




OKLAHOMA COUNTY  
**CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE**  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

Oklahoma County Criminal Justice  
Advisory Council  
Annual Report to Interlocal Partners


Sixth Annual Report for the FY 2023-2024  
September 2024



OKLAHOMA COUNTY  
**WARRANT  
CLEARING**  
EVENT

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## MEMBERS OF THE OKLAHOMA COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COUNCIL

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**Tony Tyler**, Vice-Chairperson (First Community Representative)

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**Sue Ann Arnall**, Second Community Representative

**Judge Philippa James**, Presiding Judge of Oklahoma City Municipal Court

**Vicki Behenna**, District Attorney of Oklahoma County

**Sheriff Tommie Johnson III**, Oklahoma County

**LaShawn Thompson**, Court Administrator of OKC

**Rick Warren**, Court Clerk of Oklahoma County

**Craig Freeman**, City Manager of Oklahoma City

**Christy Gillenwater**, President & CEO of Greater Oklahoma City Chamber

**Scott Rigby**, Edmond City Manager

**Brian Maughan**, Oklahoma County Commissioner

**Dan Straughan**, Third Community Representative

**Rev. Theodis Manning**, Fourth Community Representative

**Brandi Garner**, Oklahoma County Detention Center

**Wade Gourley**, Chief of Police of Oklahoma City

**Brigitte Biffle**, Chief Public Defender for Oklahoma County

**Judge Richard C. Ogden**, Oklahoma County

**Allie Friesen**, Commissioner of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

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**Timothy Tardibono**, Executive Director

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**Cole Marshall**, General Counsel McAfee & Taft

## BACKGROUND

In response to the growing concerns about chronic overcrowding in Oklahoma County's jail facility, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber announced the creation of a special task force to evaluate Oklahoma County's criminal justice system in December 2015. With collaboration and input from a diverse group of community members, the Chamber contracted with the Vera Institute of Justice to complete an initial analysis and make recommendations for reform of the Oklahoma County criminal justice system. Vera released their recommendations in December 2016. As a central recommendation of the report, an inter-local agreement between Oklahoma County, the City of Oklahoma City, the City of Edmond and the City of Midwest City created the Oklahoma County Criminal Justice Advisory Council (CJAC) in November 2017. The Advisory Council continued to evolve with the hiring of a full-time executive director in February 2018 to provide support to the CJAC's efforts. The creation of this permanent oversight body is key to implementing the proposed criminal justice reforms which can be summarized in these six key recommendations:

- Create oversight and accountability mechanisms for the local justice system.
- Reduce jail admissions for municipal violations and low level misdemeanors.
- Create a fair and efficient pretrial release process that safely reduces unnecessary pretrial incarceration.
- Identify and address district court case processing delays that increase jail admissions and length of stay.
- Expand meaningful diversion program options, focusing on those with mental illness and substance abuse disorders.
- Reduce the impact of justice system fines and fees as a driver of jail growth and recidivism.

Although each of the six recommendations carries numerous challenges and barriers to improvement, the good news is that because of the cooperative effort of the Advisory Council's stakeholders, progress continues to be made on all six recommendations.

CJAC completed its sixth full fiscal year on June 30, 2024, continuing to make Oklahoma County's justice system fairer and more effective. The year was marked by a new study that should provide a policy guide map for CJAC partners to continue to make system improvements. A new data study should further enhance this opportunity.

As new CJAC members join the effort, continuity of relationships and mission is now the challenge. More than six years into this voyage of system change and improvement, we know that vigilance, innovation, and courage are required to keep building on the foundations of the amazing progress that has already occurred.

## NEW STUDY UNVEILS SUCCESSES AND PATH TO FURTHER PROGRESS IN OKLAHOMA COUNTY JUSTICE SYSTEM

In 2016, the Vera Institute for Justice evaluated Oklahoma County's criminal justice system and made six recommendations to responsibly reduce the jail's population and enhance public safety. Last year, CJAC requested a follow-up study to assess the extent to which the county has implemented the recommendations and to identify further improvements needed to achieve the goals outlined in the assessment.

To conduct this analysis, CJAC engaged the [Crime and Justice Institute \(CJI\)](#) to analyze data from the detention center, review state statutes and agency policies, and interview numerous system stakeholders. CJI collaborates with agency leaders and practitioners in developing and implementing effective justice system policies that achieve better outcomes and build stronger, safer communities. They work with local, state, tribal, and national justice organizations to provide nonpartisan policy analysis, implementation consulting, capacity-building assistance, and research services to advance evidence-based practices and create systems-level change.

The subsequent report showed seven findings about the county's criminal justice system:

1. Oklahoma County has established CJAC, a local criminal justice coordinating council, to provide oversight and increase transparency and collaboration among local justice system stakeholders.

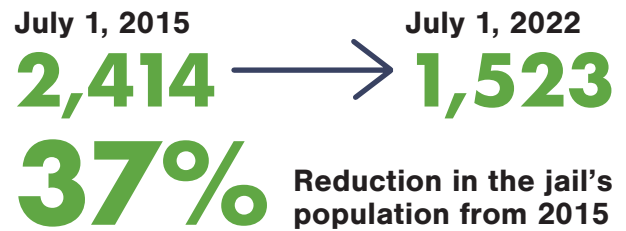
2. OCDC admissions have decreased by 44% since 2015, including drops in arrests for municipal charges and drug and alcohol-related misdemeanors.
3. Oklahoma County has not reduced the proportion of its population that is pretrial.
4. Overall length of stay has decreased since 2015, but is most pronounced for those released within the first 48 hours.
5. Access to and use of diversion programs has increased considerably in Oklahoma County.
6. Oklahoma County has reduced the impact of justice system fines and fees on jail growth and recidivism.
7. Racial disparities have increased within OCDC.

Overall, the county has achieved its primary goal of reducing the detention center population to address overcrowding, as the **population has decreased by 46% since 2015**. The new study serves as a roadmap for continued reform efforts in the coming years.

### DATA REVIEW BY CJI

CJI noted that their data assessment and analysis was more robust than the 2016 Vera Institute report data section due to greater data availability and upgraded agency data systems, including the jail's data system.

CJI found that from July 1, 2015, to July 1, 2022, the jail's population reduced by 37% from 2,414 to 1,523. Additionally, the study revealed that both the number of unique individuals booked into the jail and total admissions decreased by more than 40% between 2015 and 2022.

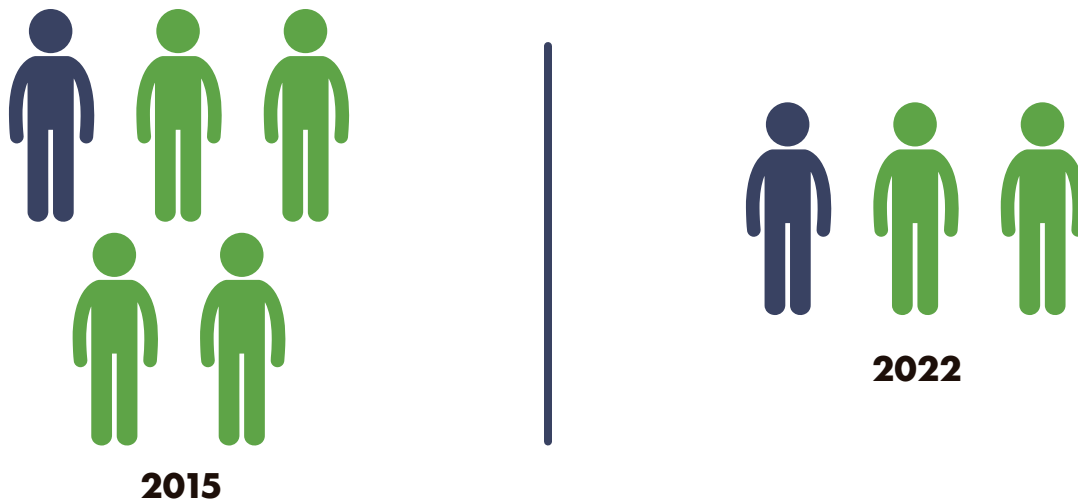


## PROGRESS IN OKLAHOMA COUNTY REFORM

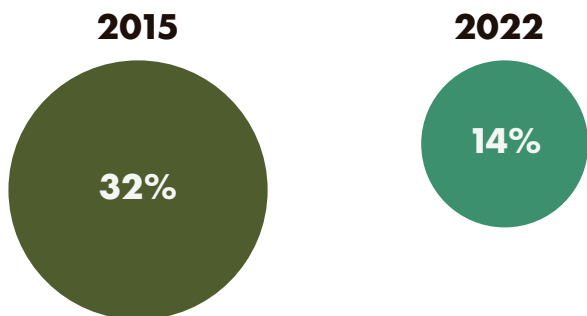
Of the six Vera Institute recommendations, CJI found progress on some, while more work is needed on others. The first recommendation, to create oversight and accountability mechanisms for the local justice system, was accomplished through the creation and continued operation of CJAC. The study found that CJAC's work increased transparency and accountability while facilitating collaboration among

county justice system agencies and partners. The county has made significant progress on expanding meaningful diversion program options, focusing on those with mental illness and substance use disorder. Additionally, diversion program participants are identified earlier in the criminal justice process, making them eligible for a broader continuum of diversion programming.

**OCPD's use of cite-and-release increased. In 2015 one in five contacts with a subject ended in cite-and-release, and by 2022 that figure grew to one in three.**



**Arrests due to a municipal charge have decreased.**



Finally, the county has reduced the impact of justice system fines and fees as a driver of jail growth and recidivism. The study showed a significant decrease in the number of people jailed solely for unpaid fines and fees. In 2022, less than 1.5% of jail admissions were due unpaid fines and fees. CJAC successfully advocated for a new law, passed by the Oklahoma Legislature last year, which will take effect in November and further reduce the number of warrants leading to arrest and jail time for unpaid fines and fees.

## MORE WORK TO BE DONE:

The recommendation to create a fair and efficient pretrial release process that safely reduces unnecessary pretrial incarceration saw no change from the Vera Institute study. The pretrial population for the Vera Institute study was 84% and there was no change in 2023. The CJI study pointed toward a new goal of 71% which would match the national average.

The recommendation to identify and address district court processing delays that increase jail admissions and length of stay, had mixed results. Although the length of stay decreased for those released within the first 48 hours, for those staying past 48 hours the length of stay was stagnant. Also, although counsel is now involved in the detainees' initial court appearance, the ability for attorneys to physically see their clients at the jail is still hindered by staffing and infrastructure challenges. These challenges are top of mind in the new jail design.

The study highlighted several aspects of the outdated notification process for filed charges, the absence of a formal system to expedite cases, and the lack of a system-wide electronic court notification reminder system. The report also noted that a previously unfulfilled recommendation was achieved through the first warrant clearance event, allowing over 180 Oklahoma County residents to resolve outstanding warrants, potentially preventing their arrest for minor offenses. The number of individuals who have participated in subsequent warrant-clearing events has reached over 1500.

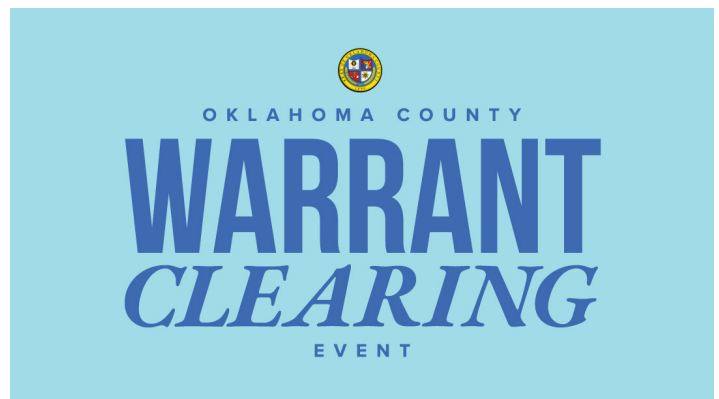
Fortunately, the newly appointed District Attorney is aware of these unaddressed recommendations and is working with other justice system stakeholders to create new strategies to address these concerns.

## NEW 2023 CJI RECOMMENDATIONS

The scope of CJI's study reviewed past recommendations and made new recommendations to guide CJAC's work in the next few years. The study reported that racial disparities in the jail population did not improve. While the total number of African Americans in jail decreased from 2015 to 2023, the percentage of African Americans in jail increased proportionally, while other demographic groups decreased.

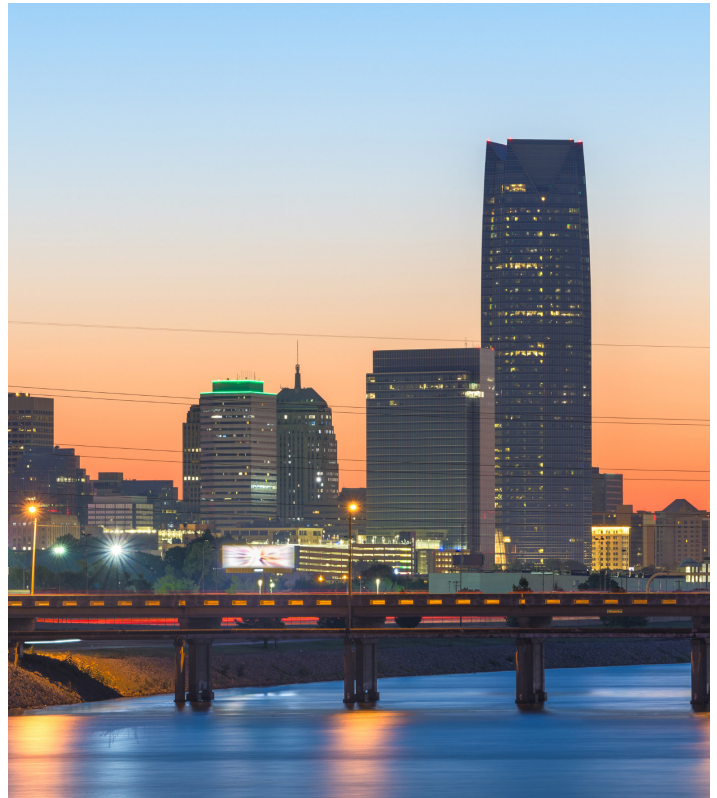
The study noted that although national standards have not advanced a clear solution to address this nationwide problem, the best practice is to create a robust data tracking system on racial demographics. Such data tracking will provide justice system agencies and partners the opportunity to analyze and report on trends. CJI suggested that the Oklahoma County justice system develop a streamlined process to share racial demographic data among multiple stakeholders.

This recommendation includes the county's pretrial services and conditional bond release agency since it currently has not adopted a formal way to track and report racial demographics. CJI noted that the Vera Institute study provided a list of key data indicators for race and other outcomes that are still valid and should be adopted across justice system stakeholders.



Another new recommendation is to create strict deadlines and review points throughout the court process to ensure individuals are not detained longer than necessary. Work on this recommendation could include:

1. Ensuring that criminal history information is available early in the process for pretrial release decision-makers, including judges.
2. Developing a risk assessment that considers public safety and flight risk.
3. Determining at which points in the court process, after the initial appearance, reviews can occur to reconsider release eligibility, necessity, or adjust the bond amount.
4. Setting up a system to review bond-setting circumstances in cases where someone is being held for a technical violation or a warrant from another county.



## IN CONCLUDING THE STUDY, CJI NOTED:

Leonard Engel, Director of Policy at CJI, commented on the study and the work of CJAC after the Vera Institute report, “While many communities put together similar task forces to evaluate their problems, most end up as one-and-done looks that fail to gain traction. What stands out here is that you are continuing to do this. [CJAC’s] commitment to continue doing this is unique. I haven’t seen this level of commitment sustained over this period of time anywhere else.”

The study concludes, “Since 2015, the Oklahoma County jail population has undergone a steep decline, from over 2,500 to now just over 1,550 people. Local stakeholders from across both the justice arena and the general community have committed themselves to nurturing a safer, fairer criminal justice system so that Oklahoma County is a better place to live, for all its residents. It is critical

that this commitment and momentum endure, as the County looks to build on its recent strides and continue to improve its local policies and practices. After all, there is still work to do to fully implement the recommendations made in 2016. The last seven years have demonstrated that Oklahoma County stakeholders can and will address the challenges they face with the required determination to succeed.”

CJAC is grateful for the diligent work of the CJI research team that visited Oklahoma County on multiple occasions for one-on-one visits with various CJAC partners. The team was led by Molly Robustelli, Dr. Shannon Streisel and Yasmin Eriksson. To see the full report and related presentation slides, visit the CJAC website: [www.okcountycjac.com/reports](http://www.okcountycjac.com/reports)

# LEGISLATURE CONTINUES PROGRESS ON JUSTICE REFORM MEASURES

The Oklahoma legislature continues to make progress in different aspects of justice reform passing three much needed measures in the 2024 session.

First, the legislature renewed funding for a second year for State Question 781 (SQ781). In 2016, voters approved a pair of criminal justice reform ballot measures known as State Questions 780 and 781. SQ780, redefined some non-violent and drug offenses from felony to misdemeanor. As the prison population declined from the SQ780 reforms, SQ781 set out that those state budget cost savings were to be rebated back to counties to implement county programs to address the high jail and prison population, like substance abuse treatment centers or diversion programs.

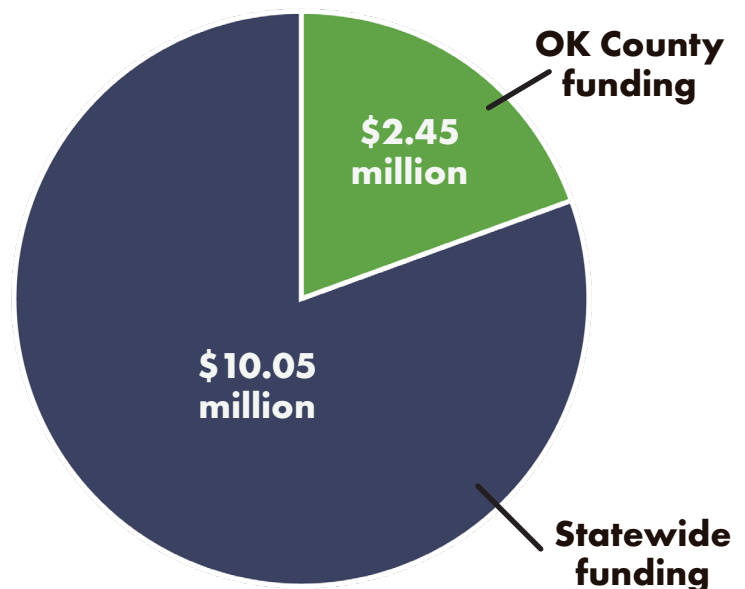
In 2023, the Governor and Oklahoma State Legislature allocated \$12.5 million to go back to counties based on population. Oklahoma County's portion of that \$12.5 million was \$2.45 million. In the 2024 annual budget, the Governor and the Legislature allocated that same amount, \$12.5 million, to continue to make funding available to counties. It is anticipated that OK County will again receive \$2.45 million. Counties may use their portion of the funding in the following ways:

- Mental health and substance abuse treatment or other health care programs
- Pretrial diversion programs
- Employment programs
- Education programs
- Housing programs

The Oklahoma County Board of County Commissioners partnered with the Oklahoma County District Attorney's office, the Public Defender's office and program providers to craft a plan on how to deploy that \$2.45 million. That plan will expand service delivery to the County's pretrial diversion and alternative sentencing programs through hiring of several new positions including attorneys in the District Attorney's offices and Public Defender's offices to ensure court cases keep moving toward graduation which results in dismissal of charges. Additionally, funding will go to hire new Supervision Engagement Officers and Recovery Navigators. Finally, funding is allocated for transportation and housing services along with medication compliance services to make sure participants stay current with prescribed medication.

The goal is to enhance public safety by giving participants the foundation to maintain their recovery and reintegrate into their families and communities. If not for these programs, there is little doubt that these participants would be in jail or prison.

**Projected 2024 SQ781 Funding**





## COURT PERSONNEL

Assistant District Attorney  
Assistant Public Defender  
Assistant Public Defender-Civic  
Treatment Court Program Director  
Administrative Assistant  
CO-OP Coordinator (Court Ordered  
Outpatient Treatment Program)  
Training of various new positions  
Team Building/judicial training  
ReMerge

## DIRECT CLIENT SERVICES

Supervision Engagement Officers  
DREAMS Court, Veterans Treatment Court, DUI,  
and ReMerge

## RECOVERY NAVIGATORS/CASE MANAGERS

DREAMS Court, CO-OP, DUI, and Drug Court  
Transportation Assistance  
Housing Assistance  
Drug Testing for Medication Compliance  
Indigent Drug Testing Support  
Program Incentives  
TEEM Pretrial Assistance Support

The second major accomplishment of the legislature was legislation to upgrade how justice system fines and fees are assessed or cleared. The legislation updates the program launched in 2023 which creates a court cost compliance program to allow a justice-involved individual to set up a payment plan with the courts through the court clerk in order to avoid arrest, jail and/or prison. A payment plan could be as little as \$25 per month or another amount as agreed upon between the defendant and the court. In lieu of arrest, law enforcement officers will be able to issue a cite and release citation for the defendants that have outstanding failure to appear warrants for costs. The court hearing determines a defendant's ability to pay and allows the court and the defendant to set up a payment plan. The court has discretion to reduce or waive costs.

This new program should substantially reduce the number of people that might be arrested and

jailed on failure to pay warrants. Oklahoma County officials played a prominent role in finalizing the legislation with Court Clerk Rick Warren and District Judge Nikki Kirkpatrick, Special Judge April Collins, and CJAC's Executive Director Timothy Tardibono serving on the committee. The current focus is the implementation phase ensuring that statewide system partners like sheriffs, court clerks, judges and police officers understand how to comply with their portion of the law.

The third major reform was a new system for sentencing classification. Oklahoma is one of the last remaining states in the nation that doesn't have a felony classification system. The new sentencing classification scheme will create 14 tiers based on severity. The new sentencing system will provide more uniformity across the state and should eliminate sentencing disparities based on a defendant's geography.

# OVER 1500 COUNTY RESIDENTS BENEFIT FROM WARRANT-CLEARING EVENTS

An issue continually contributing to the jail population is outstanding warrants, discovered when someone is pulled over for a traffic violation. Law enforcement officers have no discretion and must arrest on that warrant, even when the warrant is several years old, or for minor offenses like overdue traffic tickets.

Over a year ago, several partners in the Oklahoma County justice system collaborated to address the issue of old warrants. The group determined that by reducing the number of individuals with warrants stemming from low-level offenses, they could prevent arrests which would help keep the jail's population at a manageable level while saving taxpayers money. Last year, Oklahoma County Detention Center (OCDC) officials concluded that an average first-day cost was over \$200 due to expenses incurred during the intake process.

“To accrue the cost of arresting an individual who will likely be released from jail within the next day or few days makes no sense for the individual arrested, the arresting officer who has to bring that individual in, district judges, jail staff or taxpayers,” former Oklahoma County Public Defender Bob Ravitz said.

In addition to the costs that the county bears by arresting low-level offenders with active warrants, there are tremendous costs to the arrestee. At any given time, Ravitz said, about 30,000 individuals in Oklahoma have a warrant out for their arrest. Contrary to public perception, an individual with an old or minor warrant out for their arrest usually does not pose a threat to society.

The warrant clearing event allows those with an Oklahoma County warrant to get help clearing traffic, cost, or misdemeanor warrants. Revocation warrants (no new cases) are also eligible to be reviewed. Individuals will have the option to pay their fines and fees, get on a payment plan, or even reset a court date without the risk of being arrested.

The event couldn't succeed without the cooperation of multiple justice system partners. Oklahoma County judges, Oklahoma County Court Clerk staff, and attorneys from the offices of the Public Defender and District Attorney are onsite to assist, with the low pressure, outside the court environment. There are also service providers like TEEM, Diversion Hub, Bail Project, and Urban League and municipalities, like Oklahoma City and Edmond, who can help clear municipal warrants.

Due to the incredible success, the system partners intend to continue the events regularly throughout the coming year.



**30,000 individuals**  
have a warrant out for their arrest at any time

# DATAHUB FEASIBILITY STUDY LAUNCHED

One of the benefits of the 2016 Vera Institute for Justice report was that it gave extensive guidance on what system improvements were needed. From the outset the Vera Institute noted that a top strategy was to improve data capacity and collection across agencies and share data through what is now CJAC.

Additionally, the report gave goals for working groups, including:

1. Assessment to enable a fuller understanding of the data systems used by all agencies in the criminal justice system and their capacity for collecting key data
2. Establish a common case identification number that can be used by all criminal justice system agencies for data sharing
3. Criminal justice system online dashboard that reports essential and current information about the jail population and other criminal justice system data
4. Data warehousing system (datahub) to provide analytics on different aspects of the justice system

CJAC fulfilled the public dashboard recommendation and the dashboard is now housed on okcountycjac.com and utilized by numerous partners. The recommendation for a data capacity assessment was completed by another organization in 2018-19. However, the Data Subcommittee recognized that the information was outdated and data sharing and analytics technology has substantially improved in recent years making a refresh of the data capacity assessment timely. The Data Subcommittee determined that the other two recommendations, common case identifier and the datahub were stalled and needed a jumpstart.

In response to these concerns, the subcommittee put out a Request for Proposal and chose the Tulsa-based data and analytics company, 9b Corp to spearhead a feasibility study to determine how to accomplish the incomplete recommendations or whether the recommendations were still valid. 9b works to empower their clients to make well-informed, evidence-driven decisions something the Vera Report noted was lacking in the county's justice system in 2016.

9b has been working through the summer interviewing numerous CJAC partners. **The study should be ready for review in the fall of 2024.**



# LAND PURCHASED FOR NEW JAIL AND BEHAVIORAL CARE CENTER

Oklahoma County continues to make slow but steady progress on the new jail. Two years after voters opted to renew an expiring bond to build the new jail, the Board of County Commissioners purchased land at 1901 E. Grand Blvd. in southeast OKC. The land purchase and site selection allow the county to continue to move forward with one of the hallmarks of the new jail facility proposal, the Behavioral Care Center (BCC). The BCC will provide up-to-date facilities for the

mental and behavioral health needs and diversion of justice-involved individuals.

It is no secret that the current jail's behavioral care areas are inadequate to meet the current needs of residents. Despite the expectation of construction progress on the BCC site in FY25, the new jail project still faces numerous hurdles related to cost, and awaits a court determination on whether zoning requirements apply.



*Architectural rendering of the planned Oklahoma County Detention Center and Behavioral Care Center*

# FY24 AVERAGE JAIL POPULATION DROPS FOR THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR

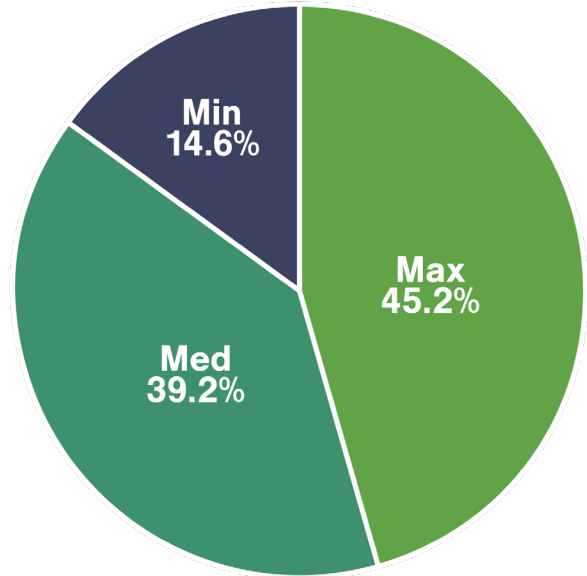
The chronic jail overcrowding that has plagued the Oklahoma County Detention Center (OCDC) for more than two decades has receded significantly in the last few years. The trend continued in **FY24 with a new record low yearly average of 1,385.**

This average was impacted by notable historic lows in the jail population. This record-setting low began in November 2023, when the trend for OCDC jail population under 1,300 started with a total count of 1,298 on November 30. The December 2023 monthly average population reached a 27-year low of 1,289 - a rate not seen since 1996.

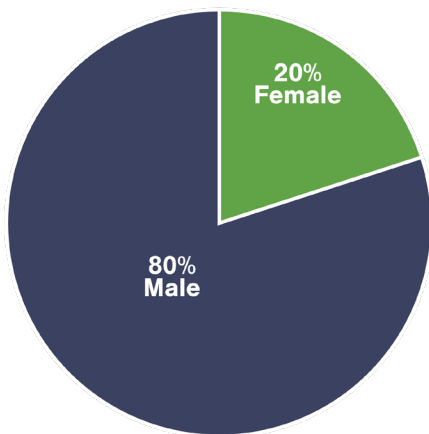
Comparatively, during that time in Tulsa County, the jail population reached 1,446. In December, OCDC averaged 1,289 while Tulsa County's average was 1,390. It is remarkable that with a much larger general population in Oklahoma County, the OCDC population dipped below Tulsa County's.

These historically low levels starkly contrast with the incredible overcrowding that plagued OCDC for most of the past century and spurred the action toward sensible reform that CJAC and its community partners now advance each day.

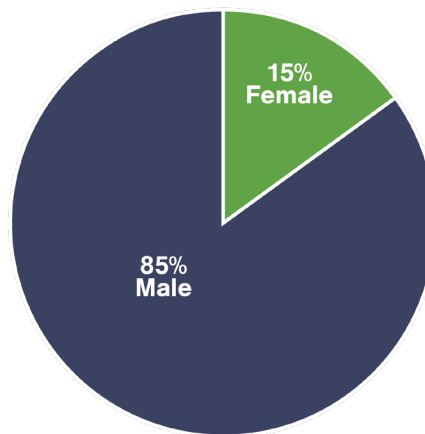
## OCDC Security Classifications FY24 Average



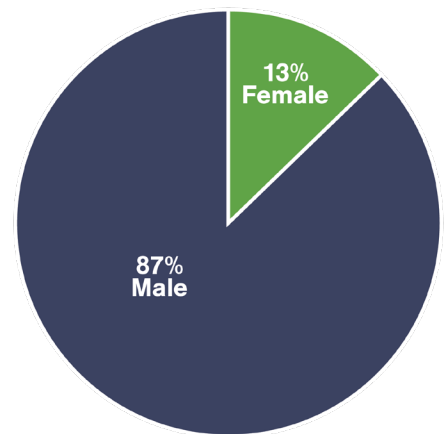
## Gender Breakdown of Jail Population Comparison



Vera Report 2016

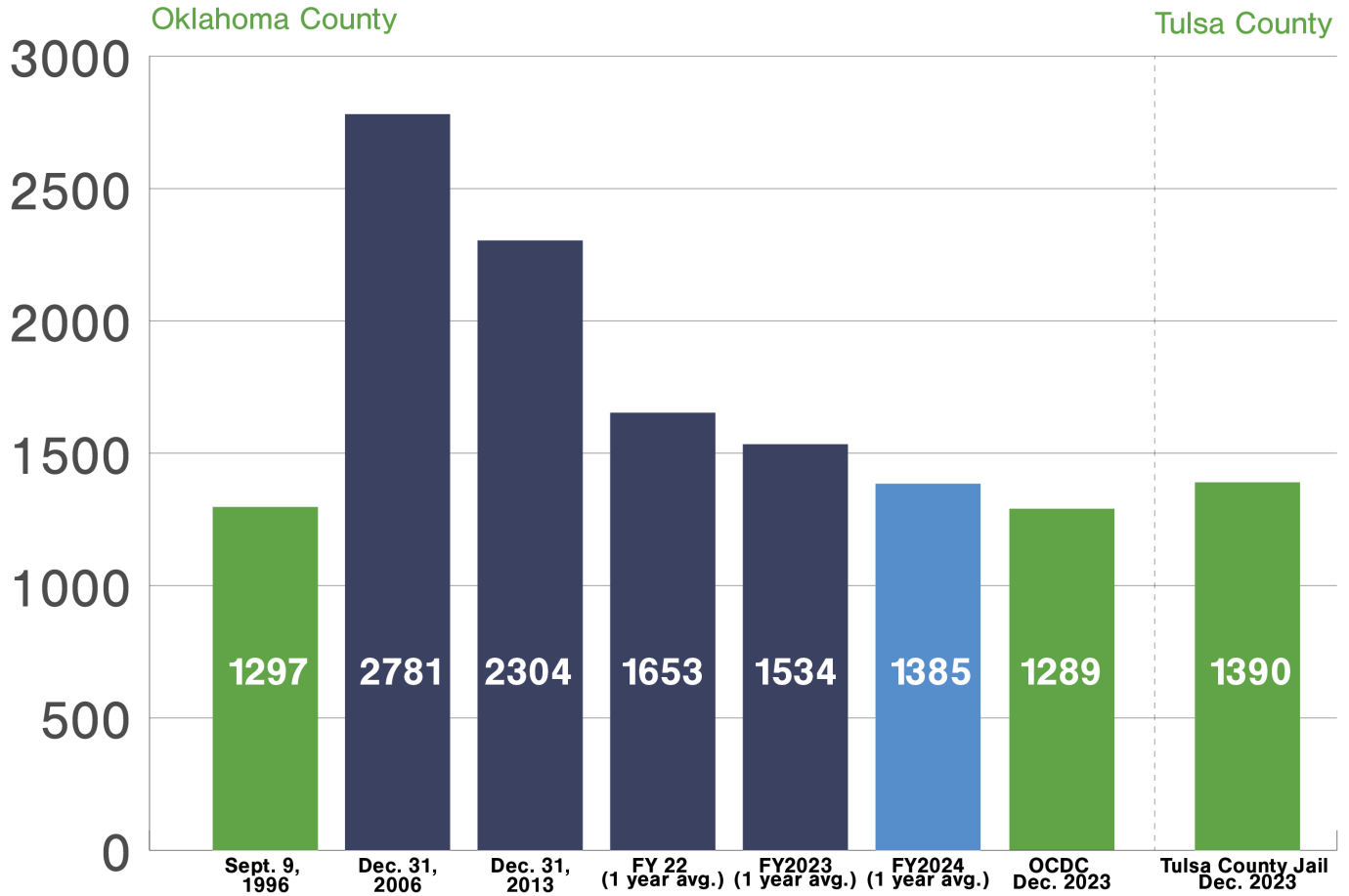


FY23



FY24

## Average Jail Population Totals



On November 30, 2023, the Oklahoma County jail population reached a historic low of 1,298, breaking the 1,300 mark for the first time since the 1990s. This trend continued, with December’s average daily population dipping into the 1,280s. Notably, Oklahoma County’s jail population dropped lower than Tulsa County’s, despite having a larger general population, highlighting the ongoing improvements in our justice system.

## CJAC WELCOMES NEW FACES, APPLAUDS JUSTICE CHAMPIONS RAVITZ AND GOURLEY

The Oklahoma County Criminal Justice Advisory Council stands on the shoulders of numerous justice champions who served on previous commissions, task forces and working groups. Since the majority of CJAC members are appointed

or elected officials, the makeup of the 19 members fluctuates from year to year. FY24 saw two new faces appointed to CJAC while one member retired and another sadly passed.

One of those newly appointed officials joining CJAC in FY24 is Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) Commissioner Allie Friesen. Prior to her role as Commissioner, Friesen held the position of Director of Clinical Programs in Behavioral Health at INTEGRIS. Her experience developing cost-effective, evidence-based practices, improving access to care, and enhancing patient safety will lend itself well to public service at ODMHSAS.

Friesen is a licensed mental health professional who specializes in working with individuals facing neurological disorders and other chronic medical conditions. In her new capacity, Commissioner Friesen emphasizes the need for transformative solutions and smart growth within the behavioral health field.

Another new face to CJAC is Brigitte Biffle, Oklahoma County's new Chief Public Defender. Biffle has a long history in the public defender's office representing clients in all stages of a criminal case, including bond hearings, probation revocation hearings, preliminary hearings, motion hearings, blind pleas, trials, and sentencings. Biffle is a fierce litigator who has a tremendous jury trial record. She follows an amazing legacy, after the passing of longtime Chief Public Defender Bob Ravitz, and she was encouraged and comforted in knowing that Ravitz hoped for her to succeed him. Ravitz had recently brought Biffle on as his First Assistant so she could learn the role more intentionally. She served in the interim role directly after his passing. After being officially named the Chief Public Defender, Biffle hit the ground running in implementing efforts to expand treatment courts, and deployed State Question 781 funding to enhance diversion services. She has ushered in substantial changes in the county's pretrial release system which will move more people out of incarceration and into successful interventions. Biffle has expressed pride as she watched former defendants improving their lives, succeeding in sobriety, and experiencing long-term employment and family stability.



*Allie Friesen, ODMHSAS Commissioner*



*Brigitte Biffle, OK County's Chief Public Defender*

**“THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN HAVING SOMEONE IN YOUR CORNER TO WALK SOMEONE THROUGH THE LEGAL PROCESS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES,” BRIGITTE BIFFLE, [OKLAHOMA CITY FREE PRESS](#)**

As we welcome two new members, a pair of CJAC's longtime justice champions moved on. OKC Police Chief Wade Gourley recently retired after serving Oklahoma City residents on the police force for 34 years with the last four of those as chief. Chief Gourley has been an active participant in CJAC and always made himself and his staff available to answer questions or cooperate on project planning. He was effective as Chief leading numerous efforts to improve service to residents including:

- Changing the way OKCPD responds to mental health calls
- Supporting transparency through body-worn cameras
- Revamping the entire officer/staff wellness program
- Expanding crisis intervention training for all officers.

Chief Gourley led the department through the tumultuous summer of 2020 that saw unprecedented civil unrest in America after national police incidents. Chief Gourley did not shy away from the challenge and embraced the Mayor and City Manager's task forces to review policing practices. The reviews, led by national consultant 21st Century Policing group, showed that OKCPD was already implementing and recommending important changes in their policing tactics.



*OKC Police Chief Wade Gourley*

**“WORKING ALONGSIDE THE DEDICATED MEN AND WOMEN OF THIS POLICE DEPARTMENT AND SERVING THIS GREAT COMMUNITY FOR OVER 34 YEARS HAS BEEN AN INCREDIBLE HONOR,” GOURLEY SAID.**



Finally, and sadly, CJAC unexpectedly lost one of its founding members, Bob Ravitz. Ravitz passed away on January 23, 2024 after more than 30 years of service as Oklahoma County's Chief Public Defender. At Ravitz's funeral, his oldest daughter Rachel gave a tribute, "Loud. If you ever talked to my dad, you know he had a loud, boisterous, passionate voice. Loud was my dad's voice to right the wrongs and stand up for the everyday man. He was not afraid to speak loud for those voices that could not be heard." CJAC knew that loud Bob very well, and his passion and determination are evident in the various justice system improvements he worked to institute.

Another speaker at Bob's funeral, Scott Rowland, Presiding Judge of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, and a long-time friend and humble adversary to Bob from his time in the Oklahoma

County District Attorney's office, quietly summed up his tribute by frankly assessing the situation, "**We've lost a lot.**"

The accolades he received in his passing were extensive. As the depth of love and respect for Bob from Oklahoma County and state leaders poured in, the impact of his legacy was clear.

Notably, the Crime and Justice Institute knew of Bob even before their review to update the Vera Institute report that has guided much of CJAC's work. They sent their condolences to CJAC along with this statement: "We met Bob in 2015 when Gov. Fallin invited CJI to Oklahoma to assess the state's readiness for an intensive examination of the corrections system. Bob was at the center of every task force, commission, study group and the like, fully giving of his time and experience.

Timothy Tardibono, CJAC Executive Director expressed his gratitude to have served with Ravitz, "Bob Ravitz was a blazing star in the constellation of justice reform in Oklahoma County and statewide and a founding member of (CJAC). This sad loss is immeasurable. CJAC is incredibly grateful for the time we had to serve alongside him resulting in the dramatic improvements in the Oklahoma County justice system that have occurred and setting the foundation for further improvements to come. Personally, I will miss his innovative thinking. He was always seeking to remove barriers to justice."

CJAC moves forward in Bob's shadow, inspired and resolute to face the daunting task of carrying on our work in a way that honors his life, passion, and service...and in a way that extends his loud voice against injustice.



**HIS COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN OKLAHOMA, AT THE LOCAL AND STATE LEVEL, WAS RELENTLESS. HIS EXPERIENCE AND STORIES BROUGHT HUMANITY TO DRY DISCUSSIONS OF DATA TRENDS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES. HE ALSO UNDERSTOOD THE SIZE AND WEIGHT OF THE ROCK THAT HE CONTINUALLY PUSHED UP THE STEEP HILL OF REFORM, YET ALWAYS SEEING OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE PROGRESS AND TO BREAK DOWN BARRIERS... OKLAHOMA IS A FAIRER AND MORE JUST STATE THANKS TO BOB'S EFFORTS. WE WILL MISS HIM." -[THE CRIME AND JUSTICE INSTITUTE](#)**



## CONCLUSION

Henry Ford once said, “Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is a success.” If Oklahoma County’s justice system has indeed turned the corner towards a new sustainable model, simply coming together

will not be enough, as the effort has moved beyond its initial stages. Staying together and working together are the next crucial steps toward a fairer and more effective justice system for Oklahoma County residents.