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SPOKANE CITY & COUNTY AWARDED ADDITIONAL \$700,000 BY MACARTHUR FOUNDATION SAFETY AND JUSTICE CHALLENGE TO RETHINK LOCAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

New Funding Will Help Support Initiatives Aimed at Safely Reducing Spokane County's Jail Population and Advancing Racial Equity

Spokane, Wa February 9, 2021 – The Spokane Region is the recipient of a \$700,000 grant by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to continue building on efforts in collaboration with local leaders and the community to rethink the local criminal justice system, safely reduce the region's jail population, and eliminate racial inequities. The grant brings the Foundation's total investment in the region to \$4,450,000 to date, and is part of the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#), a \$246 million national initiative to reduce over-incarceration and advance racial equity in local criminal justice systems by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

The Safety and Justice Challenge is supporting local leaders, individuals directly and most impacted by the justice system, and the broader community in Spokane and across the country who are determined to address one of the greatest drivers of over-incarceration in America – the misuse and overuse of jails. Spokane was first selected to join the Safety and Justice Challenge Network in 2015 and has since used the resources and funding provided by the initiative to implement evidence-based solutions and promising initiatives.

These solutions include felony diversion, the Office of Pre-Trial Services, improved data collection and reporting, and developing community partnerships. As a result of these efforts and others, Spokane safely reduced the jail population by 8% before COVID-19 and published a publicly available jail population [dashboard](#).

Today, Spokane was one of 15 jurisdictions selected for additional funding based on the promise and progress of work to date. This new round of funding will provide the Regional Office of Law & Justice and partners with continued support and expert technical assistance to strengthen and expand strategies that address the main drivers, and resulting racial inequities, of local jail incarceration.

Building on the Spokane region's progress to date is especially critical as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustices against Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color



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reinforce the need to transform how the system operates. Largely due to the region's years long effort to build relationships and improve data reporting, the City and County were able to respond to the pandemic swiftly by reviewing the jail population, increasing releases when appropriate and citing individuals on the street whenever possible. Detention Services also worked diligently to implement critical measures in the jail to avoid Covid-19 outbreaks. Thanks to all of these efforts, the jail population declined as much as 41% at its lowest point, and Detention Services has been able to effectively respond to positive COVID-19 cases in the jail.

Commissioner Josh Kerns said, "I am proud of the work that has been done to improve our criminal justice system. We are committed to being an efficient and cost effective government for our tax payers. Our goal of safely reforming our criminal justice system can only be accomplished through our regional collaborations and working across departments for the betterment of our community. With this additional funding, we hope to build on the successes we've seen so far."

In partnership with local courts, prosecutors, public defenders, Detention Services, and community members, Spokane 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: Supported Release, an innovative pre-trial release program, a microgrant initiative to invest in community-based solutions, constructing a criminal justice specific equity toolkit, providing cell phones to indigent individuals facing charges, along with a transportation initiative to provide free rides to court-related appointments.

More than five years after its public launch, the Safety and Justice Challenge has grown into a collaborative of 51 jurisdictions in 32 states modeling and inspiring reforms to create more fair, just, and equitable local justice systems across the country.

"Now more than ever, we must confront the devastating impacts of mass incarceration by a system that over-polices and over-incarcerates Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color," said Laurie Garduque, MacArthur Foundation's Director of Criminal Justice. "Over the past five years, the Safety and Justice Challenge has safely reduced the ineffective and harmful use of jails, while learning that jail population reduction alone does not undo the racial inequities perpetuated by an unjust system and our nation's history of systemic racism. We are committed to supporting cities and counties as they reimagine a definition of safety that is inclusive of all communities and makes meaningful progress towards our goal of ending racial and ethnic disparities in jails."



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“The Safety & Justice Challenge has been crucial to our efforts to eliminate unnecessary incarceration in Spokane and direct people to the support services to address the underlying issues, including during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,” Spokane Mayor Nadine Woodward said. “The additional support will help us sustain these efforts to ensure all communities are safe and able to thrive by ending the cycle of involvement with the criminal justice system.”

Several of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations will continue to provide technical assistance and counsel to the Regional Law & Justice Office, Spokane partners, and the other jurisdictions involved in the Safety and Justice Challenge. These include the Center for Court Innovation, Everyday Democracy, Nexus Community Partners, the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, JFA Institute, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, the Pretrial Justice Institute, Policy Research, Inc., the Vera Institute of Justice, the W. Haywood Burns Institute, Urban Institute, and Bennett Midland.

More information about the work underway in Spokane can be found on the [Regional Law & Justice webpage](#) as well as on www.SafetyandJusticeChallenge.org.

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About the MacArthur Foundation

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