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New CA Fwd Report Shows Pretrial Programs Could be Cost-Effective Alternatives to Crowded Jails

Report Features Best Practices from Pretrial Programs in Five California Counties

Sacramento – While two in three counties in California are planning to add new jail beds to fulfill new realignment responsibilities, California Forward’s (CA Fwd) [Partnership for Community Excellence](#) (PCE) has identified counties who have developed cost-effective ways to safely manage defendants awaiting trial. CA Fwd’s report, [Best Practices and Resources for California Counties: Pretrial Detention and Community Supervision](#), is the second in a series aimed at providing counties with information to effectively implement the 2011 Public Safety Realignment Act. The report reviews national evidence and highlights different yet successful pretrial programs in Marin, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Francisco and Yolo counties.

Approximately 71 percent of jail beds throughout the state are occupied by detainees awaiting trial. This is higher than the national average of 61 percent. Realignment, which is the state’s ambitious attempt to reform the criminal justice system, transfers responsibility for non-serious, non-violent, non-sex offender populations to counties, giving local officials more authority over lower level offenders and reducing overcrowding in state prisons.

CA Fwd’s report looks into how several counties have significantly reduced the need to increase expensive jail beds through the use of pretrial programs without diminishing public safety.

“It’s important for county agencies and local officials to recognize that there is no one-size fits all solution to realignment,” said Sharon Aungst, Director of [CA Fwd’s Partnership for Community Excellence](#). “Our goal is to provide the factual information counties’ need to make smart decisions based on the evidence about what works and the unique needs of their local jurisdictions.”

Many detainees who are low risk for flight and committing new crimes remain in jail prior to trial because they cannot afford to pay their scheduled bail amounts, while others who are higher risk are released because they have the financial means to meet their bail requirements. Pretrial programs that are implemented properly with the use of risk

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assessments help assure that high-risk detainees stay in jail while low-risk offenders are released to community supervision.

“This report details successful alternatives to the detention of low risk pretrial defendants,” said Lenore Anderson, Director of Californians for Safety and Justice. “We encourage local officials to explore and examine options that may both save their county money and provide better outcomes that in the long-run will directly benefit their communities.” Californians for Safety and Justice, through its Local Safety Solutions Project, aims to give direct support to counties building innovative approaches to increase safety and reduce justice system costs. They will focus part of their efforts on pretrial programs.

In addition, The Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) at Community Resources for Justice has received a grant from the Public Welfare Foundation to provide technical assistance to two California counties. Technical assistance tools and lessons learned throughout the process will be shared within the state as well as nationally.

“In recent years, California developed a reputation for having one of the most expensive, least effective prison systems in the nation. The experience in these five counties demonstrates that California can earn a new reputation – for reducing costs and reducing crime by focusing on outcomes and putting in place strategies that work,” said Jim Mayer, Executive Director of CA Fwd.

The organizations that contributed to this report include ACLU of Northern California; Californians for Safety and Justice; Leaders in Community Alternatives; the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice; the Crime and Justice Institute; and CA Fwd.

The first report released by the PCE was [County AB 109 Plans Analysis & Summary](#). The PCE holds quarterly meetings open to the public and welcomes all organizations and individuals who are interested in supporting counties in their realignment efforts. The next PCE meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 5th at the California Endowment in Sacramento, CA.

The [Partnership for Community Excellence](#) (PCE) was established by California Forward (CA Fwd) in 2011 to provide information and assistance to county officials and local criminal justice agencies to build the capacity, culture, infrastructure and integrated systems necessary to successfully implement Realignment. The PCE is supported by grants from The James Irvine Foundation and S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation; and in-kind support from CA Fwd. [CA Fwd](#) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization devoted to improving the performance of government in California. It believes that increased emphasis on accountability and transparency will create government that Californians deserve and expect.

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