

New Jersey Jail Population Analysis

Provided by Luminosity in Partnership with the Drug Policy Alliance

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Executive Summary

The New Jersey County Jail System (NJCJS) is collectively operated by each of the state's 21 counties. Each county is responsible for the safe, secure detention of individuals who have either been charged with a crime and are pending case disposition or who have been sentenced to a period of incarceration after having been convicted of a crime. On any given day, the NJCJS has in its custody approximately 15,000 inmates.

The current study was commissioned by the Drug Policy Alliance for the purpose of examining the New Jersey jail population and developing a population profile. The goal of the study is to use this profile to identify opportunities to responsibly reduce New Jersey's jail population while maintaining public safety and the integrity of the judicial process. To conduct the study, data were requested and received from the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts ("AOC"). The AOC maintains the County Corrections Information System (CCIS) for which 19 of the 21 counties contribute inmate data. This data comprise a "snapshot" of the New Jersey jail population.

An informal survey was also conducted of all county correctional facilities and the New Jersey Department of Corrections' Office of County Services (NJDOC-OCS) was consulted to obtain more detailed information on the individual jail facilities. In addition, information related to criminal justice system trends and key stakeholder agencies (e.g., crime rate, incident, and arrest statistics; law enforcement; prosecutor; public defender; and the courts) were included to provide context to the population profile results.

The New Jersey County Jail System is a complex organization, with 21 counties operating 22 county facilities and utilizing three private facilities to house approximately 15,000 inmates daily. Acknowledging these complexities, the study was still able to identify a common theme across all counties.

- Nearly three-fourths of all New Jersey jail inmates were being held pending trial or sentencing in either Superior Court (66%) or Municipal Court (7%).
- As of the day the jail snapshot was taken, inmates who had been indicted but had not yet had a trial had been in custody on average 314 days.
- Nearly 40% of the total jail population has the option to post bail but lacks the financial resources to do so and twelve percent of the entire jail population was held in custody solely due to an inability to pay \$2500 or less.
- More than half of the individuals held in county jails were held on non-violent charges.

The large number and percentages of pretrial inmates appear to be caused by three primary factors.

1. According to the AOC Management Statistics as of June 2012 -
 - a. 41% of the total active pending cases in the Municipal Court were in backlog status;
 - b. more than half (53%) of the Superior Court criminal cases pre-indictment were considered to be in backlog status; and
 - c. 45% of the criminal cases post-indictment were considered to be in backlog status.

Considering the above facts, it appears that the greatest opportunities to responsibly reduce New Jersey's jail population are related to more efficiently and effectively managing the pretrial population. More research should be done in this area to identify the best solutions, which may include reducing the backlog in the Courts at all levels and developing and/or expanding alternatives to pretrial detention. It must be acknowledged that the court case processing backlog is the responsibility of many key justice stakeholders including the court, prosecutor, public defender, defense bar, law enforcement, and others. In addition, reducing case backlog and developing and/or expanding alternatives to pretrial detention in combination could substantially reduce the average length of stay, thereby responsibly reducing the jail population.