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## **New Report Shows Lengths of Stay at Louisville Jail Increasing Even as Admissions Decline**

*Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice report shows that bail, prison transfer times and fewer people in jail for lower-level offenses are contributing to longer stays, with Black individuals disproportionately affected*

**Louisville, Kentucky** -- A 35% decline in admissions to the Louisville Metro Department of Corrections (LMDC) over a 10-year period has not produced a proportionate reduction in people in jail, according to a new report from the [Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice \(“Research Network”\)](#), a project of the [Data Collaborative for Justice \(DCJ\)](#) at John Jay College. This new research – conducted by members of the Research Network based at the University of Louisville and University of Indiana Southeast – indicates that fewer arrests, and thus admissions to Louisville’s jails, are being offset by a rising number of people who remain jailed for longer periods of time (thereby increasing the average length of stay).

The increase in the average length of time that people stay in jail appears to be driven primarily by three factors:

- People who are unable to pay higher bail amounts (\$5000+) and secure their release while their criminal case is pending;
- Delays in transferring people from jail to prison after they have received a prison sentence, possibly due to overcrowding in state prisons;
- People admitted to jail on more serious charges are staying longer.

[Understanding Trends in Jail Population in Louisville Metro, Kentucky: 2010 to 2019](#) examines data on arrest and admissions, bail, lengths of stay, and population levels at the LMDC between 2010 and 2019. The research finds that, despite the 35% decrease in annual admissions during the study period, the average daily population fell by just 5%, in large part because the average length of stay increased by 60% (the number of people with a length of stay for over one year more than doubled). This demonstrates that **longer lengths of stay, rather than changes in admissions, have become a significant driver of the jail population.**

**The report outlines five notable trends:**

- **Fewer low-level arrests have resulted in fewer jail admissions.** Driven by fewer arrests for misdemeanors and violations, admissions to the LMDC declined by 35% between 2010 to 2019 – from a high of 43,724 admissions to 28,255 admissions.
- **Increases in length of stay are a key driver of jail populations.** Between 2010 and 2019, the average length of stay increased from 18.9 days to 30.4 days – a 60% increase that had a

significant impact on the size of the jail population. The people who were most likely to stay in jail for more than 30 days were those who were booked on new charges, those awaiting transfer to state prison, and people charged with crimes against persons.

- **Bail continues to be a key driver of the jail population.** Length of stay decreased for those with bail set below \$5,000; however, those with higher bail amounts saw a substantial increase in length of stay from 56 to 92 days and accounted for 86% of people with bail set who spent 180+ days in jail.
- **Black people are disproportionately represented in jail admissions and experienced significant increases in lengths of stay between 2010 and 2019.** In 2019, Black people accounted for 39% of jail admissions but just over 20% of the population of Jefferson County. The average length of stay for Black people increased 15 days over the study period, compared to a 10 day increase for white people.
- **A significant proportion of people return to jail repeatedly.** Of people jailed in 2010, 69.8% returned to jail at least once between 2010 and 2019 and over a quarter (27.7%) returned five or more times.

This research in Louisville could shed light on jail population trends elsewhere in the nation and signal that average length of stay is driving increased jail populations rather than arrests and admissions. While attempts at reforming the criminal justice system often aim to curb jail populations through reductions in arrests and pretrial detention, this research suggests that such efforts may be offset by other factors, such as prohibitive bail costs and longer waits for transfers to prison, that increase the amount of time people are detained in jail. **Another notable trend, which is also worthy of further study in other jail systems, is that racial disparities in admissions persist as Black people continue to stay in jail longer than white people.** Black people were 7% more likely to spend over 30 days in jail compared to white people.

Like many other jurisdictions, the Louisville jail released individuals at an increased rate in the early months of 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic was first spreading across the country. However, these declines did not last, and in fact the current population has started to increase.

“This data highlights a critical set of questions for policymakers and stakeholders inside justice systems across the country. Louisville has taken significant steps to reduce the number of people admitted to its jails. At the same time, our research shows this progress cannot be relied on as the sole solution to reduce the average daily population of a jail,” said **Erica Bond, Policy Director of the Data Collaborative for Justice**. “Beyond reducing admissions, this data makes it clear that attention must be paid to how long people who admitted to jails stay and why.”

“This analysis helps us to see the bigger picture of how lengths of stays, the ripple effects of overcrowding in state prisons that delays our ability to transfer inmates after their sentencing, and other factors impact trends in Louisville’s jail population. Before COVID-19, we were already working hard to reduce strain on

the system and the pandemic has further illustrated the danger of jail overcrowding,” said **Dwyane Clark, Director of Louisville Metro Department of Corrections**. “Research partnerships like this will help ensure that future improvements to our justice system are backed by data, not anecdote. And one thing is clear from today’s report: we need more research and data to help us chart a path forward.”

“Research and data-informed decision making is a critical tool to enable Louisville and other jurisdictions to use their limited resources effectively to promote public safety.” said **Tom Wine, Jefferson County Commonwealth’s Attorney**. “Pre-COVID, 70% of admissions are for people booked on new charges, a warrant, or a combination thereof. In 2019, nonviolent felonies and misdemeanors were the most common top charges while violent felonies accounted for 8% of admissions. While the average daily population of the jail had been decreasing during this time period, the average length of stay had increased, in some part because people accused of more serious crimes now make up a larger proportion of those jailed while their case is pending. This report raises a good set of questions that should serve as the jumping off point for more research on how we can prevent over-crowding in our jails while keeping Louisville safe.”

“Without question reducing arrests alone hasn’t reliably lowered our jail population and that the time to have a conversation about money bail is long overdue,” said **Leo Smith, Executive Director and Chief Public Defender in the Office of the Louisville Metro Public Defender’s Office**. “Most people booked into jail before trial, in theory, can purchase their freedom while awaiting their day in court. But in reality, the price of money bail is out of reach for many people and it’s keeping our jails full.”

**The report was made possible through the support of the Pew Charitable Trusts and [can be viewed on Data Collaborative for Justice’s website.](#)**

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About the [Data Collaborative for Justice](#) (DCJ): DCJ leads critical research about frequent interactions between community members and the criminal justice system and aims to ensure that communities, and the governments that serve them, have the necessary information to develop and implement evidence-based policies, practices, and programs. DCJ’s work has informed policy reforms, facilitated partnerships between researchers and government agencies across the country, spurred new scholarly research on lower-level enforcement, and been cited extensively in the press. More information about the Data Collaborative for Justice’s work is available at: [www.datacollaborativeforjustice.org](http://www.datacollaborativeforjustice.org).

About the [Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice](#): In 2016, DCJ launched The Research Network on Misdemeanor Justice to study lower-level enforcement actions, which represent the most common interactions between communities and the criminal legal system. The Research Network is comprised of researcher-practitioner partnerships in seven jurisdictions committed to producing data, research, and scholarly work on lower-level enforcement trends: Durham, NC; Los Angeles, CA; Louisville, KY; New York City, NY; Prince George’s County, MD; Seattle, WA; and St. Louis, MO. The Research Network seeks to inform criminal justice system operations and policy at the local and state levels. It also seeks to support

a national discourse, informed by data, on the role of lower-level enforcement in public safety, trust in the criminal legal system, racial justice, and efficient use of finite taxpayer dollars.