

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/oklahoma-city-chamber-criminal-justice-task-force-report>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

For years, Oklahoma County has been grappling with an overcrowded and run-down jail. With discussions abounding about whether to replace it with a larger facility, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce convened a task force to examine the county's local justice system and needs. Chaired by Clayton Bennett, chairman of the Oklahoma City Thunder, the task force included business leaders, criminal justice stakeholders, the judiciary, county and city officials, state agencies, and others. It also brought in Vera to help analyze why the jail was overcrowded, how it was used, and whether that use served the county's public safety needs effectively. This report presents Vera's recommendations to the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber Criminal Justice Task Force for how the county can safely reduce its jail population. While data collection practices limited some of the analysis, key findings and associated recommendations are reported below.

A discussion about replacing or expanding the jail must be preceded by a thorough examination of the current local pretrial justice system: how is the jail being used? How should it be used? To address jail overcrowding, counties must look comprehensively at their systems and discover why and how their jails have become overcrowded.

The Oklahoma County pretrial justice system needs greater collaboration and oversight to ensure that the jail, the county's most restrictive and most costly criminal justice resource, is being used judiciously.

The county should develop alternative strategies to respond to the lowest-level offenses, such as municipal violations and lower-level misdemeanors.

Because the county relies primarily on bail for pretrial release, money governs whether someone is detained pending trial, rather than risk of flight or reoffending.

RESOURCE SITE

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