

MacArthur Foundation Awards \$18 Million in Grants to Rethink Local Justice Systems and Advance Racial Equity

New Research Confirms Decline in Jail Populations Among Cities and Counties Participating in the Safety and Justice Challenge

Chicago, IL, February 9, 2021 – Building on significant momentum for evidence-based reforms to local justice systems, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation today announced an additional \$18 million in grants as part of its [Safety and Justice Challenge](#), a national initiative to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

The new funding will support 15 cities and counties that are already working to reduce over-incarceration and advance racial equity in local criminal justice systems. To date, the foundation has awarded more than \$246 million to support cities, counties, and states committed to reform.

More than five years after its launch, the Foundation’s [Safety and Justice Challenge Network](#) has grown to 51 sites across 32 states modeling reform. The initiative supports local leaders who are working collaboratively to rethink local justice systems from the ground up. Participating cities and counties are using data to identify key drivers of incarceration and racial inequities and working with diverse groups of community members, individuals who work in the justice system, and people with lived experience to develop impactful reforms.

In conjunction with today’s announcement, the City University of New York’s Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG)—the organization that tracks Safety and Justice Challenge progress—released a [new report](#) measuring the effectiveness of strategies to reduce jail populations over the first three years of the initiative. Key findings in the report, [“Reducing The Misuse and Overuse of Jails in Safety and Justice Challenge Sites: An Interim Progress Report,”](#) include:

- The **average daily population in jails declined significantly** across Safety and Justice Challenge sites, especially for individuals awaiting trial, from 2016 to 2019.
- This progress was mostly **driven by a decline in jail bookings**, not a reduction in the length of time people are spending in jail.
- Safety and Justice Challenge grantees have made **progress reducing the number of people in jail for nonviolent traffic, property, drug, or public order offenses**, but more must be done to reduce the number of people held in jail after being charged with other types of crimes.
- While some jurisdictions decreased the rate of misdemeanor bookings for people of color, racial inequities in local justice systems persist.

“We must confront the devastating impacts of mass incarceration by a system that over-polices and over-incarcerates Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people,” said Laurie Garduque, MacArthur’s Director of Criminal Justice. “Over the past five years, the Safety and Justice Challenge has safely reduced the ineffective and harmful use of jails, while learning that jail population reduction alone does not undo the racial inequities perpetuated by an unjust system and our nation’s history of systemic racism. We are committed to supporting cities and counties as they reimagine a definition of safety that is inclusive of all communities and makes meaningful progress towards our goal of ending racial and ethnic disparities in jails.”

ISLG’s Research Director, Reagan Daly, said their report shows that significant progress can be achieved when cities and counties use data to identify drivers of jail incarceration and develop strategies that speak directly to those drivers. “Many cities and counties participating in the Safety and Justice Challenge have achieved substantial reductions in their jail populations, and these improvements were seen across racial and ethnic groups. With that said, there is still much work to be done to eliminate disparities, which have persisted despite the progress that has been made in other areas. Data will continue to play a critical role as cities and counties confront these inequities moving forward,” she said.

Today’s award of additional funding by the MacArthur Foundation will allow cities and counties to build on their work to address justice system practices that take a particularly heavy toll on people of color, people with low-incomes, people without stable housing, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and people who have mental health or substance use issues.

The cities and counties receiving additional support and funding are:

- Philadelphia, PA
- Allegheny County, PA
- San Francisco City/County, CA
- Buncombe County, NC
- Charleston County, SC
- Milwaukee County, WI
- St. Louis County, MO
- New Orleans, LA
- Lucas County, OH
- East Baton Rouge Parish, LA
- Lake County, IL
- Minnehaha County, SD
- Spokane County, WA
- Pima County, AZ
- New York, NY

“As a data-guided collaborative of system leaders and community representatives committed to improving safety and justice, we are incredibly grateful for support from the MacArthur Foundation through the Safety and Justice Challenge. It’s helped us safely reduce jail use, face inequities, and engage the community in improving the local criminal justice system,” said Kristy Pierce Danford for Charleston County’s Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and project director for the local SJC effort. “The new funding will help us sustain what we’ve already accomplished and continue improving the local system and advancing equity for years to come.”

Beth Huebner, professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Missouri–St. Louis at project director for the local SJC effort, said the collaboration between key justice system stakeholders fostered through the Safety and Justice Challenge is not only an important factor in the success reducing St. Louis County’s jail population, but was also particularly important over the past year as the county responded to COVID-19. “This additional funding will allow us to build on reform strategies and invest in new evidence-based solutions to safely reduce our jail population and confront inequities in the system,” she said.

The Safety and Justice Challenge brings together many of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations to provide technical assistance and counsel to participating cities and counties. These include the Center for Court Innovation, Everyday Democracy, Nexus Community Partners, the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, JFA Institute, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, the Pretrial Justice Institute, Policy Research, Inc., the Vera Institute of Justice, the W. Haywood Burns Institute, Urban Institute, and Bennett Midland.

More information on the Safety and Justice Challenge can be found at www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org.

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