

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-smaller-jail-for-new-orleans-what-democracy-looks-like>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

This evening, the New Orleans City Council [voted unanimously to pass an ordinance](#) to construct a new jail with just 1,438 beds about 40 percent of the current 3,575-bed capacity. Although this is an incredibly important step in the right direction, the new jail's capacity will still allow the city to have a detention rate 40 percent higher than the U.S. average in urban areas. The new facility will replace buildings that were damaged in post-Katrina flooding in 2005, a tragedy that presented the opportunity to rethink the practices that made New Orleans the nation's per capita leader in jail detention.

The city council's vote today echoed the recommendations made in November by Mayor Mitch Landrieu's working group on criminal justice and marks the culmination of an impressive, heartening coming-together of community and government. The council members' action is particularly striking when you consider the progress made since last summer, when they were presented with a proposal to build a 5,800-bed jail. Green-lighting such a facility would have signaled that a broad-based commitment to systemic rethinking had been thwarted. And it would have threatened the efforts of many system actors that have resulted in critical reforms, with more in the works.

So it was an extraordinary day in New Orleans, with another sign that this wonderful city has turned a corner to escape its troubled criminal justice past. And it was moving to read [this blog post](#) by Thomas Hilbink, program officer for the Transparency & Integrity Fund for U.S. Programs at the Open Society Foundations. Tom really captured the spirit of a community meeting two weeks ago about the jail proposal as informed, invested participants once again came together to keep the decision-making process open and accountable. His work frequently brings him to New Orleans to advance the criminal justice reform and open governance efforts OSF supports and his message is inspiring.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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