

Lake County Sheriff's Office  
John D. Idleburg, Sheriff

# MEDIA RELEASE



**SAFETY+JUSTICE**  
CHALLENGE

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Lake County Sheriff's Office • 25 South Martin Luther King, Jr., Avenue • Waukegan, Illinois 60085

For Immediate Release

## **NEW STUDIES SHOW SIMULTANEOUS DECLINE IN INCARCERATION RATES AND CRIME RATES IN LAKE COUNTY**

### **Data Demonstrates the Success of Efforts to Safely Reduce Jail Populations**

New data released this week shows that crime, jail populations, and arrests are all declining simultaneously in Lake County, indicating that the local justice system can be transformed while keeping the community safe. This mirrors a larger trend seen in cities and counties across the country undertaking criminal justice reform, according to new reports from the JFA Institute (JFA) [The Impact of COVID-19 on Crime, Arrests and Jail Populations](#) and the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) [Jail Decarceration and Public Safety: Preliminary Findings from the Safety and Justice Challenge](#). Both new reports show that efforts to reduce the harmful use of jails in Lake County have occurred alongside an overall decline in crime rates.

These new studies track select participants in the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#) (SJC), a \$252 million national initiative funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, to support collaboration among local leaders and communities to reduce over-incarceration and eliminate racial disparities in local criminal justice systems by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. Lake County joined the Safety and Justice Challenge in 2017. ISLG's new study measures the public safety effects of the SJC by studying 24 participating cities and counties between 2015 and 2019 following the implementation of jail population reduction strategies. The JFA Institute's latest study examines the impact of COVID-19 on crime, arrest, and jail populations by studying 11 cities and counties participating in the SJC between June and December 2020, building on a [prior analysis](#) of the early months of the pandemic.

In Lake County, the data show that the jail population remained steady, and crime declined by 11 percent from 2016 to 2019. Our public health driven pandemic efforts reduced our jail population by 27% on people nearing the end of their sentence and lowering non-violent cash bonds. Violent and nonviolent crimes decreased in Lake County during the pandemic. Across many cities and counties included in the two reports, jail populations declined or remained steady —

with some cities and counties seeing historic lows amid the pandemic — while overall crime rates declined.

While all 11 cities and counties tracked in JFA Institute’s study, including Lake County, reported the same or greater number of homicides in all of 2020 compared with 2019, in total, the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program reported that crime was 22 percent lower in December 2020 compared to December 2019 and 14 percent lower for the total number of reported crimes for 2020 versus 2019. Given the concern in Lake County and across the country about recent increases in homicides, these findings reinforce the importance of historical trends, rather than year-over-year data; crime continues to be significantly lower now than decades earlier.

“These new data are further evidence that those who tell us we need to choose between safety and change are simply wrong,” said Reagan Daly, research director of the City University of New York’s Institute for State and Local Governance. “As cities and counties across the country ramped up efforts to rethink their local justice systems, overall crime rates steadily dropped in most places. We can make our justice systems fairer and effective while also keeping communities safe.”

As Lake County and other cities and counties across the country continue to grapple with what justice looks like within communities, the data indicate that efforts to transform criminal justice systems do not lead to increased crime rates on average. Looking beyond the data, listening to the experiences of those most gravely impacted by criminal justice systems, particularly Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other communities of color, illustrates the need to reshape our understanding of public safety to create communities where everyone experiences safety and security. The data show that efforts to end harmful patterns of over-incarceration at the local level can be both safe and effective.

In partnership with Lake County Government, the Lake County State’s Attorney’s Office, 19th Judicial Circuit Court, Lake County Public Defender’s Office, Lake County Adult Probation, Criminal Justice Community Council, the Lake County Sheriff’s Office has developed a comprehensive plan for additional strategies and initiatives over the next two years to invest in a safer, more effective, and more equitable system. These include, but not limited to: diverting people from jail by dropping them off at a wellness center for behavioral health assessments and local service linkage. This will serve as a hub to community organizations, with on-site multi-disciplinary team consisting of a peer recovery specialist, intensive case manager, and a registered nurse. Additionally, we will collect and analyze racial and ethnic data, modify outreach, and course correct when necessary. We will continue our ongoing efforts toward reducing recidivism and reducing our jail’s population while increasing the engagement and membership in the criminal justice community council.

“It is time to break the misleading and mistaken connections between increased use of jails and increased public safety,” said Wendy Ware, president of the JFA Institute. “We know how to safely reduce jail populations. The COVID-19 pandemic fueled the largest one-time decrease in jail populations in recent US history, and those practices should serve as the new standard for local criminal justice systems going forward. It is important to not allow a departure from historical trends to roll back policies and practices that reduce the harmful and unnecessary use of incarceration.”

Sheriff John D. Idleburg said, “We are seeing more and more data which shows mass incarceration does not equate to having safer communities. My staff and I are working diligently to safely reduce our inmate population by providing exceptional programming and re-entry services, so inmates have every opportunity to be successful and supported upon their release from custody. This and our ongoing collaboration with our criminal justice partners, looking at the criminal justice system in a multidimensional manner is proving to be successful in reducing crime while simultaneously reducing incarceration rates.

State's Attorney Eric Rinehart said, "Pre-trial detention should only be used when the community is directly at risk. Unnecessary incarceration for non-violent crimes separates families and contributes to economic, educational, and psychological strife. The criminal justice partners are committed to increasing diversion and treatment programs that safely reduce jail populations and incarceration costs. Treatment, diversion, and re-entry programming attack the root causes of non-violent crime while also treating the individual. The Lake County State's Attorney's Office is committed to data analysis and innovative initiatives that will decrease the non-violent jail population and finally address decades of racial disparity."

Jail population reduction alone doesn't remedy racial inequities perpetuated by an unjust system. The findings of these reports support advancing an inclusive definition of public safety rooted in dignity that protects those most harmed by an unjust system rather than prioritizing over-incarceration and over-policing tactics that are not proven to enhance safety.

More information about the work underway in Lake County can be found on [www.lakecountyil.gov/sheriff](http://www.lakecountyil.gov/sheriff) or [www.lakecountycjcc.org](http://www.lakecountycjcc.org) as well as on [www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org](http://www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org).

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### **About the MacArthur Foundation**

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### **End of Release**

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