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MILWAUKEE COUNTY AWARDED \$2 MILLION BY MACARTHUR FOUNDATION TO REDUCE JAIL POPULATION, IMPROVE LOCAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, AND MODEL REFORMS FOR THE NATION

MILWAUKEE, WI, April 13, 2016 – The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation today announced a \$2 million grant to Milwaukee County to implement reforms to safely reduce Milwaukee’s jail population and address racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system. Milwaukee County is one of 11 jurisdictions in the country chosen to receive significant funding and access to expert technical assistance to implement a plan for reform over the next two years. In total, nearly \$25 million was awarded in support of ambitious plans to create fairer, more effective local justice systems across the country.

The grant is a part of the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#), a national initiative supported by the Foundation with an initial \$75 million to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. The Challenge is establishing a network of jurisdictions to model and inspire effective local criminal justice reforms across the country. Last May, Milwaukee County was one of the 20 jurisdictions chosen by the Foundation for initial grants and expert counsel to develop plans for reform after a highly competitive selection process that drew applications from nearly 200 jurisdictions in 45 states and territories.

“The way we misuse and over-use jails in this country takes an enormous toll on our social fabric and undermines the credibility of government action, with particularly dire consequences for communities of color,” said Julia Stasch, President of the MacArthur Foundation. “The thoughtful plans and demonstrable political will give us confidence that these jurisdictions will show that change is possible in even the most intractable justice-related challenges in cities, counties, and states across the country.”

With the award, Milwaukee County will implement reforms to address the main drivers of its jail population – which include people with mental health and substance abuse, and others accused of non-violent misdemeanor offenses – with the goal of reducing the average daily jail population by 18 percent over two years.

Milwaukee County, in collaboration with local law enforcement, corrections officials, prosecutors, defenders, judges, and other stakeholders, has developed a plan that focuses on expanding the county’s book and release program for low-level non-violent misdemeanor offenses and diverting individuals with mental health or substance abuse issues to alternatives to jail that will help prevent them from cycling in and out of the system.

As in most jurisdictions, people of color are overrepresented in Milwaukee County’s jail population. Despite making up 41 percent of the local population, African Americans and



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Hispanics make up approximately 70 percent of the county's jail population. These disparities are primarily brought on by higher rates and exposure to violent crime in the city of Milwaukee, which leads to increased trauma among disadvantaged populations within the city. To address this, Milwaukee County will institute a new post-booking stabilization program for individuals suffering from mental health or substance abuse issues that will remove them from jail within 48 hours and connect them with appropriate services. Furthermore, the county will also provide law enforcement with additional resources and training around trauma while also increasing the utilization of existing behavioral health services. Through these initiatives alone, the county aims to reduce mental health misdemeanor bookings by 15 percent and the number of competency hearings by half.

In addition, Milwaukee County will launch reform initiatives including:

- new strategies that foster greater information sharing;
- prompt and effective interventions that will minimize the use of jail for people with mental health or substance abuse problems; and
- more trauma-informed response options for its justice system administrators.

Milwaukee County will continue to place an emphasis on community engagement and collaboration among local law enforcement, corrections officials, prosecutors, defenders, judges, and other stakeholders in this work to drive reform.

Chief Judge Maxine White stated, "We are extremely grateful and honored to have received this award and opportunity from the MacArthur Foundation. With their help and our efforts, we can better protect public safety by smart use of our jails and working with issues of mental illness and substance abuse in a more systematic and effective way. This opportunity allows Milwaukee County to continue as a leader in criminal justice reform."

Despite growing national attention to the large number of Americans confined in state and federal prisons, significantly less attention has been paid to the local level, where the criminal justice system primarily operates and where over-incarceration begins. Jail populations have more than tripled since the 1980s, as have the cumulative costs of building and running them. Nationwide misuse of jails most harshly impacts low-income communities and communities of color. For example, while African Americans and Latinos make up 30 percent of Americans, they make up 51 percent of the U.S. jail population. Today, one in three Americans believes his or her local justice system is unfair, [according to a poll conducted by Zogby Analytics and supported by the Foundation](#). MacArthur launched the Safety and Justice Challenge in February 2015 to address these issues by creating fairer, more effective local justice systems and spurring national demand for reform.

Several of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations will provide technical assistance and counsel to Milwaukee County and other jurisdictions: 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 Vera Institute of Justice, Pretrial Justice Institute, and W. Haywood Burns Institute.



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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 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; the strength and vitality of our headquarters city, [Chicago](#); and generating new knowledge about critical issues.

More information about the Safety and Justice Challenge is available at www.safetyandjusticechallenge.org.