

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/new-orleans-pretrial-services-program-has-promising-future>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

New Orleans residents are detained in jail, especially pretrial, at significantly higher rates than people in other U.S. cities. Though the rate has been steadily decreasing, New Orleans still locally detains roughly 475 per 100,000 residents while the national urban average is about 250 per 100,000. Louisiana state law allows for a person to be detained up to 60 days while the prosecutor decides whether or not to file charges, which, combined with the presumptive use of pretrial detention for those who cannot afford to pay a financial bond, drives high rates of detention.

More pretrial incarceration can have negative social and economic results, and jeopardize public safety instead of improving it by resulting in lost employment, increased homelessness, disrupted treatment services, and increased future criminal activity. In order to address this problem, Vera contracted with the City of New Orleans in late 2011 to implement the [New Orleans Pretrial Services program \(NOPTS\)](#).

For many citizens of New Orleans, the program can be the difference between living productively in their community and losing their freedom before ever being convicted or formally charged with a crime. The program's impact is particularly important for communities of color or low-income individuals, according to Pastor Antoine Barriere, who told listeners of Angela Hills radio show that high incarceration rates [are] harvesting the poor. For the same crime, same arrest, a black person spends twice as much time in jail.

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) recognized the program's positive community impact in a report issued earlier this year, finding that between July 2012 and May 2013, 95 percent of individuals released from pretrial detention appeared in court as ordered, and 96 percent of low-risk defendants were not charged with a new crime while on pretrial release. City Councilmember Susan Guidry said, This report confirms that New Orleans Pretrial Services is a well-designed, cost-effective program that has the potential to be a complete game-changer with respect to reforming our local criminal justice system.

It is a promising time for New Orleans Pretrial Services, as the City Council and the mayoral administration have committed to fully funding the program's core activities. The program's new supervision component where NOPTS provides supervision to low to moderate-risk individuals under a grant from Baptist Community Ministries is so widely embraced by the magistrate judges that it is at capacity. With the continued support of our government and community partners, NOPTS will continue working towards a fairer, safer, and more just New Orleans for every resident.

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