

Evaluating Oklahoma County's Progress on Reducing the Jail Population and Promoting Public Safety

In July of 2022, Oklahoma County's Criminal Justice Advisory Council (CJAC) sought the research and data analysis assistance of the [Crime and Justice Institute](#) (CJI) to assess the progress Oklahoma County's criminal justice system has made in implementing six recommendations from the [2016 Greater Oklahoma City Chamber Criminal Justice Reform Task Force](#) (Task Force) to responsibly reduce the jail population. Notably, since 2015, the Oklahoma County jail population has steeply declined from over 2,500 to currently just over 1,520 people. Criminal justice stakeholders in Oklahoma County have implemented many, but not all, of the 2016 recommendations to safely and effectively reduce the jail population and promote public safety. It is critical that this commitment and momentum endure as the county looks to build on its recent strides and continue to improve its local policies and practices.

CJI's assessment revealed:

- **Oklahoma County has established CJAC, a local criminal justice coordinating council, to provide oversight and increase transparency and collaboration among local justice system stakeholders.**

- **Oklahoma County Detention Center (OCDC) admissions have decreased by 44 percent since 2015, including drops in arrests for municipal charges and drug and alcohol-related misdemeanors.**

The county has reduced the number of unique individuals booked between 2015 and 2022 by 41 percent.

The following 2016 recommendations were not fully implemented:

- Eliminate the 10/24-hour hold order;
- Institute a court notification system in municipal court; and
- Reduce instances of companion (dual) charging, during which officers initially charge individuals with state charges for municipal-eligible offenses, and then charge them with associated municipal charges if the county prosecutor declines to file state charges.

- **Oklahoma County has not reduced the proportion of its population that is pretrial.**

The portion of the jail's population that is "pretrial", i.e., are awaiting trial, has remained higher than the national average and unchanged since 2015.

The following 2016 recommendations were not fully implemented:

- Expedite screening and assessment of those in jail who may qualify for ordered release/conditional release (OR/CR);
- Expand eligibility for OR/CR bond release;
- Calculate bail amounts based on the highest charge, not cumulatively;

- Expand the use of personal recognizance bonds;
- Institute a bail review at formal arraignment;
- Develop a comprehensive understanding among local criminal justice system stakeholders of pretrial risk and evidence-based practices in pretrial decision making; and
- Identify and implement a pretrial risk assessment tool to guide judges' decisions about pretrial release.

- **Overall length of stay has decreased since 2015 but is most pronounced for those released within the first 48 hours.**

There are still significant inefficiencies in case processing.

The following 2016 recommendations were not fully implemented:

- Notify out-of-custody defendants once charges have been filed;
- Develop a capacity to sort cases, identifying those that can be fast tracked or diverted;
- Implement proven strategies for reducing case backlogs;
- Implement a court notification system in district court to reduce failure to appear;
- Prioritize access to counsel in jail;
- Review practices and procedures for bond surrender; and
- Institute a periodic warrant resolution program.

- **Access to and use of diversion programs has increased considerably in Oklahoma County.**

There are now a number of programs by community organizations, as well as services run by the county itself, to reduce the number of individuals serving time in jail.

The following 2016 recommendation was not fully implemented:

- Identify and enroll participants in specialty court earlier in the criminal justice process.

■ **Oklahoma County has reduced the impact of justice system fines and fees on jail growth and recidivism.**

Although much progress has been made, there is no place for individuals to find comprehensive information on all their criminal justice-related debt.

■ **Racial disparities have increased within the OCDC.**

Although the overall population has declined since 2015, white admissions have declined at a faster rate than Black admissions (50% v 37%), increasing the overrepresentation of Black individuals admitted to the jail. This trend is also occurring within the standing population.

■ **Beyond implementing the 2016 recommendations, Oklahoma County can continue to reduce its jail population and promote public safety by:**

Reducing the pretrial population at the OCDC by:

- Ensuring an individual's criminal history is available to pretrial release decision makers;
- Creating a presumption for release on personal recognizance with conditions;
- Eliminating procedural barriers that delay an individual's pretrial release;
- Conducting a subsequent release eligibility review after an initial decision to detain an individual pretrial;
- Allowing bond to be set for offenses where "no bond is required";
- Establishing pre-arrest deflection and diversion programs; and
- Creating more alternatives for individuals with a substance use disorder who are not high risk.

Removing system inefficiencies to reduce the length of stay for individuals not released within 48 hours by:

- Creating strict deadlines throughout the adjudicatory process that ensure individuals are not detained beyond their appropriate release date; and
- Creating a more streamlined competency restoration process.

Implementing strategies with equitable goals at the forefront to reduce racial disparities in the jail by:

- Ensuring criminal justice stakeholders track data on racial demographics;
- Requiring regular analysis and reporting of racial demographics in the local criminal justice system to county and state leaders; and
- Increasing data capacity by hiring more staff and streamlining the collection of data among multiple stakeholders.