

INTRODUCTION (SAFETY + JUSTICE CHALLENGE):

The Safety + Justice Challenge, supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, provides support to jurisdictions across the country to address drivers of local jail populations. The Challenge Network represents 52 cities and counties, across 30 states. There are 21 implementation sites that have received funding to work towards ambitious reform, making local justice systems fairer and more effective.

IMPLEMENTATION SITE (SAFETY + JUSTICE CHALLENGE IN BUNCOMBE COUNTY):

In October 2018, Buncombe County was awarded \$1.75 million from The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to implement strategies to reduce jail numbers by addressing the main drivers of Buncombe County's jail population. In February, 2021 Buncombe County was awarded an additional 1.75 million over 2 years to sustain progress with the goal of returning to the lowest jail population achieved during the pandemic, and to advance racial equity.

BACKGROUND:

As of 2018, despite significant efforts at diversion by the county and its partners, Buncombe's jail population had grown to historically high levels. The data suggested that the percentage of women in jail would rise so high that by 2020 the jail would be over capacity. The main drivers of the jail population were pretrial defendants and the length of stay. Between 2015 and 2018, the pretrial population grew nearly 15%, from just over 300 to 350 people awaiting trial. Detention disrupts the lives of people's families and communities. It leads to higher re-arrest rates and produces worse case outcomes, including future episodes of being held in jail. The impact of jail has had a particularly heavy toll on Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color.

PROGRESS:

Since joining the Safety + Justice Challenge, Buncombe County enhanced collaboration across justice system and community partners working to safely reduce the jail population, making it easier to [respond quickly and efficiently during the pandemic](#). As a result, Buncombe surpassed the original goal of reducing the jail population by 15% with the average monthly population declining by 30% between February 2019 and January 2021. People released from custody during this time have not increased recidivism: the percentage of people released pretrial who returned to custody for a new charge in 6 months was 23.5% in 2019. In 2020 it was 21.4%.

Racial disparities for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color reinforce the importance of building equitable opportunities for all to access justice. As the jail population has decreased, there has been an increase in the [overrepresentation of the Black population](#): in July 2020, 33% of people in jail were Black; this has since dropped to just under 30%. Work to sustain jail reduction continues, while focusing on reducing racial and ethnic disparities, addressing root causes of inequities, and sustaining new community safety initiatives.

GOALS & STRATEGIES:

Three major goals moving forward include: ***Sustaining Jail Reduction Progress, Advancing Racial Equity, and Building Community Engagement and Trust.***

To achieve these goals, Buncombe Safety + Justice Challenge partners are focusing on five strategies:

Strategy 1: Enhancing Pretrial Release Strategies

Strategy 2: Increasing Efficiencies in Case Processing

Strategy 3: Advancing Racial Equity

Strategy 4: Increasing Community Engagement

Strategy 5: Advancing Community Safety and Violence Prevention