

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/how-new-orleans-funds-justice>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

The principal agencies of the New Orleans local criminal justice system—the state and municipal criminal courts, the district attorneys office, the public defenders office, and the sheriff's office—rely significantly on revenues from fees imposed on people who are arrested. This funding structure is the product of state law, state and local budgetary decisions, and long-standing local practice.

Using data from 2015, Vera analyzed this funding model in order to determine how much revenue the city of New Orleans collected from those in contact with the criminal justice system in comparison to the operating costs spent on individuals who were incarcerated because they could not pay. This report details the results of Vera's analysis and offers an alternative vision for justice.

The city's approach to funding its criminal justice system is generally meant to shift the system's costs from all taxpayers to those who have contact with the system. However, Vera's analysis found that the current funding model is both unjust and expensive, costing taxpayers more money in the long run.

There is no evidence that detaining people pretrial because they cannot pay increases public safety. Indeed, pretrial incarceration itself correlates with an increased likelihood of future rearrest, even after only a few days in jail.

If the city and criminal justice system agencies collaborate, it is possible without state law change to refocus on justice and public safety by eliminating the two major forms of wealth extraction and replacing those revenue sources with direct funding.

PUBLICATION

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