



LPSCC

Local Public Safety Coordinating Council
MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON

County continues work on strategies to ensure the right defendants are in jail

Multnomah County's public safety partners are working together to better address defendants with mental health and substance abuse disorders while ensuring that those people who genuinely pose a threat to public safety remain in custody.

Jail is meant to hold defendants awaiting trial who are a flight risk, those who pose a danger to public safety, and people serving short-term sentences. But too often, jail also is the de facto option for people struggling with mental health and substance abuse disorders, or homelessness. This can quickly fill all available jail beds, especially over long-holiday weekends when the courts are closed and no one is being released. That pressure has led the County and our Sheriff's Office to develop short and long-term solutions to prevent and mitigate emergency releases when the jail reaches capacity. Solutions include ramping up County pretrial services programs to safely supervise appropriate defendants in the community, ahead of court appearances, and hold those who should not be released. We are bolstering connections to mental health and addiction services and placing trained professionals with lived experience with addiction in the jail. These changes include [revisions to the County's Emergency Population Release plan](#) that exclude any inmate from emergency release who is facing serious charges such as Measure 11 or domestic violence charges.

But our public safety partners which includes [judges, district attorneys, law enforcement, public defenders, victims advocates and more](#) remain united in our effort to find better options for people who are neither a flight nor a public safety risk. Data shows that many in jail are struggling with addiction and/or a mental health crisis and are repeatedly arrested for nonviolent offenses. A [2016 Multnomah County Corrections Grand Jury report](#) indicates at least 40 percent of inmates have been diagnosed with a mental illness. And a [2015 report](#) shows a disproportionate number of those incarcerated are people of color. The jail is a revolving door of incarceration for people struggling with addiction and mental health challenges. This revolving door exacts enormous financial and social tolls – not only on those individuals and their families but the community at large – particularly communities of color.

Multnomah County is working to reduce mass incarceration and rethink the use of jails as part of the [John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Safety and Justice Challenge](#). The County is part of a network of jurisdictions pursuing [strategies](#) to reduce overall jail use, make the system more efficient, reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and better respond to individuals with behavioral health problems.

Some of those strategies include:



Responding to the continuing *addiction issues* confronting our community.

- Creating the right services to prevent people from going to jail, such as supportive services to help them in their recovery, can help break the cycle of addiction and incarceration. That's why we have the **Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program (LEAD)** to redirect people engaged in low level drug activity away from jail and into services.
- And that's why District Attorney Rod Underhill launched **Treatment First**, which is a better way to match people to the appropriate supervision and services.



Diverting people with *mental illness* to treatment, instead of jail.

- Under the leadership of Sheriff Mike Reese, this program releases inmates on their own recognizance to mental health services and support. The Mental Health Diversion Program is slated to launch in February 2019.



Expanding initiatives to reduce *racial and ethnic disparities*

- **The Diane Wade House** launched this winter. It is the first-of-its-kind, Afrocentric transitional housing program for adult women involved in the criminal justice system and aims to reduce the overrepresentation of African Americans in jail.
- In 2017, the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office **changed its policy** on prosecuting fare evaders with a class A misdemeanor. The charge carried a punishment of up to one year in jail and disproportionately affected low-income and people of color.



Working with our partners to find *common sense solutions* that save jail space and keep the community safe.

- These are simple things that have a big impact, like working with our judicial partners to reduce the time it takes to **process a probation violation**, or our Department of Community Justice using science and data to change **how long people on parole and probation stay in jail on probation violations**.
- As a system, we are also working to decrease **failures to appear** for court hearings by improving notifications and improving outreach.

These strategies require continued commitment from all our public safety partners and a shared desire to change the status quo. We must use our limited public safety funds wisely and invest in efforts that not only leverage national funds but also make our community safer by ensuring the right people are in jail to begin with. Jail beds are the most expensive option in the public safety system and yield the wrong results for many defendants who are struggling with addiction, mental health issues and homelessness.

Watch or **read about the lives** changed through investments in public safety alternatives.