

Lancaster County Jail

Population and

Alternatives to

Incarceration

Comprehensive justice system initiatives to reduce overcrowding and improve public safety through evidence-based community corrections programs.

Lancaster County Criminal Justice System



Contents

Jail Population Overview

Key statistics on Lancaster County jail population, average daily occupancy, and overcrowding challenges affecting the criminal justice system.

24/7 Sobriety Program

Evidence-based alternative to incarceration using daily monitoring to reduce alcohol dependency and DUI recidivism among participants.

Pretrial Alternatives and Initiatives

PR bonds, Public Safety Assessment, day reporting center, pretrial drug court, and court reminder systems designed to reduce jail population and support community reintegration.

Strategic Recommendations

Evidence-based policy recommendations to expand programs, enhance supervision, and implement technology for improved justice outcomes.

Community Corrections Programs: Comprehensive Impact

1,139

Total Clients FY 24-25

11,574

Jail Bed Days Saved

\$1.74M

Quarterly Savings

81%

Success Rate

24/7 Sobriety Program

Alcohol/drug-focused alternative to incarceration with daily testing and monitoring.

- 51 clients served, 81% success rate (FY24-25)
- 3,179 jail bed days saved (Jul-Sep)
- Cost: \$10-15/day vs. \$150/day incarceration

House Arrest Program

Highest success rate program: Allows sentenced offenders to serve at approved residence.

- 275 clients served, 94% success rate
- 4,754 jail bed days saved (Jul-Sep)
- Electronic monitoring and substance testing

Mental Health Problem Solving

Specialized intervention for offenders with mental health/substance abuse issues.

- 36 clients served, 86% success rate
- Supportive intervention prevents unnecessary incarceration
- 12-month minimum program duration for felonies

Lancaster County Jail Population Overview

747.5

Avg Daily Population 2024-2025

112%

Operational Capacity

78%

Pretrial Detainees

150/day

Cost Per Inmate

Key Challenges

Overcrowding at 112% capacity with rising jail admissions since 2020, driven by extended pretrial detention periods in felony cases.

- Population increased 17% from September 2022 to September 2024
- Corrections is county's largest budget expense at \$34.9M in FY24
- Long pretrial detention creates criminal justice backlog
- 2,700+ annual jail admissions (2023)
- Average felony case processing time is 336 days
- Felony four cases represent 35% of population

Root Causes

The pretrial population is identified as the main driver of growth, particularly for felony cases, including drug charges and theft offenses.

- Felony four cases create extended detention periods
- Underutilization of available alternatives
- Limited use of pretrial supervision and diversion programs
- Drug charges (32% of population), Theft (18%), Assault (15%), Other felonies (35%)
- Average bond amount: \$15,000-\$25,000 for felonies

24/7 Sobriety Program

Current program data (Jul-Sep FY25-26): 53 total clients served, 81% success rate (59% shown for this quarter, but 81% for FY24-25 annual). New clients: 18 in quarter. Successful terminations: 13, Unsuccessful: 9. Jail bed days saved this quarter: 3,179. DUI rearrest rate: 5-7% vs. 25-35% traditional prosecution. Cost-effective alternative: \$10-15/day per participant vs. \$150/day incarceration, generating estimated savings of \$30,000-\$45,000 per participant.

- Need for more community-based alternatives essential
- Policy focus on reducing pretrial detention critical
- Investment in prevention and diversion programs justified
- FY24 corrections budget: \$34.9M (\$150/inmate/day)
- Jail capacity designed for 675, operating at 747.5 daily average

Public Safety Assessment (PSA) Tool

Assessment Tool Purpose

The Public Safety Assessment (PSA) is a validated risk assessment tool developed by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation in 2020. It is used throughout the country to evaluate the risk defendants will fail to appear in court or be rearrested if released.

The PSA evaluates 9 key factors:

- #1 Age at current arrest
- #2 Current violent offense
- #2A Current violent offense and 20 years old or younger
- #3 Pending charge at time of arrest
- #4 Prior Misdemeanor activity
- #5 Prior felony conviction
- #6 Prior violent conviction
- #7 Prior failure to appear in past 2 years
- #8 Prior failure to appear older than 2 years
- #9 Prior sentence to incarceration

PSA provides objective, data-driven risk scores to inform judicial decision-making on pretrial release. Helps determine appropriate conditions of release and supervision levels.

Key Benefits

- Objective risk scoring reduces bias in pretrial decisions
- Validates who is safe to release vs. who needs more supervision
- Supports PR bonds and alternatives to detention
- Helps identify best candidates for community supervision programs
- Easy to implement and Improves consistency in pretrial release decisions

Court Reminder Systems and Compliance

Automated Court Reminders

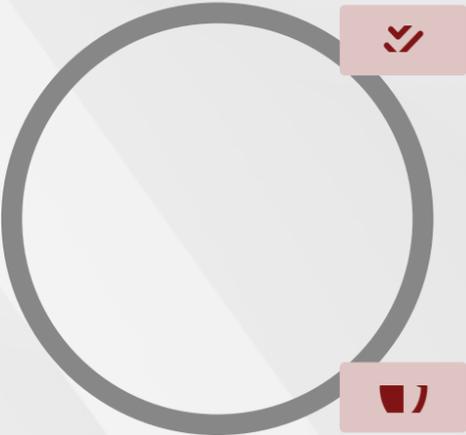
Systematic text and phone notifications reduce failure-to-appear rates by keeping defendants informed about court dates and requirements. Real-time communication improves accountability.

SMS and voice notification system

Reduces FTA (failure-to-appear) rates by 20-30%

Cost: \$2-5 per case

91% of recipients report receiving reminders effectively



Efficiency Improvements

Reduces administrative burden on court system, decreases unnecessary warrant issuances, improves overall court processing efficiency and case flow management.

Reduces unnecessary warrant issuances by 40-50%

Court processing time reduction: 15-20%

Administrative staff time savings: 10-15 hours/week per court

Estimated annual savings: \$50,000+ per jurisdiction

Benefits

Maintains court authority and compliance while reducing pretrial jail population. Technology enables effective supervision without incarceration for lower-risk offenders.

Maintains compliance without incarceration

Low-risk offenders successfully supervised: 88-92%

Enables pretrial release for hundreds of pretrial defendants annually with minimal cost

Nebraska 24/7 Sobriety Program

Program Overview and Purpose

The 24/7 Sobriety Program is an alternative to incarceration opportunity specifically designed for defendants involved in the criminal justice system due to alcohol and/or drug use. The 24/7 Sobriety Program provides daily testing, monitoring, and sanctioning to promote accountability and abstinence.



Eligibility Criteria

DUI/DWI offenders and repeat offenders with substance-related charges. Ideal participants should be employed or engaged in community activities. Target population: DUI offenders, repeat substance abusers. Excludes violent felons and sex offenders. Average participant age: 25-45 years.



Daily Monitoring Process

Twice-daily breathalyzer testing (morning and evening). Random urine testing for drug use. Home detention with exception for work and treatment. Cost: \$10-15/day per participant vs. \$150/day incarceration. Program duration: 6-12 months typical. Compliance monitoring 24/7/365.



Effectiveness Results

Proven highly effective with strong outcomes: 81% success rate (FY24-25). During the most fiscal year, served 97 total clients with 66 new clients enrolled. Of clients served, 52 successfully completed the program. 9,591 jail bed days saved, representing significant jail population relief. National data shows DUI rearrest rate: 5-7% (vs. 25-35% traditional prosecution). Cost-effective alternative: \$10-15/day per participant vs. \$150/day incarceration, generating estimated savings of \$30,000-\$45,000 per participant. Program provides daily testing, monitoring, and sanctioning to promote accountability and abstinence.

UNO Study of Lancaster County Jail Systems

Research Findings on Pretrial Detention

UNO and HDR researchers identified long pretrial detention stays as primary driver of jail capacity issues. Felony four cases and drug charges create extended detention periods exceeding system capacity.



Key Recommendations

Expand pretrial release programs, fully implement Public Safety Assessment (PSA) tool, add day reporting centers



Policy Solutions

Enhanced supervision for pretrial defendants, specialized case management, and community partnerships to reduce reliance on jail housing.

Day Reporting Centers and Pretrial Drug Courts

Day Reporting Centers

Non-residential facilities providing enhanced supervision and rehabilitative programming for offenders in community settings.

- Cognitive behavioral treatment and substance abuse counseling services
- Employment training and educational programming opportunities
- Reduced recidivism rates: 10.8-12.8 percentage point improvement
- Cost-effective alternative reducing jail population pressure
- Capacity: 35 - 75 participants
- Operating hours: 6am-10pm, 7 days/week
- Services: Job training, GED classes, treatment counseling
- Cost comparison: \$35/day vs. \$150/day jail incarceration
- 3-year recidivism: 24% (vs. 55% incarcerated group)

Pretrial Drug Courts

Court-supervised treatment programs for first-time felony drug offenders with judicial accountability.

- First-time felony drug charges and first-time felony DUI cases eligible
- 12-13% reduction in felony recidivism compared to traditional processing
- Significantly lower positive drug tests during participation
- Improved outcomes for participant employment and family stability
- Eligibility: Reside in Lancaster County, willing to participate minimum 12 months
- Court appearances: Monthly progress reviews with judge
- Mandatory urinalysis: Minimum 2x weekly
- Graduation rate: 60-65% of enrolled participants

Personal Recognizance (PR) Bonds

Program Overview and Purpose

PR bonds allow defendants to be released from custody without posting bail, based on their promise to appear in court. This program reduces jail population while maintaining public safety for lower-risk offenders.

ROR population in Lancaster County: 40+ active cases monthly

Reduces pretrial jail population by 8-12%

Increases access to justice for low-income defendants



Eligibility Assessment

Evaluated based on criminal history, employment status, family ties to community, and likelihood to appear. Risk assessment tools determine suitability for release.

Typical PR bond candidates: Non-violent first-time offenders, local residents



Release Conditions

Defendants released with conditions such as regular reporting, travel restrictions, no-contact orders, and periodic check-ins to ensure compliance.

Weekly check-ins: 70% of cases

Electronic monitoring optional: 15% of ROR cases

Violation rate: 8-12% require reincarceration



Impact and Effectiveness

Reduces pretrial detention costs while maintaining court appearance rates of 85-90%. Enables defendants to maintain employment and family connections.

Court appearance rate: 88-92% (vs. 65-75% with bail)

Cost savings per case: \$4,500-\$6,500 compared to pretrial detention

Defendants able to remain employed, keep housing and ability to support family, pay taxes, etc.

Strategic Recommendations for Lancaster County

Expand 24/7 Program

Increase program capacity and eligibility criteria to serve more DUI/DWI and substance-involved offenders. Proven 12% reduction in DUI arrests in adopting jurisdictions.

Current Utilization: 25-35 participants

Target expansion: 100-150 participants (300% increase)

Implementation timeline: 12-18 months

1

Implement ROR and PSA Programs

Expand Release on Own Recognizance bonds and Pre-Sentence Adjustment programs to reduce pretrial detention.

Maintain 85-90% court appearance rates while reducing incarceration costs.

PR Bond expansion target: 300 annual releases

Helps identify best candidates for community corrections programs

Improves consistency in pretrial release decisions

2

Enhance Day Reporting Centers

Research shows a cost-effective alternative reducing recidivism 10-13 percentage points compared to incarceration.

Expansion target: 100 participants (50% of jail-eligible population)

3

Implement Court Reminder Systems

Deploy automated notification technology to reduce failure-to-appear rates and improve court efficiency. Integrate with all pretrial defendants.

Reach: 2,700+ annual cases

FTA reduction target: 20-30% decrease

4

Policy Advocacy and Data-Driven Implementation

Evidence-Based Policy Framework

Use UNO research and national best practices to advocate for comprehensive criminal justice reform. Data demonstrates clear ROI for community-based alternatives.

Phase 1: Assessment and Planning

- Conduct full capacity assessment of current programs
- Identify eligible populations for expansion
- Engage stakeholders and county commissioners

Phase 2: Implementation and Growth

- Secure funding for program expansion initiatives
- Train staff and integrate new technologies
- Monitor outcomes and adjust as needed

Measurement and Evaluation

Track recidivism, cost savings, public safety outcomes, and participant success rates quarterly.

Current impact: 24/7 Program has 28 clients achieving 81% success rate.

Pretrial Release Program has 21 clients with a 60% success rate and 2,708 jail bed days saved. The Sentence Conversion program has 17 clients saving 933 jail bed days. Combined ROR/PSA initiatives provide critical pretrial alternatives.

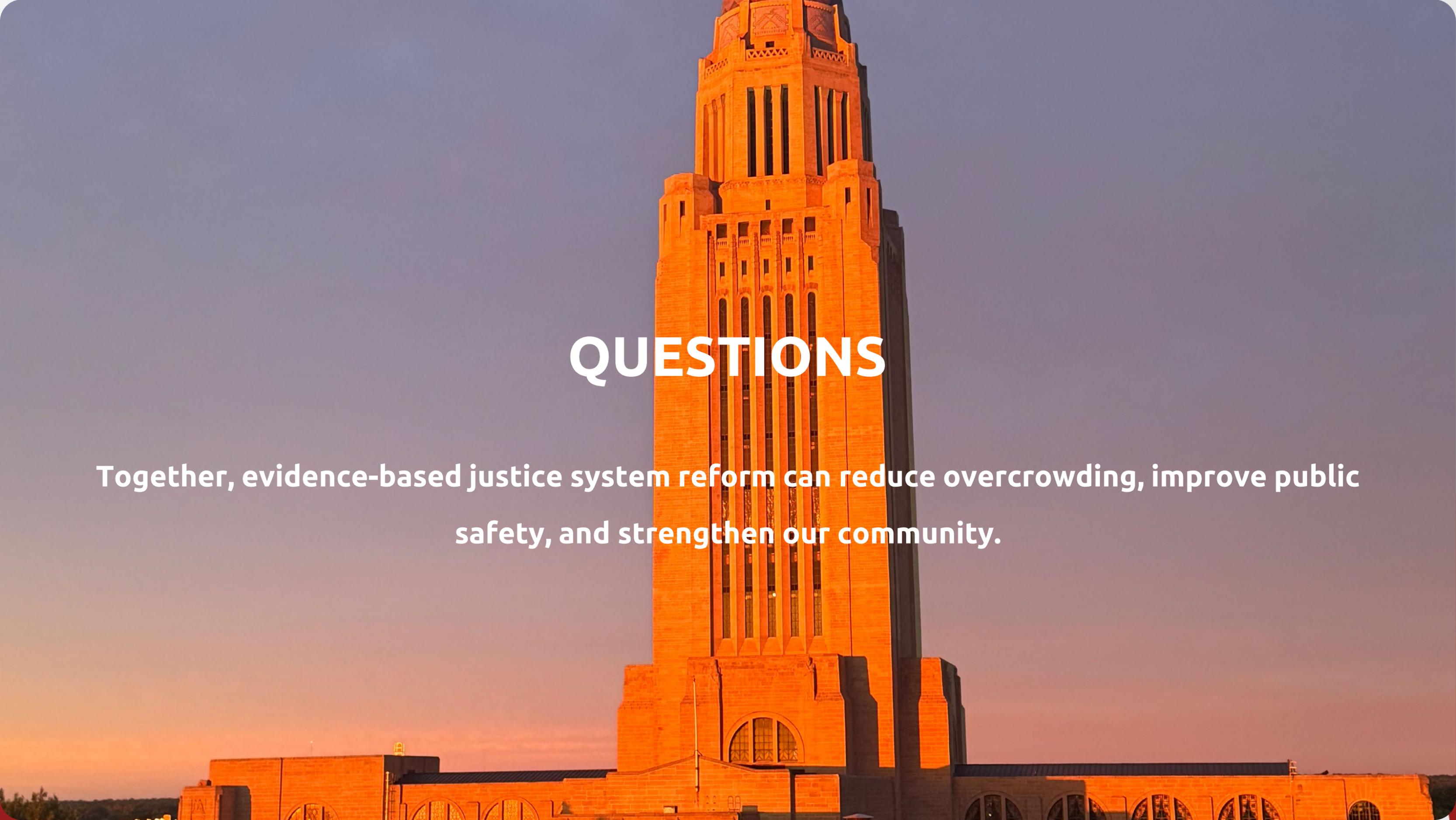
Community Partnership

Collaborate with nonprofits, treatment providers, and advocacy organizations for holistic approach.

Long-Term Sustainability

Build permanent funding mechanisms and institutional capacity for lasting system transformation.

Scale House Arrest and Mental Health Programs: House Arrest (94% success, 4,754 bed days saved) and Mental Health Problem Solving (86% success) demonstrate exceptional outcomes. Expand these proven programs to increase capacity and reach. Investment: \$300,000 annually. Projected jail population reduction: 50-75 additional beds.



QUESTIONS

Together, evidence-based justice system reform can reduce overcrowding, improve public safety, and strengthen our community.