

## Charleston jail reform group awarded additional \$2.46 million grant

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Oct 24, 2018



The Al Cannon Detention Center in North Charleston. File/Staff

Charleston County officials have received more than \$2 million to continue a years-long project to reduce the inmate population at the Al Cannon Detention Center and institute a number of other reforms.

The county's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council announced Wednesday that it had received \$2.46 million in additional [grant funding](#) from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to continue their efforts. The council has received \$4.95 million overall from the foundation since 2015.

That money, officials said, has allowed authorities to decrease the jail population by 18 percent, drawing them closer to their stated 25 percent inmate reduction goal. The council's efforts have also seen the creation of a facility to assist people suffering mental illness, substance abuse or other crisis events, and the implementation of a system for officers to cite people suspected of certain low-level offenses such as simple marijuana possession, rather than arresting them.

Mitch Lucas, Charleston County's assistant sheriff and chairman of the council, said that while work has gone on for years and the organization had already received more than \$2 million in funding, the new grant allows it to transition from building up infrastructure and planning, and begin implementing reforms that they know will help make the community safer and more just.

### [Charleston-area residents, officials, call on community to take action on reforming criminal justice system](#)

"We're just hitting our running stride," Lucas said. "This is a [game changer](#)." Some of the initiatives the council has completed so far:

[https://www.postandcourier.com/news/charleston-jail-reform-group-awarded-additional-million-grant/article\\_1c9cdb7c-d7b9-11e8-8edd-3bdafc879e85.html](https://www.postandcourier.com/news/charleston-jail-reform-group-awarded-additional-million-grant/article_1c9cdb7c-d7b9-11e8-8edd-3bdafc879e85.html)



- Building a database that combines information from Charleston County law enforcement and judicial agencies, allowing officials to identify areas of the criminal justice system that need improvement.
- Having officers issue citations instead of arrests for low-level, nonviolent offenses such as having an open container of alcohol, misdemeanor shoplifting, trespassing and public intoxication.
- Opened the Tri-county Crisis Stabilization Center, where officers can take people with mental **illness**, substance abuse or homelessness, instead of taking them to jail or hospital emergency rooms.
- Started a text message reminder system for defendants with upcoming court dates as a method of reducing bench warrants for defendants who miss proceedings.
- Pretrial services report now informs magistrates in bond court about a defendant's level of danger to the public and risk for flight.
- Sped up systems for case processing, assignment of prosecutors and defense attorneys, and initiated the county's first public defender representation in bond court.
- Funding for personnel to help with docket management.  
The new funding will be especially useful in making sure that what's already been accomplished stays in place while officials work to expand their efforts, said Kristy Danford, the council's project director.

"The new investment will go into deepening community engagement, advancing racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity reduction efforts, and deliberately focusing resources in increasingly impactful ways," Danford said.

**Report: Admissions at Charleston County's jail dropped by 30 percent between 2014-2016**