



2023 Tennessee Pretrial Symposium Series: Knoxville

Knoxville Symposium Summary

In May 2023, the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) hosted a series of pretrial events across Tennessee with funding and support from the Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP). Local leaders and pretrial practitioners from county and state agencies came together to hear the latest from the field and share ideas on how to improve system and community outcomes.

This document highlights key takeaways and lessons learned from panelists participating in the Knoxville event.

Panel 1: Innovative Programs and Cross-Agency Partnerships in Tennessee

Panelists included: **Judge Patricia Long**, General Sessions Court Judge, Knox County; **Jennifer Knisley**, Regional Director for the Lifeline Peer Project, **Richard Major**, Magistrate and Court Administrator, Knox County; and **William Wall**, Executive Director, Tennessee Corrections Institute

Key Takeaways:

- In some counties the local jail is the highest-funded, or only, mental health treatment facility.
- Jail is not the right place for everyone. Understand your population and who needs to be there – and who doesn't.
- Be proactive with decision making and communication (many agencies are reactive to high profile events or can't tell the real story because they don't know their own populations).
- Resources to address behavioral health needs and other pretrial capacity challenges are readily available, including funding and services at the state level. Local leaders need to pursue the opportunities available.
- The process of starting system change is slow and requires ongoing collaboration, but it's effective and does improve outcomes.

"Setting a bond doesn't guarantee safety. Judges need to be able to make informed, intentional decisions on who to hold and who to release based on risk, not ability to pay."

- Patricia Long

Panel 2: Successful Approaches to Pretrial Services: One Size Does Not Fit All

Panelists included: **Diana Brady**, Pretrial Director, Davidson County; **Viranda Smith**, Booking Supervisor, Davidson County; **Keith Harris**, Sergeant, Knox County Pretrial Services; **Stoney Gentry**, Lieutenant, Knox County Pretrial Services; and **Elizabeth Hammond**, Pre-Trial Program Manager, Hamilton County.

Key Takeaways:

- Knox, Davidson, and Hamilton Counties are very different – but all used their local data and pretrial best practices to implement and maintain pretrial programs in their unique jurisdictions.
- The pretrial program in Knox County did not remove judicial discretion; the program simply increased options. With over 19,000 referrals to pretrial since 2018, the average pretrial length of stay (ALOS) in jail has declined from approximately 12 days to 3 days.
- Hamilton County has innovated ways of using technology for virtual intake, such as reporting via phone and kiosks, to more effectively communicate with people on pretrial release.