

# The Impact of COVID-19 on Crime, Arrests, and Jail Populations

An Expansion on the Preliminary Assessment



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

*The JFA Institute*

Denver, CO • Washington, D.C. • Camden, SC

## Executive Summary

Beginning in March 2020, local and state criminal agencies took several actions to mitigate the rising number of people being infected with the COVID-19 virus. To address these concerns, a variety of policies were enacted to reduce the number of persons held in jails. These policies were designed to 1) mitigate the number of people being arrested and booked into local jails and 2) reduce the length of stay (LOS) for those admitted to jail. Concurrently, public safety concerns were raised that by lowering the jail populations, crime in the community would increase.

To address these concerns, the JFA Institute (JFA), through resources provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) program, began tracking and analyzing six cities and counties participating in SJC (jurisdictions) and their jail and crime data in real time to monitor the impact of these mitigation activities. In October 2020, JFA expanded the study to eleven jurisdictions and collected the data through December 2020 to examine longer term trends and a potential rebound.

Analysis of the eleven jurisdictions:

- Analysis of the eleven jurisdictions studied revealed jail populations declined, yet crime and arrests declined as well, giving indication that declining jail populations did not compromise public safety.
- Overall, total reported crime was 22% lower in December 2020 when compared to December 2019 and 14% lower for the total number of reported crimes for CY 2020 versus CY 2019.
- When combining all jurisdictions, there was an average 39% decrease in jail bookings, which equates to over 130,000 fewer jail bookings in a one-year time frame. Jail booking decreases were fueled by the decrease in property crime and arrests, primarily for misdemeanor and lower-level felony charges.
- As a result of the change in jail bookings, the composition of the jail populations changed post-COVID-19, with a higher proportion being male and charged with violent felony and non-drug felony crimes.
- The LOS for people in jail has increased due to the changing make-up of the jail populations and a slowdown in court case processing.
- After the historic initial decrease, jail populations rebounded somewhat but stabilized in October 2020. During this time, there was no substantial increase in overall crime.

There are challenges ahead in keeping jail populations low, namely maintaining lower arrests, jail bookings, and reducing the length of stay by expediting the disposition of criminal cases. The response to COVID-19 has shown that such reforms are possible and can safely reduce the number of persons held in jail but sustaining lower jail populations will require maintaining these reforms in some manner.

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## I. Introduction

Beginning in March 2020, local and state criminal justice agencies took several actions to mitigate the rising number of people being infected with the COVID-19 virus. There was considerable concern that people arrested and booked into local county jails would be unduly exposed to the virus, become infected, and then spread the virus to those also confined to jails, employees, and/or to others in the community once released from confinement.

To address these concerns, a variety of policies were enacted to reduce the number of persons in held jails. These policies were designed to 1) mitigate the number of people being arrested and booked into local jails and 2) reduce the length of stay (LOS) for those admitted to jail. Concurrently, public safety concerns were raised that by lowering the jail populations, crime rates would increase. To address these concerns, the JFA Institute (JFA), through resources provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC) initiative, began tracking and analyzing six SJC jurisdictions and their jail and crime data to monitor the impact of these mitigation activities. This culminated in a preliminary report issued in late 2020 with data and observations covering a time frame of January 2019 to June 2020<sup>1</sup>.

Results of this first-stage analysis found an emerging trend where jail populations declined, yet crime and arrests declined as well, giving indication that declining jail populations did not compromise public safety. As the pandemic continued into its second, third and even fourth wave, some mitigation measures were modified, but most continued. To build upon the findings gleaned from the first analysis, JFA expanded the study to eleven jurisdictions and collected the data through December 2020.

The eleven participating jurisdictions for this iteration of analysis are:

1. Allegheny County, PA (Pittsburgh);
2. Charleston County, SC (Charleston);
3. Cook County, IL (Chicago);
4. East Baton Rouge Parish, LA (Baton Rouge);
5. Lake County, IL;
6. Los Angeles County, CA;
7. Orleans Parish, LA (New Orleans);
8. Pennington County, SD (Rapid City);
9. City and County of San Francisco, CA;
10. Spokane County, WA; and,
11. St. Louis County, MO.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.jfa-associates.com/publications/jss/Impact%20of%20COVID-19%20on%20Crime%20\(prelim%202\).pdf](http://www.jfa-associates.com/publications/jss/Impact%20of%20COVID-19%20on%20Crime%20(prelim%202).pdf)

## II. Data Collected

For each of the eleven jurisdictions, JFA collected a wide array of aggregate- and individual-level data for both pre- and post-COVID-19 timeframes. Since the pandemic is still occurring, for the purpose of this analysis post-COVID-19 refers to data from April 2020 to December 2020. In terms of aggregate-level data, the following counts were provided by each jurisdiction for each month from January 2019 to December 2020:

1. Reported UCR crimes or NIBRS (murder, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft);
2. Adult arrests (UCR crimes, total felony, total misdemeanor, and domestic violence);
3. Jail bookings; and
4. End-of-month jail population.

These data were used to assess the impact of COVID-19 on crime, arrests, and jail populations. By collecting data back to January 2019, one can control for traditional seasonal fluctuations in these metrics (crime, arrests, and jail populations tend to rise in the spring and summer and decline in the fall and winter seasons). The crime and arrest data were provided by the major individual law enforcement agencies for each county (a minimum of 75% of all jail bookings). Appendix A has detailed lists of each jurisdiction's law enforcement agencies that contributed to data in this report.

In addition to aggregate-level data, JFA collected individual-level data for the following populations both prior to and after the implementation of COVID-19 restrictions:

1. Snapshot of the jail population at the end of February 2020 and the end of December 2020; and
2. Jail releases since January 1, 2019.

These individual-level data demonstrate how some key attributes of people comprising the jail population have changed beginning with the declines first seen in March 2020. The jail release files allowed for a more detailed comparison of how people are being released from jail and, more importantly, their length of stay (LOS).

## III. Analysis

The following pages present the analysis of these data. JFA pooled the data for all eleven jurisdictions to analyze overall trends. Where there are significant differences in the overall trends for specific jurisdictions, these are noted and commented on, emphasizing the individual jurisdictions' impact on the overall trend. JFA examined data for the entire pre- and post-COVID-19 period; however, specific attention was paid to differentiate between initial COVID-19 impacts that occurred between March and May of 2020 and longer sustained trends, which will be shown by year-on-year comparisons of 2019 and 2020.

## A. Dramatic Reduction in Jail Populations

Restrictions imposed by jurisdictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had an immediate and dramatic effect on jail populations across the country. Mandated jail population reductions to allow for social distancing resulted in a variety of policy measures across the eleven jurisdictions studied. Nearly all jurisdictions enacted the use of virtual hearings and suspended or postponed court cases/hearings. Further initial reduction measures ranged from early release for sentenced offenders, increased use of ROR and pre-trial release, changes to bail/bond schedules and rules, and suspension of arrest for misdemeanor and traffic offenses. These data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Mitigation Actions Taken by SJC Jurisdictions

Mitigation Action	Allegheny	Charleston	Cook	New Orleans	San Francisco	East Baton Rouge	St. Louis	Pennington	Lake	Spokane	Los Angeles
Reduction/suspend FTAs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✗		✓*	
Use of virtual hearings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Reduction in misdemeanor/traffic arrests		✓+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓**	✓
Increase use of ROR for certain defendants		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Expanded use of early release/time served	✓			✓	✓		✗	✗	✓	✓***	✓
Release of persons with "high" risk for COVID-19	✓		✓		✓	✗	✗			✗	✓
Changes to bail/bond rules		✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
Expansion of pre-trial release	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
Rule changes for issuing warrants/violations	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
No evictions permitted	✓	✓++	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Court cases/hearings suspended or postponed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓

Note: \*In February 2021, the Washington State Supreme Court promulgated a new Court Rule that changes when a court of limited jurisdiction can issue an FTA Warrant. \*\*Continuation of this policy may vary across law enforcement agency. \*\*\*District Court Judges are continuing to receive daily inmate population lists for a case-by-case review by the assigned judge. \*Policies to reduce these arrests enacted prior to March 2020 but continued through the pandemic. \*\*Limits placed on evictions but not a full moratorium.

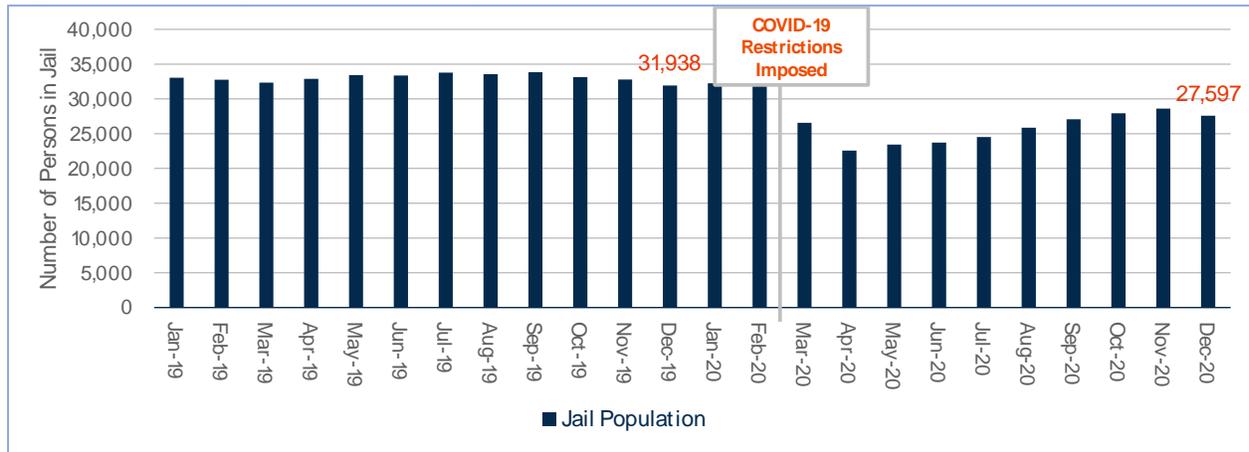
Legend: ✓ Measure began with COVID-19 and has continued.

✗ Measure began with COVID-19 but has been discontinued.

These swift actions sizably reduced the jail population in all eleven jurisdictions studied. Pooled data for all jurisdictions showed a pronounced decrease in the jail population from the end of February 2020 to the end of May 2020. Jail population decreases ranged from 14% to as high as 40%. The average decline across all jurisdictions during the initial three months was 26%. Beginning in June 2020, jail populations rebounded somewhat and continued to grow through October 2020. In the fourth quarter of 2020, jail populations in the jurisdictions studied seemed to stabilize and, even with the mid-year rebound, the number of confined persons at the end of December 2020 remained substantially lower than December 2019 (-14%). Figure 1 illustrates the trends in the jail population of the eleven jurisdictions from January 2019 to December 2020. While the summary data show jail populations

remained low, two jurisdictions in our study had a flat or small increase in jail population when comparing year on year. St. Louis County saw a total net increase of 46 detainees in jail at the end of December 2020 compared with December 2019, and Cook County had a small year-on-year decrease of just -4%.

Figure 1. Jail Population January 2019 to December 2020



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

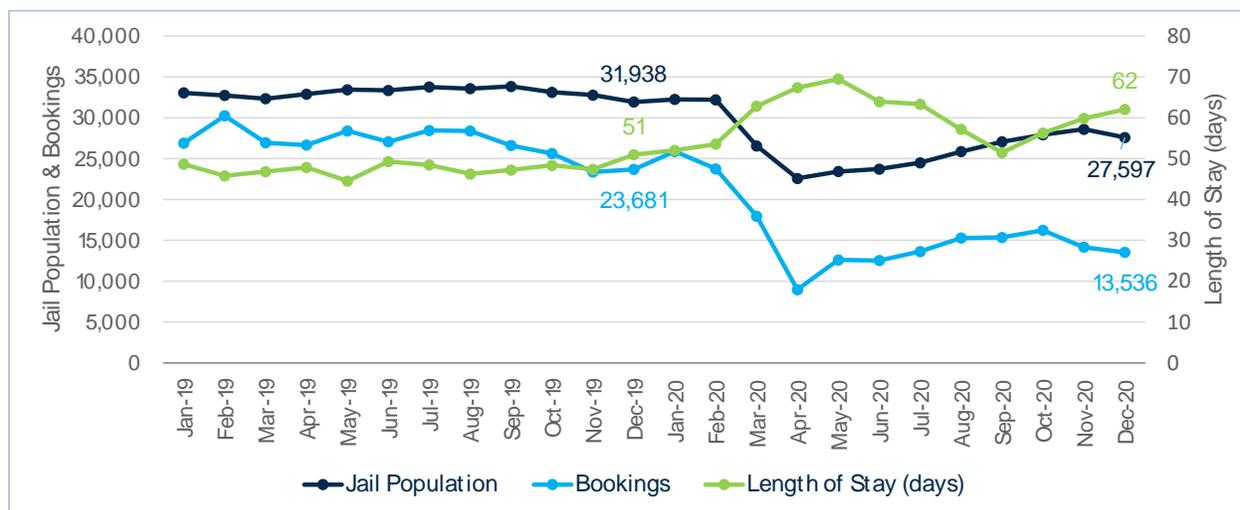
The initial jail population reduction was fueled by a decrease in jail bookings for property crime and arrests, primarily for misdemeanor and lower-level felony charges. When comparing jail bookings for all eleven jurisdictions from February 2020 through May 2020, the total number of bookings declined on average 41% from the same period in 2019.

The decline in jail bookings (-41%) was larger on a percentage basis than the decline in the jail population when comparing the end of May 2019 and May 2020 (-30%). The divergent declines in bookings and jail populations are related to the higher proportion of people not being arrested and brought to jail for misdemeanor and low-level felony crimes. Individuals arrested for these crimes typically have a shorter LOS in jails as they are more able to secure pretrial release through bail or their own recognizance. The shorter an individual’s LOS in a jail, the lesser the impact of not admitting that person will have on the total jail population.

It is noteworthy that, beginning in May 2020, jail bookings began to increase from the historic lows seen in April 2020. These increases in bookings fueled the rebound in the jail populations previously mentioned. The monthly increases in jail bookings leveled off in October 2020 and saw a slightly decreasing trend emerge in November and December of 2020. November and December 2020 jail bookings averaged 41% lower when compared to November and December of 2019.

Even with the fluctuations in jail bookings over the entire year, total jail bookings for all CY 2020 compared with CY 2019 were an average of 39% lower. When combining all jurisdictions, the decreases equated to over 130,000 fewer jail bookings in a one-year time frame. Figure 2 compares the two-year trend of the jail population and bookings for the eleven jurisdictions studied.

Figure 2. Jail Population, Bookings & Length of Stay January 2019 to December 2020



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Pennington, San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

## B. Impact on Reported Crime

Any discussion about trends in crime rates needs to be seen in context with the overall crime trends since the 1990s. Since the early 1990s overall crime, murder, and other violent crime have all plummeted. In 1990, the overall crime rate was nearly 6,000 per 100,000, the violent crime rate was about 750 per 100,000, and the murder rate was 10 per 100,000. Since then, crime rates have steadily declined. By 2019, overall crime rate was 2,490 per 100,000, or more than half the 1990 rate. The 2019 violent crime rate was 380 per 100,000, and the murder rate was 5 per 100,000 – again about half the 1990 rates.<sup>2</sup> These dramatic declines in the crime rates were not driven by larger jail or prison populations but by demographic and economic factors.<sup>3</sup>

When examining changes in crime over the last year, it must be noted that any 2020 one-year annual “percent changes” are based on crime rates that were already historically low in 2019. Any increase observed in 2020 does not accurately represent major changes in one’s risk of being victimized. Finally, crimes rates fluctuate seasonally within a year (rates are higher in the summer and lower in the winter) and can fluctuate during a downward or upward trend year by year. Given this, caution must be given to sudden increases or decreases that have occurred since COVID-19 in lieu of the longer established trends.

Overall, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, declines in both jail bookings and populations have not translated to increased reported crimes or arrests. Across all eleven jurisdictions, there was a sharp decline in the number of serious crimes reported to police beginning in March 2020 and continuing

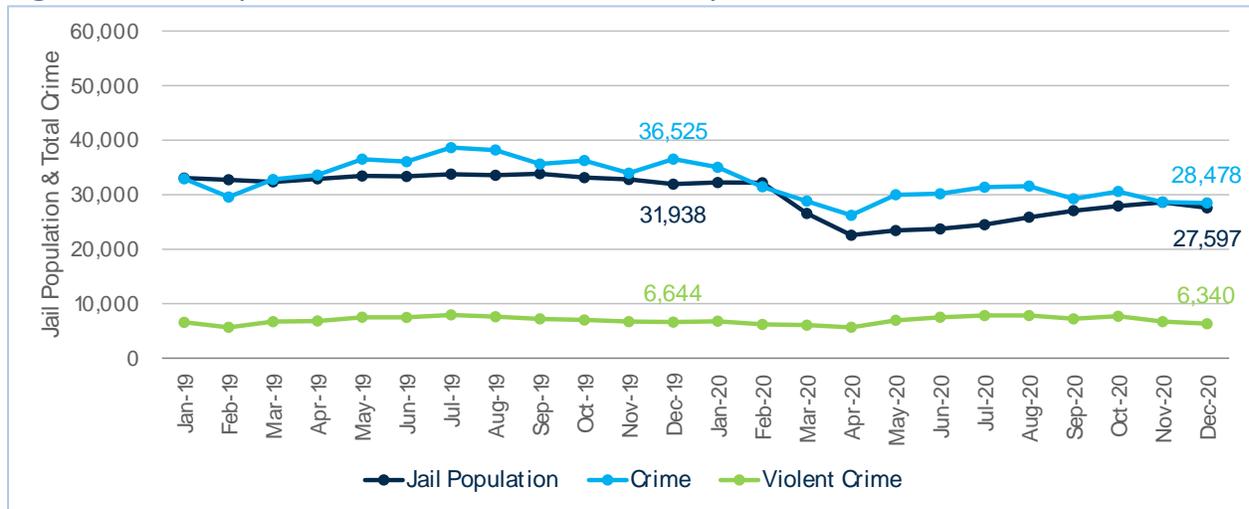
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>

<sup>3</sup> James Austin, Todd Clear, and Richard Rosenfeld. 2020. **Explaining Past and Projecting Future Crime Rates**. New York, NY: The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. [hfg.org/crime\\_forecasting.htm](http://hfg.org/crime_forecasting.htm).

through May 2020. Most of this decline was attributable to declines in larceny-theft, which traditionally comprises over 60% of the total UCR crimes.

From May 2020 through the fall of 2020, there was a modest up-tick in the number of crimes reported, but some of this increase was related to seasonal fluctuations in crime. For example, the number of total crimes for every month from March 2020 through December 2020 is well below the corresponding monthly number for 2019. Figure 3 displays the trends of the jail population, reported total crime, and violent crime for the two-year period.

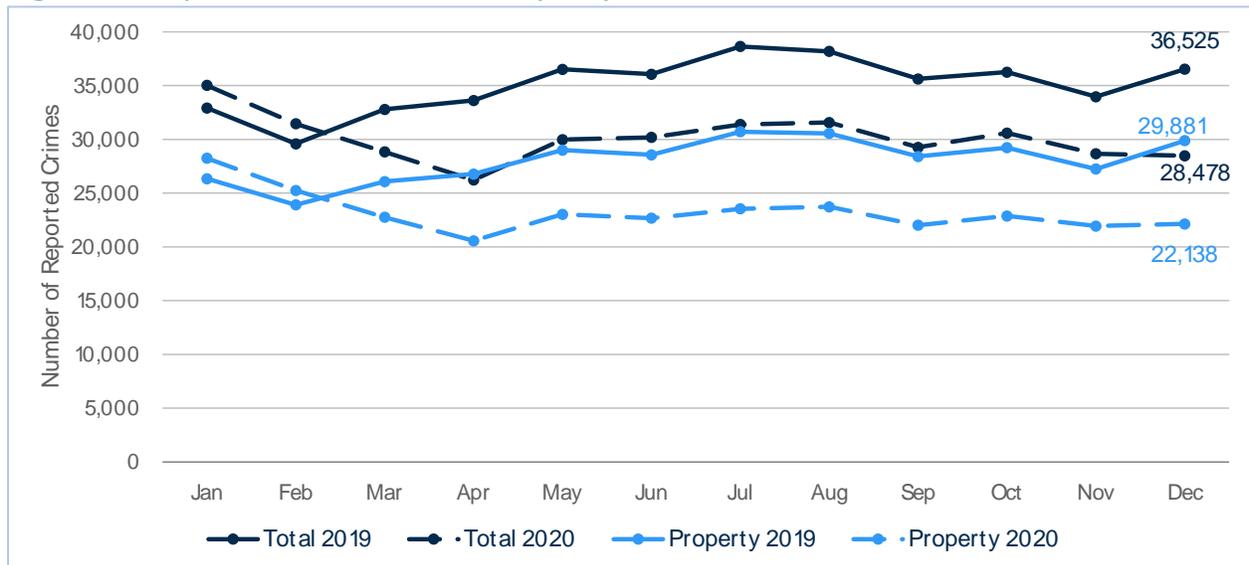
**Figure 3. Jail Population and UCR Crime January 2019 to December 2020**



*Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles (LAPD only), New Orleans, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis*

Another way to represent these data is to show the entirety of CY 2019 versus CY 2020 (a year-to-date or YTD analysis). This shows the traditional spring to summer increase in crime for 2020 but not nearly at the level for the same six-month timeframe for 2019. These data are shown in Figures 4 and 5. Overall, total reported crime was 22% lower in December 2020 when compared to December 2019 and 14% lower for the total number of reported crimes for CY 2020 versus CY 2019.

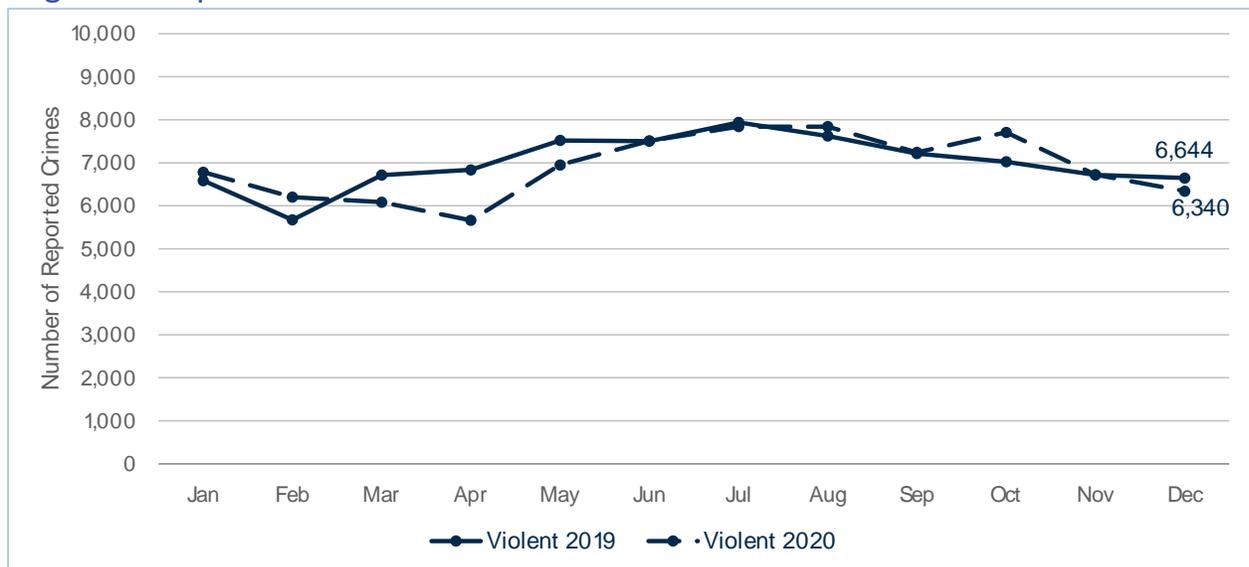
Figure 4. Reported UCR Total & Property Crime 2019 & 2020 Year-to-Date



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles (LAPD only), New Orleans, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

Serious reported crime is made up of violent crime and property crime categories. Each of these categories were analyzed over the pre- and post-COVID-19 timeframe to distinguish trends in individual crimes in the jurisdictions.

Figure 5. Reported UCR Violent Crime 2019 & 2020 Year-to-Date



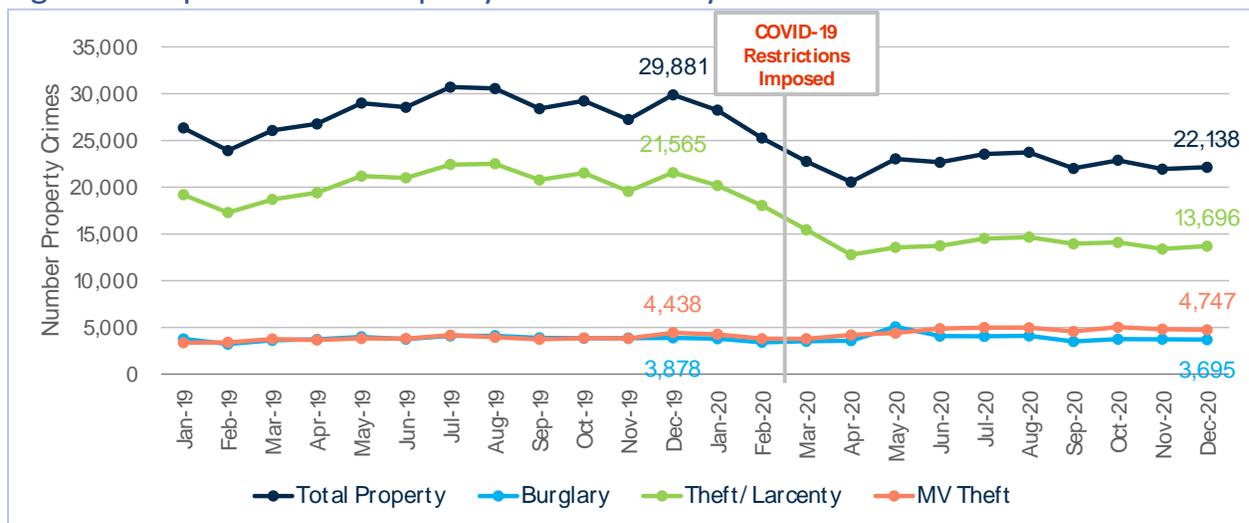
Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles (LAPD only), New Orleans, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

## Property Crime

Three crime types make up the UCR property crime category: larceny/theft, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. As noted earlier, property crime, particularly larceny/theft, make up over half of all crimes reported and thus has a considerable influence over the overall reported property crime trend. All jurisdictions studied reported huge declines in reported larceny/theft crimes, both initially (March to May 2020) and longer-term (2019 versus 2020). There were 27% lower larceny/theft reported crimes in all of 2020 over 2019. Burglary showed mixed results across jurisdictions. Seven of the eleven jurisdictions showed moderate to substantial decreases in burglaries for all of 2020 (Cook, St. Louis, New Orleans, Lake, Charleston, Los Angeles, and Allegheny) while four jurisdictions reported no change or moderate increases for the year (East Baton Rouge, Pennington, San Francisco, and Spokane). With all jurisdictions combined, total reported burglary crimes for all jurisdictions for 2020 were flat when compared with 2019.

Escalations in motor vehicle thefts have been publicized in the news recently, with some jurisdictions outside of this study reporting increases of over 50% in 2020. Jurisdictions in our study fall into this same trend, with only three jurisdictions reporting fewer motor vehicle thefts in 2020 than 2019 (Allegheny, Spokane, and East Baton Rouge). All eight remaining jurisdictions reported flat to substantial increases in motor vehicle thefts in 2020 (Charleston, Lake, New Orleans, Pennington, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Cook). Overall motor vehicle thefts for all jurisdictions for 2020 increased 19%, giving evidence to some recent news reports. Data available at this time is not sufficient to establish a causation of increases in motor vehicle thefts, while other property crimes remain at significantly lower levels.

Figure 6. Reported UCR Property Crime January 2019 to December 2020



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles (LAPD only), New Orleans, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

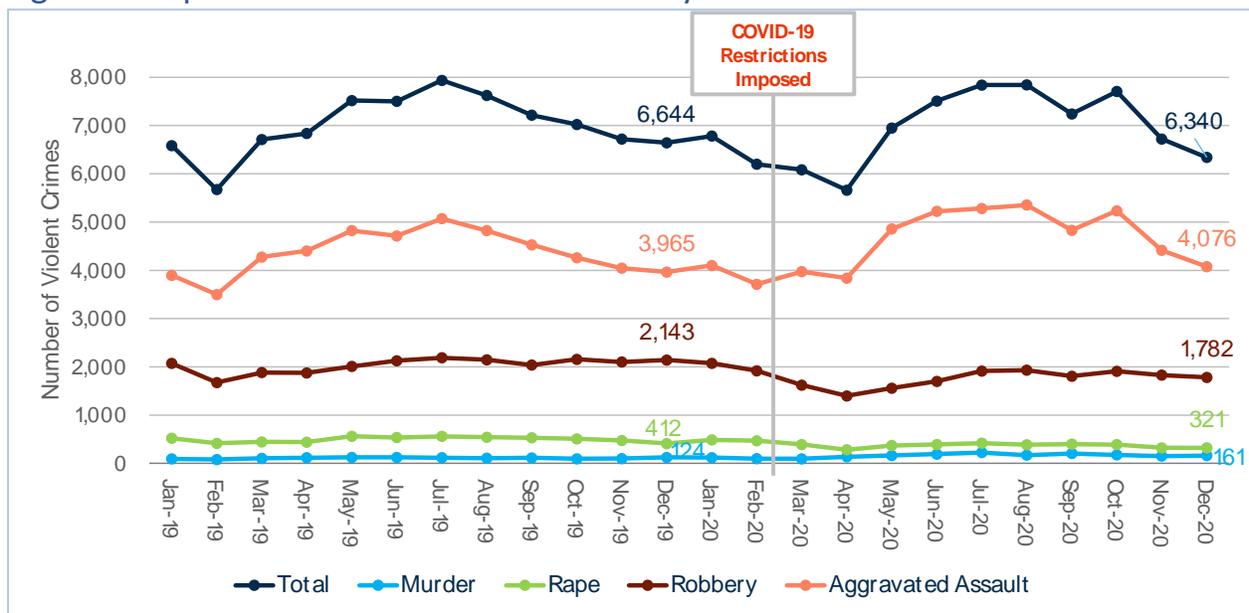
## Violent Crime

After the initial post-COVID-19 decline, data show an increased number of reported murders and aggravated assaults beginning in May 2020. Increases in murders during the summer of 2020 in certain cities have been widely reported in the media, which has been anecdotally linked to reductions in jail populations and/or demonstrations against police violence. This report solely focuses on trends and provides data analysis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data available at this time is not sufficient to establish a causation of increases in certain violent crimes (murder), while other violent crimes (rape and robbery) remain and significantly lower levels.

Statistically, for the eleven SJC jurisdictions studied here, there have been mixed results. From June through December 2020, none of the eleven jurisdictions studied reported a decrease in the number of murders when compared to the same period in 2019. Some jurisdictions like Lake, Spokane and Pennington posted over an 100% increase in the number of murders, but these data should be qualified by the small volume of crimes contributing to that percentage (Spokane 27, Pennington 16, and Lake 2). All other jurisdictions together averaged an increase of 45% more reported murders in 2020 over 2019.

One jurisdiction in particular (Cook) experienced the most dramatic rise when reported murders in June 2020 were nearly double the number reported in June 2019. This peak was followed by a sharp decline, and the monthly average for reported murders fell back to levels seen in 2019. Other categories of violent crime showed different results, with aggravated assault growing slightly by 5% across all jurisdictions when comparing 2020 to 2019 and rape and robbery decreasing substantially –22% and -12% respectively. Figure 7 displays the total reported violent crime for all eleven jurisdictions for the two-year period.

Figure 7. Reported UCR Violent Crime January 2019 to December 2020



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles (LAPD only), New Orleans, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

The clear conclusion is that overall crime has declined since COVID-19 restrictions were imposed, particularly for the crime of larceny-theft. At the same time, there has been no increase in the aggregate number of violent crimes.

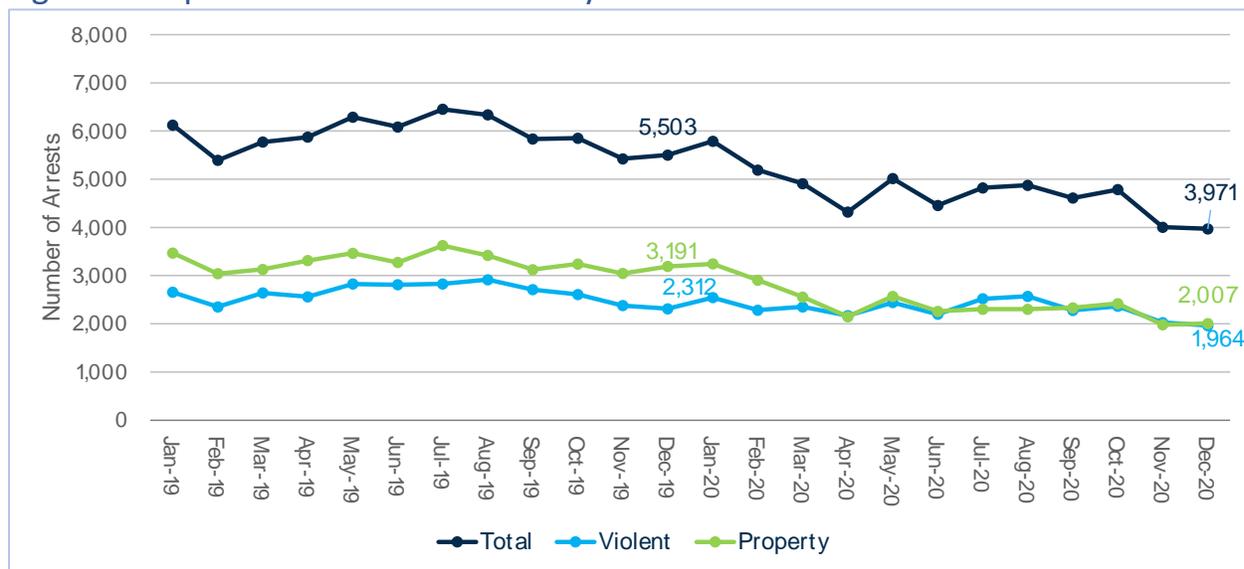
### C. Impact on Adult Arrests

The pre- and post-COVID-19 arrest trends are similar to the reported crime trends. Initially, arrests dropped sharply after COVID-19 restrictions were imposed and rebounded slightly beginning in June 2020. Total UCR adult arrests declined 20% when comparing 2019 and 2020. This dramatic decrease is in part due to the drop in crime but also due to actions taken by law enforcement agencies to reduce the number of arrests, especially for misdemeanor crimes and outstanding warrants. As a result, the total number of UCR property arrests declined most substantially (26%) when comparing 2019 to 2020, while total UCR violent arrests declined on a smaller scale, down 12%.

Like the observations from the reported crime data, each category of violent and property crime arrests had specific fluctuations within each crime type. Year on year, violent crime arrests decreased 12%, but within the category the total number of murder arrests increased 22%. Year on year, 2020 total property crime arrests decreased, but within the category, motor vehicle theft increased 7%. Figure 8 displays UCR property and violent crime arrests for the two-year period.

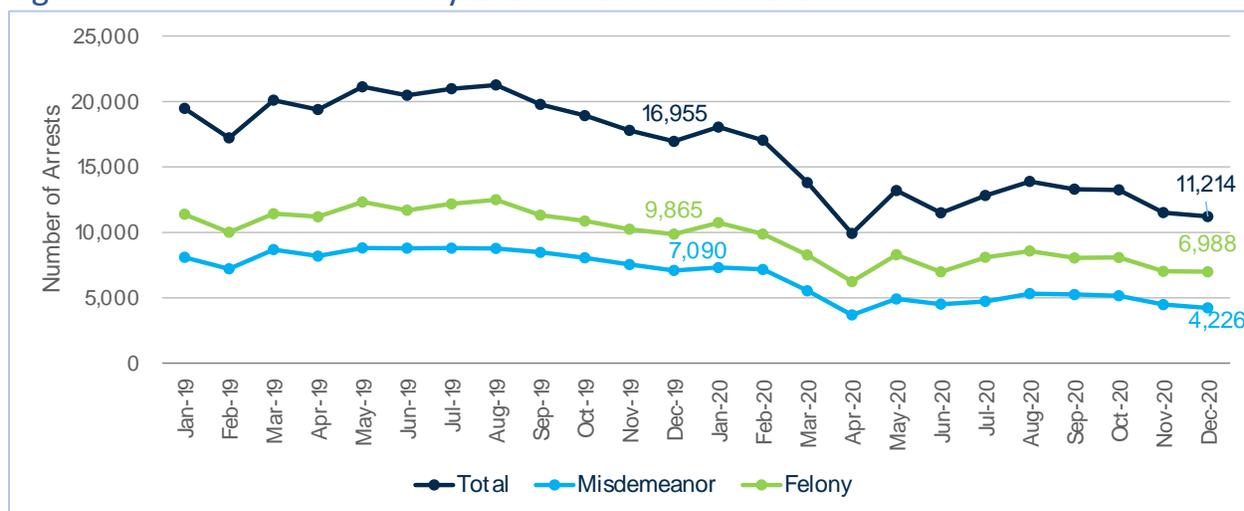
Eight of the participating jurisdictions were able to separate misdemeanor-level arrests from felony, with all showing dramatic declines initially post-COVID-19. Both felony and misdemeanor arrests rebounded slightly but remained well below their pre-COVID-19 levels. Felony arrests remain 29% lower when comparing December 2019 to December 2020 and misdemeanor arrests remain 40% lower. Figure 9 displays misdemeanor and felony adult arrests for the two-year period.

Figure 8. Reported UCR Arrests January 2019 to December 2020



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Cook, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles (LAPD only), New Orleans, Pennington (NIBRS), San Francisco, Spokane, St. Louis

Figure 9. Total Arrests January 2019 to December 2020



Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, Lake, Los Angeles (LAPD only), New Orleans, Pennington, San Francisco, Spokane

## Jail Length of Stay

Another significant development impacting jail populations is the change in LOS pre- versus post-COVID-19 (see Figure 2). Beginning in March 2020, across the eleven jurisdictions studied the LOS made a sharp increase. Between January 2019 and February 2020, the average LOS for the jurisdictions collectively was 48 days. This increased to 63 days in March 2020 and remained elevated through the rest of 2020. The two reasons for increased LOS for those released from jail post COVID-19 are: (1) reduced bookings for low-level offenses causing an increased proportion of jail bookings for more serious felony charges that traditionally have longer LOS, and (2) a slowdown in court case processing. Following a peak of 69 days in April 2020, jail LOS did begin to trend downward somewhat and averaged 59 days from October through December 2020. Examining case-level data for a smaller cohort of five jurisdictions shows a similar trend. These data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Releases (January 2019 - February 2020 v. April 2020 - December 2020)

Release Reason	Pre-COVID-19		Post-COVID-19	
	Percent of Total	Average LOS (days)	Percent of Total	Average LOS (days)
Monthly Average LOS (days)	38		48	
Bond/bail/ROR	42%	10	52%	14
Dismissed/court order	8%	53	8%	85
Time served/expired	9%	59	8%	101
Transfer to prison	10%	86	7%	97
Other	31%	51	27%	56

Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, Charleston, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Pennington, and St. Louis

## D. Changes in the Composition of the Jail Population

As jail populations declined, several of the key demographic and offense attributes have shifted. Attributes of a subset of the jurisdictions examined are shown in Table 3. Specifically, populations have become increasingly male, charged with felony and felony violent crimes, and are experiencing longer LOS. This in part is expected as the people that used to be admitted to the jail for less serious crimes are no longer being booked and/or are gaining release more easily. While LOS for those released has begun to recover to pre-COVID-19 levels, the LOS for individuals sitting in jail continues to increase – reflecting the impact of delayed court processing. Unless the slowdown in the processing of criminal cases for detained defendants is mitigated, the jail population LOS could continue to rise. How soon a return to “normalcy” occurs will depend on further delays in fully re-opening the courts and how soon COVID-19 restrictions on social and economic activities are removed.

Table 3. Comparison of Current Jail Population Attributes February 2020 v. December 2020

Attribute	Pre-COVID-19	Post-COVID-19
Total	24,429	21,077
Length of Stay (days)	184	261
Gender		
Female	12%	9%
Male	88%	91%
Legal Status		
Pre-trial	47%	46%
Sentenced	47%	48%
Other	6%	6%
Primary Charge		
Felony	82%	87%
Felony violent	42%	57%
Felony drug	8%	4%
Felony property	18%	15%
Felony other	14%	13%
Misdemeanor	8%	5%
Other	10%	8%

*Jurisdictions included: Allegheny, East Baton Rouge, Lake, Los Angeles, Orleans, Pennington, Spokane, and St. Louis*

## IV. Conclusion

Data from this research showed that in all eleven jurisdictions there is a clear, consistent pattern of both crime and jail populations declining in tandem with one another. The COVID-19 restrictions that served to greatly restrict the U.S. economy and the traditional, “every day” social and economic activities/transactions of the public served to lower crime rates, and in particular the crime of larceny-theft. Unemployment rose which, contrary to public opinion, is traditionally associated with lower, not higher, crime rates.<sup>4</sup> While this may seem counterintuitive, it is consistent with prior research. Unemployment surged during and after the recent Great Recession (2008-2009); however, crime rates continued to decline. Sociologists observed that when unemployment suddenly increases, people who have led traditional law-abiding lives do not suddenly become criminals. Additionally, a downturn in the economy curtails normal social activities, which reduces the opportunities for individuals to become victimized. Lastly, lower inflation and interest rates can negate the short-term effects of unemployment.

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With fewer people committing crimes, there were fewer arrests and fewer jail bookings, which lowered the jail populations. At the same time, local jurisdictions were also implementing policies that were designed to restrict the arrest and subsequent bookings of people charged with non-violent crimes. For people who were detained, there were efforts to make it easier for defendants to be released by lowering bail requirements or increasing the use of non-financial release mechanisms.

2020 saw a historic reduction of jail populations unlike any other in U.S. history. Never before have jail populations declined so much in a such a short time frame. Our continued tracking of jurisdictions for the nine months post COVID-19 demonstrated a small rebound off historic lows by the end of 2020. Analysis suggests that the jail population reductions did not compromise public safety as measured by the number of reported crimes and arrests. There are challenges ahead in keeping jail populations low, namely maintaining lower arrests, jail bookings, and reducing the length of stay by expediting the disposition of criminal cases. The response to COVID-19 has shown that such reforms are possible and can safely reduce jails population but sustaining lower jail populations will require maintaining these same reforms in some manner.

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<sup>4</sup> James Austin, Todd Clear, and Richard Rosenfeld. 2020. **Explaining Past and Projecting Future Crime Rates**. New York, NY: The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. [hfg.org/crime\\_forecasting.htm](https://hfg.org/crime_forecasting.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Rosenfeld, Richard, and Aaron Levin. 2016. Acquisitive crime and inflation in the United States: 1960 - 2012. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 32: 427-447.

## Appendix

### Jurisdiction

Allegheny County  
Charleston County

East Baton Rouge Parish  
Lake County  
Los Angeles County  
Orleans Parish  
Pennington County  
City and County of San Francisco  
Spokane County

St. Louis County

### Case Level Data Source

Allegheny County Courts  
Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council  
(Note: Data reported for Charleston contains raw/unofficial numbers that are subject to change throughout the year as cases are cleared. The only official numbers would come from the FBI source.)

East Baton Rouge Criminal Justice Coordinating Council  
Lake County Sheriff's Office  
Los Angeles Sheriff's Office  
City of New Orleans Criminal Justice Coordinating Council  
Pennington County Sheriff's Office  
San Francisco District Attorney's Office  
Spokane County Regional Law and Justice Dept., Spokane Police Department, and Spokane County Sheriff's Department

St. Louis SJC Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

### Allegheny County Jurisdictions Reporting

Allegheny County District Attorney  
Allegheny County Police Department  
Allegheny County Sheriff  
Allegheny County, Housing Auth  
Allegheny Valley Regional PD  
Animal Control MP, Municipal  
Aspinwall Borough Police Department  
Avalon Borough Police Department  
Baldwin Police Department  
Baldwin Township Police Department  
Beaver PSP  
Bedford PSP  
Bell Acres Police Department  
Belle Vernon PSP  
Bellevue Borough Police Department  
Bethel Park Police Department  
Blawnox Borough Police Department  
Brackenridge Borough Police Department  
Braddock Hills Borough Police Department  
Braddock, Borough of Police Department  
Brentwood Borough Police Department  
Bridgeville Borough Police Department

Moon Township Police Department  
Mt Lebanon Police Department  
Mt Oliver Borough Police Department  
Munhall Police Department  
N Braddock Borough Police Department  
N Fayette Township Police Department  
N Huntingdon Township Police Department  
New Stanton PSP Turnpike  
North Versailles Police Department  
Northern Regional Police Department  
Oakdale Police Department  
Oakmont Borough Police Department  
Office of Attorney General  
O'hara Township Police Department  
Ohio Township Police Department  
PA Fish & Boat Comm, Southwest  
PA State Police, Gaming Enforcement  
Penn Hills Police Department  
Penn State, University PD  
Pennsylvania Office of State Inspector General  
Pitcairn Police Department  
Pittsburgh Police Department

## Allegheny County Jurisdictions Reporting

Butler PSP	Pittsburgh PSP
Carlow University PD	Pittsburgh School Police Department
Carnegie Mellon, University PD	Pleasant Hills Police Department
Carnegie Police Department	Plum Borough Police Department
Castle Shannon Police Department	Point Park University Police Department
Chatham University Police Department	Point State Park
Churchill Borough Police Department	Port Authority Police Department
Clairton City Police Department	Port Vue Police Department
Collier Township Police Department	PSP, Bur Criminal In
Connellsville Police Department	PSP, Emer & Special
Coraopolis Borough Police Department	Rankin Borough Police Department
Crafton Borough Police Department	Reserve Township Police Department
Cranberry Township Police Department	Robert Morris Police Department
Crescent Township Police Department	Robinson Township Police Department
Dormont Police Department	Ross Township Police Department
Duquesne Police Department	S Fayette Township Police Department
Duquesne, University PD	Scott Township Police Department
East Deer Township Police Department	Sewickley Borough Police Department
East McKeesport Police Department	Sewickley Heights Police Department
Edgewood Borough Police Department	Shaler Police Department
Edgeworth Police Department	Sharpsburg Borough Police Department
Elizabeth Borough Police Department	South Park Tn Police Department
Elizabeth Township Police Department	Springdale Borough Police Department
Etna Police Department	St. Clair Hospital PD
Fawn Township Police Department	St. Clair Hospital Police Department
Findlay Township Police Department	Stowe Township Police Department
Forest Hills Police Department	Swissvale Police Department
Forward Township Police Department	Tarentum Borough Police Department
Fox Chapel Borough Police Department	Trafford Borough Police Department
Franklin Park Police Department	Turtle Creek Police Department
Frazer Township Pd Police Department	Uniontown PSP
Game Commission, Southwest	Univ Of Pittsburgh Police Department
Gibsonia PSP Turnpike	University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
Glassport Police Department	University of Pittsburgh Medical Center PD
Greensburg PSP	Upper St Clair Police Department
Greentree Police Department	Verona Borough Police Department
Hampton Township Police Department	Versailles Borough Police Department
Harmar Township Police Department	Veterans Medical, Admin
Harrison Township Police Department	Washington PSP
Heidelberg Borough Police Department	Waynesburg PSP
Highmark Health PD	West Deer Township Police Department
Homestead Police Department	West Homestead Police Department
Indiana PSP	West Mifflin Police Department
Indiana Township Police Department	West View Borough Police Department

Allegheny County Jurisdictions Reporting

Ingram Borough Police Department  
Jefferson Hills Police Department  
Kennedy Township Police Department  
Kittanning PSP  
Leet Township Police Department  
Leetsdale Police Department  
Liberty Borough Police Department  
Lincoln Borough Police Department  
Liquid Control Enforce, District  
McCandless Police Department  
McDonald Borough Police Department  
McKees Rocks Police Department  
McKeesport Police Department  
Millvale Police Department  
Monroeville Police Department

Whitaker Police Department  
White Oak Borough Police Department  
Whitehall Borough Police Department  
Wilkins Township Police Department  
Wilkinsburg Police Department

Charleston County Jurisdictions Reporting

(Note: Data reported for Charleston contains raw/unofficial numbers that are subject to change throughout the year as cases are cleared. The only official numbers would come from the FBI source.)

Charleston Police Department  
Charleston County Sheriff's Office  
Mount Pleasant Police Department

Cook County Jurisdictions Reporting

Chicago Police Department

East Baton Rouge Parish Jurisdictions Reporting

Baton Rouge Police Department  
East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office

Los Angeles County Jurisdictions Reporting

Los Angeles Police Department

Orleans Parish Jurisdictions Reporting

New Orleans Police Department  
Delgado Community College Police  
Southern University A & M - New Orleans - Police Department  
Tulane University Police Department  
University of New Orleans Police Department  
Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office

Pennington County Jurisdictions Reporting

Pennington County Sheriff's Office  
Rapid City Police Department  
Box Elder Police Department  
National Park Service

City and County of San Francisco Jurisdictions Reporting

San Francisco Police Department  
San Francisco Sheriff's Office  
San Francisco District Attorney's Office

Spokane County Jurisdictions Reporting

Spokane County Sheriff's Office (which does law enforcement for the unincorporated areas of the county as well as the following incorporated towns/cities: Deer Park, Millwood, Latah, Rockford, Fairfield, Waverly, Spangle, and Medical Lake)  
Spokane Police Department  
Spokane Valley Police Department

St. Louis County Jurisdictions Reporting

Ballwin Police Department	Lambert International Airport Police Department
Bel Nor Police Department	Manchester Police Department
Bel Ridge Police Department	Maplewood Police Department
Bella Villa Police Department	Maryland Heights Police Department
Bellefontaine Neighbors Police Department	Moline Acres Police Department
Berkeley Police Department	Normandy Police Department
Breckenridge Hills Police Department	Northwoods Police Department
Brentwood Police Department	Oakland Police Department
Bridgeton Police Department	Olivette Police Department
Calverton Park Police Department	Overland Police Department
Chesterfield Police Department	Pagedale Police Department
Clarkson Valley Police Department	Richmond Heights Police Department
Clayton Police Department	Riverview Police Department
Country Club Hills Police Department	Rock Hill Police Department
Crestwood Police Department	Shrewsbury Police Department
Creve Coeur Police Department	St Ann Police Department
Des Peres DPS	St John Police Department
Edmundson Police Department	St Louis Community College Police Department
Ellisville Police Department	St Louis County Police Department
Eureka Police Department	Sunset Hills Police Department
Ferguson Police Department	Town & Country Police Department
Flordell Hills Police Department	University City Police Department
Florissant Police Department	University of Missouri - St Louis Police Department
Frontenac Police Department	Velda City Police Department
Glendale Police Department	Vinita Park Police Department

Hazelwood Police Department  
Hillsdale Police Department  
Kirkwood Police Department  
Ladue Police Department  
Lakeshire Police Department

Warson Woods Police Department  
Washington University Police Department - St Louis  
Webster Groves Police Department  
Woodson Terrace Police Department

This report was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge which seeks to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. Core to the challenge is a competition designed to support efforts to improve local criminal justice systems across the country that are working to reduce over-reliance on jails, with a particular focus on addressing disproportionate impact on low-income individuals and communities of color.

More information is available at [www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org](http://www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org)



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