular reviews of data and performance metrics.
- Make data and performance metrics accessible to and digestible for to the public.
- Identify sustainable funding sources for data systems and supporting staff.

Notes

- ¹ Katie Rose Quandt and Alexi Jones, “Research Roundup: Incarceration Can Cause Lasting Damage to Mental Health,” Prison Policy Institute, May 13, 2021, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/05/13/mentalhealthimpacts/>.
- ² In-person data collection and direct observation were not possible because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ³ The initial “chronic offender” was later amended to “familiar faces” and the criteria were adjusted to seven or more bookings.
- ⁴ See Nancy Rodriguez, “Why Are Jails Still Failing to Accurately Track Race and Ethnicity?” *Safety and Justice Challenge Blog*, October 15, 2021, <https://safetyandjusticechallenge.org/blog/why-are-jails-still-failing-to-accurately-track-race-and-ethnicity/>, and Sarah Eppler-Epstein, Annie Gurvis, and Ryan King, “The Alarming Lack of Data on Latinos in the Criminal Justice System,” Urban Institute, December 2016, <https://apps.urban.org/features/latino-criminal-justice-data/>.
- ⁵ This analysis, conducted by the Justice Innovation Lab and Loyola University Chicago, is available at <https://charleston-disparity-in-prosecution.org/>.
- ⁶ The Charleston County CJCC defines *disproportionality* to refer to under- or overrepresentation of a group in the criminal justice system related to its share of the general population, and *disparity* to refer to differential treatment of people who are similar except for their race or ethnicity. As noted in the 2018 midyear report on the results of its disproportionality analysis, measuring disparity requires more advanced methods than measuring disproportionality.
- ⁷ While not the focus of SJC work, the federal/Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainee population held in the Charleston County jail nearly quadrupled between 2014 and 2019.
- ⁸ Baseline is the six months before May 1, 2016, when the implementation phase of the SJC officially launched, and year 3 is the last implementation quarter of year 3, February to April 2019.
- ⁹ “St. Louis County, MO,” Safety and Justice Challenge, last updated December 23, 2021, <https://safetyandjusticechallenge.org/our-network/st-louis-county-mo/>.
- ¹⁰ For more detail on the Public Safety Assessment, see <https://advancingpretrial.org/psa/about/>.
- ¹¹ The dashboard is available at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/eb2a32fce07e4f2888f955012f11a3f7>.
- ¹² That report is available at <https://datacollaborativeforjustice.org/work/confinement/understanding-trends-in-jail-population-in-st-louis-county-missouri-2010-2019/>.
- ¹³ For information about the PRT and similar groups in San Francisco and East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, see our case study on SJC collaborations at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/using-cross-system-collaboration-reduce-use-jails>.

References

- Charleston County CJCC (Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council). 2016. *Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Phase One Final Report*. Charleston, SC: Charleston County CJCC.
- . 2017. *Charleston County CJCC Annual Report 2016*. Charleston, SC: Charleston County CJCC.
- . 2018. *Mid-Year Report 2018: Racial & Ethnic Disproportionality and/or Disparity in Charleston County's Criminal Justice System*. Charleston, SC: Charleston County CJCC.
- . 2021. *Charleston County CJCC Annual Report 2020*. Charleston, SC: Charleston County CJCC.
- . 2022. *Charleston County CJCC Annual Report 2021*. Charleston, SC: Charleston County CJCC.
- Dobbie, Will, Jacob Goldin, and Crystal S. Yang. 2018. "The Effects of Pretrial Detention on Conviction, Future Crime, and Employment: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges." *American Economic Review* 108 (2): 201–40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.20161503>.
- Huebner, Beth M., Theodore S. Lentz, and Miranda Gibson. 2002. "Systematic Case Review Strategies: An Application for Jail Population Reduction." *Justice Quarterly* 37 (7): 1261–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2020.1819384>.
- ISLG (CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance). 2021. *Reducing the Misuse and Overuse of Jails in Safety and Justice Challenge Sites: An Interim Progress Report*. New York: CUNY ISLG.
- 2021a. *Jail Decarceration and Public Safety*. New York: CUNY ISLG.
- 2021b. *Jail Population Trends during COVID-19*. New York: CUNY ISLG.
- Lawrence, Daniel, Will Engelhardt, Storm Ervin, and Rudy Perez. 2021. *An Impact Evaluation of the Misdemeanor Diversion Program in Durham County, North Carolina*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Lowenkamp, Christopher, Marie VanNostrand, and Alexander Holsinger. 2013. *The Hidden Costs of Pretrial Detention*. Houston: Laura and John Arnold Foundation.
- Stemen, Don, and David Olson. 2020. *Dollars and Sense in Cook County: Examining the Impact of General Order 18.8A on Felony Bond Court Decisions, Pretrial Release, and Crime*. Chicago: Loyola University Chicago.
- Stevenson, Megan. 2018. "Distortion of Justice: How the Inability to Pay Bail Affects Case Outcomes." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 34 (4): 511–42. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jleo/ewy019>.
- Zheng, Zhen, and Todd D. Minton. "Jail Inmates in 2019." Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

About the Authors

Jesse Jannetta is a senior policy fellow in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where he leads projects on prison and jail reentry, community antiviolenace initiatives, police-community relations, parole and probation supervision, and risk prediction.

Storm Ervin is a research associate in the Justice Policy Center. She conducts mixed-methods research and evaluations on multidisciplinary criminal legal services and system processes for people who experience violence, people charged with crimes, and those who both experience and cause harm. She leads research related to responses to domestic violence, gun violence, and prison violence. Her work also highlights jurisdictions' efforts to reduce their jail populations and examines the process and impact of a prearrest misdemeanor diversion program.

STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

The Urban Institute strives to meet the highest standards of integrity and quality in its research and analyses and in the evidence-based policy recommendations offered by its researchers and experts. We believe that operating consistent with the values of independence, rigor, and transparency is essential to maintaining those standards. As an organization, the Urban Institute does not take positions on issues, but it does empower and support its experts in sharing their own evidence-based views and policy recommendations that have been shaped by scholarship. Funders do not determine our research findings or the insights and recommendations of our experts. Urban scholars and experts are expected to be objective and follow the evidence wherever it may lead.



500 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20024

www.urban.org