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Buncombe County Awarded \$1.75M by MacArthur Foundation Safety and Justice Challenge to Advance Local Justice System Efforts - New Funding Will Help Buncombe County Build on Progress Toward Reducing Jail Population

Oct. 24, 2018, Asheville, North Carolina — On Oct. 24, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation announced a \$1.75 million grant to Buncombe County Government to continue building on efforts to reform the local criminal justice system and safely reduce the county’s jail population. The grant is part of the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#), a \$148 million national initiative to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

Buncombe County was first selected to join the Safety and Justice Challenge Network in 2017. The selection came with an award of \$50,000 for a project focused on more effective supervision of people charged with domestic violence offenses with the goals of assisting defendants and working with victims to increase safety by adequately managing defendants in the community and reserving jail resources for those who pose the greatest risk.

Today, Buncombe County is one of 13 jurisdictions selected for additional funding based on the promise and progress of work to date. With this funding, Buncombe County joins 20 other Challenge jurisdictions across the country already receiving deep investment from the Foundation to implement local reform, in addition to 12 new jurisdictions joining the Safety and Justice Challenge Network. This funding will provide Buncombe County and its partners with additional support and expert technical assistance to implement strategies that address the main drivers of local incarceration and to improve practices that often take a toll on low-income communities, people of color, and people with mental health and substance use issues.

“Buncombe County has a strong track record of investing in criminal justice and behavioral health,” said Brownie Newman, Chair for the Board of Buncombe County Commissioners. “While we have much to celebrate, such as a below average incarceration rate, we still have more work to do. We are experiencing rising numbers of women in jail, high numbers of people who cycle in and out, and concerning disparities in terms of incarceration rates and lengths of stay for minority populations. Our Board of Commissioners supports continued efforts toward safely reducing our jail population, and we are proud to have the opportunity to participate in the Safety and Justice Challenge.”

The Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council (JRAC) is made up of local justice system leaders who come together for shared goal setting and coordination. The group is comprised of District and Superior Court Judges, Clerk of Court, Magistrate, District Attorney, Public and Private Defense, Law

Enforcement, Bureau of Identification, Pretrial Services, Community Corrections, Juvenile Justice, Behavioral Health Managed Care Organization, and representatives from the Office of the County Manager and Board of Commissioners.

“I am pleased to express my commitment to collaborating to explore promising strategies to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in Buncombe County,” said the Honorable Alan Z. Thornburg, Senior Resident Superior Court Judge.

Three years after its public launch, the Challenge Network has grown into a collaborative of 52 counties, cities, and states modeling and inspiring reforms to create fairer, more effective local justice systems across the country. The jurisdictions involved with the Challenge are already yielding promising initial results toward reducing jail populations and expanding alternatives to incarceration. For example, since joining the initiative, Philadelphia has decreased its jail population by 36 percent and Cook County, Ill. has experienced a 26 percent drop.

“There is growing demand for criminal justice reform across the country, and local jurisdictions are leading the way,” said Laurie Garduque, MacArthur’s Director of Justice Reform. “MacArthur is increasing our investment because we are seeing promising results and an appetite for more reform as evidenced by the diversity and creativity of the solutions implemented and tested across the Network. While progress is not always easy, and there is no single solution or quick fix, these jurisdictions are proving it is possible to rethink local justice systems from the ground up with forward-looking, smart solutions.”

Several of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations will continue to provide technical assistance and counsel to JRAC, Buncombe County partners, and the other jurisdictions involved in the Challenge: the Center for Court Innovation, the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, the Pretrial Justice Institute, the Vera Institute of Justice, Policy Research, Inc., and the W. Haywood Burns Institute.

More information about the work underway in Buncombe County can be found on BuncombeCounty.org/JRAC as well as on SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org.

About the MacArthur Foundation

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people, effective institutions, and influential networks building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. MacArthur is placing a few big bets that truly significant progress is possible on some of the world’s most pressing social challenges, including over-incarceration, global climate change, nuclear risk, and significantly increasing financial capital for the social sector. In addition to the MacArthur Fellows Program, the Foundation continues its historic commitments to the role of journalism in a responsible and responsive democracy, as well as the strength and vitality of our headquarters city, Chicago. More information about the Foundation’s criminal justice reform work can be found at www.macfound.org/criminaljustice.

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