

Charleston County

Report Findings & Research

Summary

A Chronological Review of Published Data (2016-2026)

Twenty-five publications.

A decade of data. A record of accountability.

The image features two stylized human figures on either side of the KPD logo. Each figure is composed of a white circle at the bottom, a yellow semi-circle above it, a light blue semi-circle above that, and a dark green circle at the top representing a head.

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Charleston County

Report Findings & Research Summary

A Chronological Review of Published Data (2016–2026)

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Charleston County has produced the most comprehensive longitudinal record of local criminal justice system performance in South Carolina, and among the most rigorous in the country. The Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) built that record over ten years through sustained, data-driven coordination. Charleston's investment in this work was made possible in part through its participation in the Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC), a national initiative of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation designed to reduce over-incarceration by changing how America thinks about and uses jails. Charleston was among the first cohort of communities awarded SJC funding in 2015. The Justice Management Institute (JMI) provided the original technical assistance that grounded Charleston's data infrastructure. The CJCC, Justice System Partners (JSP), and the Justice Innovation Lab (JIL) in partnership with the Ninth Circuit Solicitor's office produced twenty-five publications across ten years documenting what sustained, data-driven local coordination can accomplish and where the limits of local action lie.

Publications are presented in chronological order, noting progress and persistent challenges across strategy areas, and are followed by a metrics tracking table and synthesis of cross-cutting findings. The document is intended for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and community members seeking to understand what sustained, data-driven local system improvement can produce, and how Charleston's findings can inform efforts across South Carolina and beyond. All CJCC and JSP publications are available at cjcc.charlestoncounty.org/publications; JIL research at knowledgehub.justiceinnovationlab.org.

Part I. Report Summaries

The twenty-five publications summarized below span publication dates from February 2016 through Spring 2026. They are best understood as a sustained accountability record against an evolving set of strategic focus areas. Each summary notes progress, gaps, and how each publication advanced, extended, or revised the prior year's understanding.

Feb 2016
CJCC

Phase One Report & CJCC Transformation Plan

Established the reform baseline and six core strategies for a three-year transformation plan. Data analysis by technical advisors with the Justice Management Institute took over 500 manual hours. The analysis confirmed that jail use was driven primarily by low-level charge bookings, lengthy pretrial stays, and a small group of frequent utilizers, with racial and ethnic disproportionality at every decision point, largest at arrest. The six strategies were: diversion and deflection through citation and release for targeted charges and real-time alternatives to booking for individuals with substance use, mental health, or social needs; bond reform through risk-based Pretrial Service Reports (PSR) and public defender representation at bond hearings; case processing improvement through faster assignment of counsel, expedited transfer of initial discovery from law

enforcement to prosecution; automated court date reminders; and building a centralized cross-agency database. Strategies were expected to address racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity while embedding community engagement as a structural practice.

**Apr 2017
CJCC
Annual
Report**

2016 Annual Report

The first annual data report produced by the CJCC’s own centralized data warehouse, documenting early implementation across all six transformation strategies. Progress was most visible on diversion and deflection: bookings declined, the reduction in targeted low-level charge bookings exceeded the initial goal, and the Black–White booking relative rate index (RRI) narrowed. The Tri-County Crisis Stabilization Center (TCSC) was developed and funded during 2016, with a 2017 opening scheduled. The frequent utilizer population remained a notable driver of jail use. On bond reform and pretrial: personal recognizance use increased in both Summary Court and General Sessions, and infrastructure for the risk-based PSR and public defender representation at bond hearings was under development, both targeted for 2017 launch. On case processing: early-stage milestones showed improvement in time to discovery, solicitor assignment, and defense assignment, though overall time to disposition remained elevated. The data warehouse became fully operational, replacing the manual JMI baseline process and establishing the foundation for all subsequent reporting.

Note: Average daily population figures in this and subsequent reports reflect the local pretrial and sentenced population only, excluding individuals held on behalf of outside jurisdictions such as federal detainees. Figures may vary across reports due to evolving data analysis methods.

**Apr 2018
CJCC**

2017 Annual Report

The second annual report with early results on diversion and deflection. The TCSC launched providing a law enforcement deflection alternative, and the centralized database was producing the first routine cross-agency data. The familiar face population (previously referred to as frequent utilizers) declined: bed days used by individuals booked three to four times within two years fell 23%; bed days used by those booked five or more times fell 49%. A baseline pretrial outcome study using historical charge-based bond data gave the bond reform strategy its first detailed evidence: financial bond recipients experienced pretrial failure at substantially higher rates than those on personal recognizance, and the majority of returns to jail occurred within six months of release on new arrests rather than bench warrants. Court date reminders and the risk assessment instrument were in development. Racial and ethnic disproportionality analysis confirmed that the patterns documented in 2014 persisted across decision points.

Note: This baseline study used charge-level bond data; in subsequent reports, the CJCC shifted to effective bond analysis, which measures bond type at the individual hearing level rather than the charge level.

**Sep 2018
CJCC**

Midyear Report: Racial & Ethnic Disproportionality and/or Disparity

The first dedicated analysis of racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity (REDD) across decision points from 2014 through 2017, directly advancing the equity dimension of the transformation plan. Overrepresentation of Black adults was documented at every measured decision point, with the largest gap at booking and smallest at bond type, particularly in Summary Court. Disproportionality among women had declined faster than among men. A case study tracing unlawful carry charges from booking through disposition illustrated how disproportionality compounds across stages. The report

formally distinguished disproportionality (overrepresentation relative to population) from disparity (differential treatment of similarly situated individuals), noting that proving disparity would require a dedicated study, laying the groundwork for the JIL's 2021 prosecution analysis.

Apr 2019
CJCC

2018 Annual Report

The first report to document PSR completion and public defender representation at bond court as operational realities rather than development goals. PSRs launched in January 2018 and public defenders began representing defendants at bond hearings, marking the first year both elements of the bond reform strategy were fully in place. Financial bond use declined from the 2014 baseline. Early case processing metrics continued to improve. Diversion and deflection progress continued, with bookings, individuals booked, and charges all well below the 2014 baseline. Familiar face admissions continued to decline; embedded clinicians from the Charleston Center and CDMHC began receiving daily lists of familiar faces booked into the jail to initiate contact and engage individuals with services as appropriate. Pretrial outcome data continued to show financial bond recipients failed at higher rates than those on personal recognizance, and that most re-arrests occurred within six months of release. This was the first time pretrial outcome analysis was conducted in conjunction with risk-based data pursuant to the PSR launch. It found that pretrial failure increased as risk assessment levels increased, and pretrial failure rates were higher for financial bonds than PR bonds at risk levels 1-4 and almost equal between PR bonds and financial bonds at risk levels 5-6.

Note: On pretrial outcome methodology, all studies in the series use effective bond methodology, which measures bond type at the individual hearing level rather than the charge level. From 2018 through 2019, the risk instrument embedded in the PSR was the Virginia Pretrial Risk Assessment Instrument (VPRAI-R), which used a six-level risk scale and required a video interview, limiting PSR completion to 51% of eligible hearings in 2019.

May 2020
CJCC

2019 Annual Report

By 2019, transformation plan strategies were maturing across all areas. Diversion and deflection results were documented across all measures: bookings, individuals booked, and charges were all well below the 2014 baseline, the TCSC was generating regular law enforcement referrals, and the familiar face population had declined significantly. This was the first year in which General Sessions charges surpassed Summary Court charges as a share of all local bookings, reflecting the cumulative effect of cite-and-release expansion and targeted charge reduction at the front end. PSRs and public defender representation in bond court continued to mature and pretrial outcome findings remained consistent. While court reminders launched in October 2018, they discontinued in April 2019 due to a data issue. Early case processing times improved across all measured milestones. The CJCC exceeded its community engagement goal for the strategic planning process, and themes from that engagement directly shaped the next cycle's focus areas. The report noted that shifts in arrest practice had reduced the need for the officer risk assessment tool as originally conceived and identified the persistent length-of-stay problem for defendants held on financial bond as an unaddressed operational gap.

Aug 2020
CJCC

Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2021-2023

The second-generation strategic plan, developed through a Dialogue to Change community engagement process that engaged 1,215 residents through large community discussions, small group roundtables, and surveys exceeding the CJCC's goal of 1,000.

Five community themes shaped the plan: racial bias and socioeconomic factors as drivers of disparity; the importance of system agent conduct and accountability; reentry challenges including housing, employment, and financial obligations; the need for improved outcomes; and the value of transparent public reporting and engagement. The four focus areas that resulted consolidated these priorities with the data findings: Community Engagement and REDD, Diversion and Deflection, Bond and Reentry, and Case Processing. It explicitly named South Carolina's financial bond structure as a barrier not resolvable at the local level alone. The data showed that while diversion and deflection had produced large reductions in low-level booking volume, the bond reform and case processing strategies had not yet produced comparable change and remained the primary focus going into the next cycle. Two companion documents were released concurrently: a Strategic Plan Summary providing a condensed public-facing version of the full plan, and a Data Behind the Strategic Plan document presenting the underlying data analysis that grounded the four focus areas.

Apr 2021
CJCC

2020 Annual Report

The first report to document how the reform effort performed under conditions it could not control. The COVID-19 pandemic halted in-person court operations for much of the year, sharply accelerating a case processing challenge that had been building since 2018. Filings fell, dispositions fell further, the backlog grew, and the gap between Charleston's case processing performance and the state benchmark widened. The CJCC introduced projected months to clear the pending caseload as a tracking metric, and the projection was unfavorable. Cumulative pretrial outcome analysis continued to show that financial bond recipients failed at higher rates than those on personal recognizance at risk levels 1 through 3, and that most re-arrests occurred within six months of release, consistent with prior studies. Against that backdrop, the longer-term progress on jail use continued. Bookings, individuals booked, and charges all remained well below the 2014 baseline, and the familiar face population continued to decline. On bond reform, PSR completion reached a new high following the January 2020 launch of the locally validated Charleston Pretrial Risk Assessment Instrument (CPRAI), which replaced the prior instrument and eliminated the video interview requirement that had constrained completion rates. Public defender representation at bond hearings continued to grow. To address persistent lengths of stay, the CJCC launched weekly Jail Population Reviews in April 2020 to identify defendants potentially eligible for release. Early case processing metrics continued improving. Virtually all cases concluded through a guilty plea, a prosecutorial decision not to pursue charges, or a dismissal; fewer than 1% went to trial. The report named the growing backlog as the primary unresolved structural challenge, while noting that financial bond remained the majority bond type in General Sessions despite consistent outcome data showing worse outcomes and most rearrests occurring within six months of release.

Note 1: In January 2020, the CJCC launched the locally validated CPRAI, replacing the VPRAI-R. The CPRAI uses a four-level risk scale and eliminated the video interview requirement, raising PSR completion from 51% of eligible hearings in 2019 to 92% in 2020. Beginning with the 2021 Annual Report, outcome studies use a cumulative cohort anchored to the January 8, 2020 CPRAI launch with the research window extending annually.

Note 2: The South Carolina benchmark is to have 80% of pending General Sessions cases at or below 365 days. Few counties from 2017 to 2020 met this standard at year end: 1 of 46 in 2020, 10 of 46 in 2019 and 2018, and 7 of 46 in 2017. Throughout this period, Charleston was consistently below the standard (lowest 47% in 2020 and highest 70% in 2017).

Sep 2021
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Disparity and Prosecution in Charleston, SC

The first systematic analysis of racial disparities in the Ninth Circuit Solicitor's Office, and an extension of the REDD work established in the CJCC's 2018 midyear report. Where the 2018 report documented disproportionality at arrest and called for a dedicated study of what happened to that gap as cases moved through the courthouse, this analysis, examining over 24,000 charges from 2015 to 2020, provided the answer. Once cases reached the Solicitor's Office, similarly situated defendants were generally treated comparably regardless of race. The source of downstream inequity was not differential treatment in the courthouse but the scale of upstream disproportionality arriving at it: Black men accounted for 63.8% of cases and 67.6% of carceral sentences in the Ninth Circuit from 2015 to 2020 because they entered the system at disproportionate rates, not because they were treated differently within it. One process-level disparity did persist independently of that upstream effect: Black men waited approximately six weeks longer than white men to have their cases dismissed. The report also noted that disproportionality in arrests is not solely explained by differences in criminal behavior and can reflect law enforcement practices and resource allocation.

Apr 2022
CJCC

2021 Annual Report

The report documents seven years of cumulative results against the transformation plan. Diversion and deflection gains were documented across all tracked measures, and the jail population had reached its lowest point in the reform period. The Black adult booking rate had declined from the 2014 baseline. The familiar face population had fallen by nearly three-quarters from the 2014 baseline. On bond reform and pretrial: the majority of released defendants did not reoffend or miss court; financial bond recipients continued to fail at higher rates than those on personal recognizance; PSR completion reached its highest level yet; and structured bond court observations for procedural justice and fairness were added as an accountability mechanism. Case processing remained the most significant unresolved challenge, with median time to disposition continuing to climb and a substantial number of defendants in the local jail awaiting court for extended periods. Defendants who remained jailed while awaiting resolution reached a conclusion in a median 149 days; those released on bond waited a median 630 days. Virtually all cases concluded through a guilty plea, a prosecutorial decision not to pursue charges, or a dismissal; fewer than 1% went to trial, consistent with every prior year. This report also introduced routine crime rate tracking using South Carolina Incident-Based Reporting System (SCIBRS) data, providing the first published comparison of local booking trends against countywide and statewide crime trends.

Jul 2022
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The Case for Screening

A follow-up to the 2021 disparity analysis, documenting the case processing backlog and the evidence-based case for prosecutorial intake screening. As of June 2022, 13,592 General Sessions cases were undisposed; 57% open longer than one year; the backlog projected to take over six years to clear without intervention. Recommendations included: provide police reports to prosecutors quickly; use a screening attorney to review non-violent charges at intake for legal sufficiency and diversion opportunities; establish feedback sessions with law enforcement to reduce dismissal-prone arrests. The report explicitly noted the approach is applicable in lower-resource settings.

**2022
Justice
System
Partners**

Examining the Impacts of Arrest Deflection Strategies on Jail Reduction Efforts

Examines how law enforcement deflection to the TCSC affected subsequent arrests among individuals with severe mental health diagnoses. The study analyzed 105 deflections involving 94 unique individuals between February 2018 and February 2020. Key finding: 76% of those deflected did not experience a subsequent arrest within the study period. The study notes it cannot establish that the TCSC caused that reduction, as no comparison group of similarly situated individuals who were not deflected was available. The study also found that Black men diagnosed with schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders were more likely than any other group (by race, gender, and diagnoses) to experience a subsequent arrest following deflection.

**2022
Justice
System
Partners**

Examining the Pretrial Population in Charleston County, SC

The most analytically rigorous pretrial population study in the series, directly informing the Bond and Reentry area of focus. Key findings: Among 3,724 bookings tracked for a minimum of six months following release, 83.8% resulted in no new arrest. A small subset, 183 bookings involving 137 individuals (4.9% of bookings), had subsequent statutorily violent charges. Individuals released on personal recognizance succeeded at higher rates than those on financial bond across risk levels 1 through 3. Individuals with fewer pending charges from prior cases were more likely to succeed across all risk levels. The study connects this to case processing delay, noting the effect was small to moderate. Among those who did reoffend, initial booking characteristics could not reliably distinguish who would go on to commit a violent offense. The study recommended: establishing a shared stakeholder definition of violence; re-examining financial bonds for lower-risk individuals; prioritizing case processing reduction as a pretrial strategy; creating review triggers for the highest-concern bookings; and collecting needs data to inform targeted pretrial services.

**May 2023
CJCC**

2022 Annual Report

Documents the post-pandemic reset, measured against the FY2021–2023 Strategic Plan. Bookings rebounded from their pandemic low while remaining well below the 2014 baseline. General Sessions charges represented 58% of all local bookings in 2022, up from 28% in 2014, continuing a shift in charge mix that began in 2019 when General Sessions charges first surpassed Summary Court charges. Continued SCIBRS crime rate tracking documented that local booking rates decreased since 2014 while reported crime rates remained relatively stable, supporting the conclusion that booking reductions reflected deliberate practice changes rather than changes in underlying crime activity. On diversion and deflection: firearm possession violations were the most frequently booked charge for the second consecutive year, a category not amenable to the citation and release and deflection strategies. The familiar face population reached 756 persons, a reduction of nearly three-quarters from 3,618 in 2014. The CJCC developed and launched the Most Visible Persons (MVP) initiative, a small-scale pilot to identify, engage, and provide wraparound services to the most frequently cycling individuals, with grant funding awarded to plan housing options for this population. The Black–White booking RRI had improved from the 2014 baseline but had not closed. On bond and reentry: pretrial infrastructure held and Charleston remained the only South Carolina county with routine PSRs and public defender representation at bond hearings. Another cumulative study of risk-assessed releases found financial bonds produced worse pretrial

outcomes than personal recognizance across risk levels, with most rearrests within six months of release. Case processing remained the most significant challenge: median time to disposition reached its highest point in the data series, and the projected months to clear the backlog, while improving from the 2020 estimate, remained a multi-year undertaking. Defendants who remained jailed while awaiting resolution reached a conclusion in a median 189 days; those released on bond waited a median 720 days. Virtually all cases concluded through a guilty plea, a prosecutorial decision not to pursue charges, or a dismissal; trial-related outcomes remained below 1% of all dispositions. One notable exception: for the first time since tracking began, the number of charges disposed exceeded the number filed, producing a clearance rate of 105%.

**Dec 2023
CJCC**

Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon and Jail Use

An analysis of firearm-related bookings through October 2023. Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon (SC Code 16-23-20) was the top recurring charge for multiple years and the most frequently booked charge across all age groups under 34. Of those booked on unlawful carrying charges, 88-91% were Black and 90-92% were male. The report asked whether education, deterrence, or access-related interventions would be more effective than incarceration for this charge category.

Note: When the Constitutional Carry law took effect in March 2024, this charge largely disappeared from the booking data.

**May 2024
CJCC**

2023 Annual Report

Documents measurable improvement in case processing alongside continued increases in jail use and financial bond use, measured against the FY2021–2023 Strategic Plan. The Solicitor's Office cleared more cases than were filed for the second consecutive year, reaching a 106% clearance rate, and early-stage metrics continued improving. Virtually all cases resolved through a guilty plea, a prosecutorial decision not to pursue charges, or a dismissal; fewer than 1% went to trial. On diversion and deflection: bookings increased from 2022 while remaining below the 2014 peak; unlawful carry of a firearm remained the top charge for a third consecutive year; and TCSC referrals increased from their COVID-era low. The familiar face population was 847 persons; the Most Visible Persons subset numbered 110 individuals. SCIBRS crime rate tracking continued to maintain the longitudinal comparison of booking trends and reported crime rates across the reform period. On bond and reentry: financial bonds comprised 68% of all effective bonds; a cumulative pretrial outcome study found failure rates scaling consistently by risk level, from 22.1% at Level 1 to 61.8% at Level 4; consistent with every prior study in the series, most new arrest failures within six months of release; Level 1 was the only risk level in which PR bonds were the majority bond type. Beginning with this report, pretrial outcome data was no longer broken down by both bond type and risk level simultaneously, limiting the ability to track whether PR continued to outperform financial bonds within each risk category. On jail use: the average local daily population rose further from its 2021 low; General Sessions charges carried an average length of stay of 55 days compared to 12 days for Summary Court.

Note: This report also began tracking the total facility population, including individuals held on behalf of outside jurisdictions, providing a more complete picture of overall facility use alongside the local population figure. Earlier reports used a local-only definition. For consistency, local comparisons in this document exclude holds throughout.

Oct 2024
CJCC

Quick Facts on Bonds in South Carolina

A public-facing explainer of South Carolina's bond law, supporting the Bond and Reentry workgroup's transparency and education goals. Defines the four bond types under state law: Personal Recognizance (no payment), Surety (percentage through a bonding agency), Cash (full payment), and No Bond (detention until a General Sessions Court hearing). Documents the legal factors judges must consider at bond hearings and the mandatory escalation rules for rearrests while on bond. Provides the statutory foundation (SC Code § 17-15-10 and § 17-15-270) for understanding how bond law structures judicial discretion.

Spring
2025
CJCC

2024 Annual Report

Documents the sharpest single-year improvement in median time to disposition in the series alongside continued increases in jail use and financial bond dominance. The local average daily population reached 1,114, effectively returning to the 2014 local baseline of 1,111. DUI became the most frequently booked charge following Constitutional Carry's removal of unlawful carry from bookable offenses in March 2024. Summary Court charges reached 7,717, a 43% increase from 2023 and the third consecutive annual increase following a sustained decline from 2014 to 2021. SCIBRS crime rate tracking continued, maintaining the longitudinal comparison of booking trends and reported crime rates across the reform period. On bond and reentry: financial bonds comprised 73% of General Sessions effective bonds, returning to near the 2014 baseline; for the first time in the series, financial bonds became the leading bond type for Level 1 defendants; PSRs were completed in 91% of eligible hearings; pretrial failure rates continued to scale by risk level; consistent with every prior study in the series, most new arrest failures occurred within six months of release. On case processing: median time to disposition fell 23% to 462 days; defendants who remained jailed reached a conclusion in a median 196 days while those released on bond waited a median 596 days; fewer than 1% of cases went to trial; though 14,780 cases remained pending at year-end with 55% open more than a year. The topical data briefs that follow provide additional detail on each domain.

Jun 2025
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Timely Justice: How Case Screening Improves Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Fairness

The first randomized controlled trial of prosecutorial intake processes in the United States, providing causal evidence for the case processing strategy. Over 18 months in the Ninth Circuit, low-level cases were randomly assigned to either a dedicated screening attorney or standard handling. Results: 224 cases cleared affecting 221 individuals; approximately \$400,000 saved in combined jail, defense, and court costs (more than three times the cost of the staffing changes required); screened defendants spent an average of 15 fewer days in jail; no statistically significant difference in rearrest rates. The trial covered only low-level cases; broader adoption would require sustained prosecutorial leadership and, in lower-resource jurisdictions, dedicated staffing investment.

Aug 2025
CJCC
Data
Briefs (4)

2024 Topical Briefs: Arrest/Diversion/Deflection, Jail Use, Pretrial Trends, and Case Processing

Four focused summaries released alongside the 2024 Annual Report, each drawing from the same dataset to provide additional detail on a single domain. Findings consistent with prior Annual Reports are noted where they appear.

On arrest, diversion, and deflection: custodial arrests increased to 9,793 from 8,601 in 2023. DUI became the top booked charge with 1,155 warrants, nearly doubling from 601 in 2023, and following Constitutional Carry's removal of unlawful firearm carry from bookable offenses. TCSC admissions rose 57% from 195 to 307. The 2024 familiar face population (836 individuals booked three or more times over two years, accounting for 47,702 bed days and 13% of the local jail population) reflects continued monitoring of a pattern documented across every Annual Report since 2016; a subset of 128 Most Visible People, booked four or more times within a single year, are the subject of ongoing inter-agency case conferencing.

On jail use: the average daily population increased to 1,114 (including holds) while the average length of stay simultaneously decreased from 35 to 28 days, a divergence suggesting higher booking volume with faster turnover rather than longer detention. Summary Court charges surged 43% from 2023 to 2024. The demographic composition of the average daily population (67.5% Black, 91.7% male) is consistent with figures reported in prior Annual Reports.

On pretrial: financial bonds comprised 73% of General Sessions bonds and PSRs were completed in 90.9% of eligible hearings. The most notable 2024 development was that financial bonds became the leading bond type even for Level 1 defendants, the lowest-risk group. This reversed the prior pattern in which PR bonds predominated for that group. Failure rates continued to scale with risk level (Level 1: 21.5% failure; Level 4: 55.9% failure), and the majority of failures occurred within the first six months of release, patterns consistent with prior annual reports.

On case processing: median time to disposition fell 23% from 601 days in 2023 to 462 days in 2024 (per CMS-only calculation; the 2023 Annual Report reported 609 days using a combined SACDC and CMS methodology), the sharpest single-year improvement in the series. The Solicitor's Office received discovery 14% faster. More cases were filed (up 6%) while fewer were resolved (down 15%), leaving 14,780 pending cases as of December 31, 2024, with 55% open more than a year. In-custody defendants resolved cases in a median 196 days; out-of-custody defendants waited 596 days, a gap tracked since the 2020 Annual Report that showed modest narrowing from the 2022–2023 peaks. The statewide standard of 80% of cases resolved within 365 days was not met by 44 of 46 South Carolina counties, including Charleston as in prior years.

Spring
2026
CJCC

2025 Annual Report

The tenth annual report, documenting continued increases in jail use alongside a five-year high clearance rate and a modest shift in bond type distribution. The local average daily population reached 1,163, with the pretrial population at 1,144. Total bookings reached 11,452. DUI remained the most frequently booked charge for the second consecutive year. The familiar face population rose to 951 individuals; the Most Visible Persons subset reached 174 individuals. TCSC admissions continued to increase; total referrals remained below pre-pandemic levels. SCIBRS crime rate tracking continued, maintaining the longitudinal comparison of booking trends and reported crime rates across the reform period. On bond and reentry: financial bonds were the leading bond

type at Levels 2 through 4; Level 1 defendants reached a 50/50 split between financial and PR bonds; PSR completion remained near its peak; the cumulative pretrial outcome study (2021–2025) found an overall success rate of 61.8%, with failure rates scaling from 23.3% at Level 1 to 66.9% at Level 4; consistent with every prior study in the series, most failures occurred within the first six months of release. On case processing: the clearance rate reached a five-year high of 113% and total pending cases decreased 8% from the prior year to 13,644, though median time to disposition increased as long-running cases continued to resolve; defendants who remained jailed continued to reach a conclusion substantially faster than those released on bond; fewer than 1% of cases went to trial, consistent with every prior year in the series.

Note 1: The 2025 Annual Report reports charges and persons by court type; however, the number of booking records with no court type assigned surged to 5,358 in 2025, far exceeding prior years where the category was negligible, making 2025 court-type figures not directly comparable to prior years.

Note 2: The 2025 Annual Report shifted the cumulative cohort start from January 8, 2020 to January 1, 2021, dropping the first year of CPRAI data from the study period. Failure rate percentages should not be compared directly across the pre- and post-2020 periods. The consistent finding throughout is that personal recognizance consistently produces better outcomes than financial bond, and most failures occur within the first six months of release. Both findings hold across all study periods and instruments.

Metrics Tracked Across CJCC Annual Reports

The table below tracks which metrics and data elements appear in each CJCC Annual Report from 2016 through 2025. Rows that begin mid-series reflect metrics that did not exist in the baseline and were built into the reporting system during the reform period itself.

Metric / Data Element	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23	'24	'25
JAIL USE - Avg Daily Population (ADP)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
JAIL USE - Local bookings / admissions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
JAIL USE - Bookings by charge type	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
JAIL USE - Length of stay (avg / by court type)				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
JAIL USE - Familiar Faces	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
JAIL USE - Most Visible Persons (MVP)						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ARRESTS - Custodial vs. non-custodial arrests	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ARRESTS - Top booked charges	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ARRESTS - TCSC / Triage referrals & admissions		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ARRESTS - SCIBRS crime rate tracking						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BOND - Bond type distribution (PR vs. Financial)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BOND - PSR reach rate (% of eligible hearings)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BOND - Public defender representation at bond			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BOND - Pretrial outcomes (safety and appearance failures)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BOND - Outcome by bond type (PR vs. Financial)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BOND - Outcome by bond type and risk level (combined)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			

BOND - Outcome by risk level (CPRAI 1-4)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BOND - Bond amount data	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
CASE - Median time to case disposition	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CASE - Time to solicitor assignment			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CASE - Time to public defender assignment			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CASE - Time to initial discovery delivery			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CASE - Cases filed vs. disposed (clearance rate)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CASE - % pending cases over 1 year					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CASE - Disposition type (plea/dismissal/trial)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CASE - In- vs. out-of-custody resolution time					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
REDD - Disproportionality analysis (RRI, rates per 1,000)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
REDD - Demographic composition of ADP and bookings					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
REDD - Arrests and top charges by race								✓	✓	✓
REDD - Pretrial data by race (risk levels, outcomes, bond)								✓	✓	✓
REDD - Case processing by race (open cases, TTD)								✓	✓	✓

Part II. Findings and Analysis

What the Decade of Data Shows: Strengths and Persistent Challenges

Demonstrated Strengths

Data capacity built from scratch and sustained.

Charleston advanced data capacity from scratch to a centralized cross-agency database, automated dashboards and public reporting that expanded in scope each year, providing an ongoing accountability tool and a shared evidence base for decision-making. Over a decade, the CJCC and its research partners produced twenty-five publications (annual reports, midyear analyses, topical briefs, and independent studies) building on that infrastructure, making research possible that could not have been conducted elsewhere in South Carolina, and offering practitioners and policymakers evidence that is directly applicable to practice and policy decisions.

Jail use reduced dramatically at the front end through changes in law enforcement practice, not crime rate shifts.

Municipal and magistrate charges brought to the jail fell 80% from 2014 to 2021 through targeted reduction of the five most frequently booked low-level charges, cite-and-release expansion, and law enforcement deflection to treatment. SCIBRS crime rate tracking, published beginning with the 2021 Annual Report, confirmed that local booking rates followed a different and substantially steeper trajectory of decline than countywide and statewide crime rates across the same period, supporting the conclusion that the reductions were driven by deliberate practice changes rather than by changes in crime rates.

Pretrial infrastructure built and maintained.

Charleston committed to making bond court meaningful through objective risk information, defense representation, and structured observations, and delivered all three. PSR completion consistently reaches 90%+ of eligible hearings; public defenders represent defendants seven days a week; bond court observations against national standards started in 2020. No other South Carolina jurisdiction has built this infrastructure. It matters beyond the bond hearing: the data it has produced by bond type, risk level, and demographic is the evidentiary basis for every related finding in the CJCC series and made the JSP study possible.

Community engagement embedded as a structural practice.

Community representation was built into the CJCC's structure in 2015 and deepened over time. The FY2021-2023 strategic plan was developed through a Dialogue to Change process that engaged 1,215 residents; five community themes emerging from that process directly shaped the plan's four focus areas. By that cycle community governance had deepened further, with a formerly incarcerated community member appointed Co-Vice Chair. Public annual reporting, community forums, and open meetings were sustained throughout the decade.

Early processing measurably improved.

Median time to public defender assignment fell from 12 days in 2018 to a consistent 3 days by 2021 and held there through 2025. Median time to initial discovery delivery fell from 20 days in 2018 to 15

days in 2025. Median time to solicitor assignment improved from 21 days in 2018 to a low of 16 days in 2021 before returning to 21 days by 2024 and 2025, reflecting workflow fluctuations within an overall improved baseline. The JIL Timely Justice randomized controlled trial provided causal evidence that structured intake screening reduces both cost and time to resolution without affecting rearrest rates.

The strengths above and the challenges that follow are not separate stories. Several involve the same strategies, the same actors, and the same data, viewed from the angle of what has worked and what has not yet produced comparable results. That the CJCC can document both with equal precision is itself a reflection of the data capacity described above.

Persistent Challenges

Financial bond has not meaningfully changed despite poor outcomes.

Financial bonds comprised roughly three-quarters of General Sessions bonds in 2014 and still comprise 73% in 2024, despite reductions in the intervening years, PSRs at 90%+ completion, public defenders at bond hearings, and outcome data consistently showing worse results for financial bond recipients at every risk level. The 2025 Annual Report documents a modest improvement to 61% overall with a 50/50 split at Level 1, though financial bonds remain dominant across all risk levels. The consistent finding is not just that financial bond produces worse outcomes, it is that the system gives judges almost no meaningful alternative regardless of what the risk data shows.

Across the cumulative cohort, success rates range from 77% at Level 1 to 33% at Level 4, confirming the risk instrument performs as designed. The persistent challenge is not that judges lack objective information at bond hearings; Charleston has provided that information at more than 90% of eligible hearings since 2020. The challenge is that South Carolina's bond structure gives judges very limited options regardless of what that information shows, a barrier explicitly named in the FY 21-23 Strategic Plan as not resolvable at the local level alone.

Case processing delay remains persistent and well above state and national standards.

Median time to disposition peaked at 625 days in 2022 before falling to 462 days in 2024, the sharpest single-year improvement in the series. While that improvement is real, it does not resolve the structural picture. Fewer than 1% of General Sessions cases resolve by trial; virtually all end in a plea or dismissal. The backlog is not primarily a courtroom capacity problem; it is a negotiation pace problem. Time-to-disposition data, broken out by custody status, documents one concrete dimension of that impact. In 2024, people held in jail reached resolution in a median of 196 days; those out of custody waited 596 days. That 400-day gap creates pressure to resolve cases through a plea regardless of the merits and compounds harm across the system: delayed justice for victims, increased opportunities for missed court appearances and rearrests, overloaded workloads for attorneys and court staff, and costs to impacted individuals, families, and the broader community that extend well beyond the courthouse.

South Carolina's case timeliness standard, established by State Court Administration, requires that 80% of pending cases be open less than a year, a framework consistent with National Center for State Courts guidelines for measuring court backlog. That standard is itself more forgiving than the Model Time Standards jointly adopted by the Conference of Chief Justices, the American Bar Association, and the National Association for Court Management in 2011, which call for 90% of felony cases resolved within 180 days. Charleston has not met South Carolina's standard in any year for which data are available, and neither have most South Carolina counties.

At year-end 2024, 14,780 cases remained pending, with 8,078 (55%) open more than a year. The 2025 Annual Report documents a five-year high clearance rate of 113% and an 8% reduction in total pending cases to 13,644, though median time to disposition increased 21% in 2025 as long-running cases continued to resolve.

The JSP pretrial population study found that individuals with unresolved prior cases were more likely to be rearrested at every risk level, directly connecting case delay to pretrial outcomes. A 2025 randomized controlled trial of earlier prosecutorial screening conducted by the JIL demonstrated that the delay is not inevitable: significant cost savings, two fewer weeks in jail per defendant, better feedback to law enforcement on dismissal-prone arrests, and no increase in new arrests. While early-stage metrics have improved consistently, overall time to disposition has not kept pace, and the data documents that case delay is a pretrial outcomes problem, not just a court efficiency one.

Front-end practice gains have not been fully sustained.

The decline in local jail use from 2014 to 2019 was the product of deliberate choices by law enforcement leaders, prosecutors, and court officials to use their discretion differently; to cite rather than arrest, to deflect rather than book, to review rather than detain. Summary Court charges brought to jail fell from 26,922 in 2014 to 8,803 in 2019, a 67% reduction. The familiar face population fell from 3,618 in 2014 to 1,642 in 2019, a 55% reduction, continuing lower through 2022 when it reached 756. TCSC referrals grew from 847 in 2018 to 943 in 2019 as law enforcement and community partners increasingly used the center. These gains reflect how individual actors exercise the discretion they hold at each decision point; jail use is not fixed by statute or population size; it is shaped by practice.

Since the pandemic-era low, several indicators have reversed. Summary Court charges increased from a low of 3,467 in 2021 in each of the three years from 2022 to 2024, reaching 7,717 and exceeding the 2019 pre-pandemic level of 5,738, a sustained reversal of a prior decline from 26,922 in 2014. Summary Court charge data for 2025 is not directly comparable due to court-type assignment issues documented in the 2025 Annual Report. The familiar face population has risen each year since 2022, reaching 951 in 2025. Total TCSC referrals in 2025 (480) remain roughly half the 2019 pre-pandemic level of 943, even as total bookings have surged to 11,452, suggesting deflection has not kept pace with front-end volume.

The pattern across both directions of change is consistent: jail use fell when law enforcement leaders chose to cite rather than arrest and to deflect rather than book, and it has risen as those choices have shifted. The data documents practice decisions, not crime rates, as the primary driver in both directions. The CJCC has experienced multiple transitions in police chiefs, sheriffs, and jail administrators across the reform period. A cross-site analysis of seven Safety and Justice Challenge communities, including Charleston, found that sustainable transformation depends on institutional capacity that extends beyond any one leader's tenure, and that setbacks and fluctuations are inherent to the transformation process. The pattern across multiple indicators in Charleston is consistent with that finding. Charleston's experience provides a documented foundation for those conversations, and its publication record offers a replicable model for the kind of transparency and accountability that makes sustained improvement possible.

Racial and ethnic disproportionality upstream compounds downstream effects.

From 2014 through 2022, Black adults were booked at rates consistently three to four times higher than White adults relative to their share of the county population and were detained at rates five to seven times higher. Both relative rate indices improved over that period but did not close. The 2018 REDD report documented this as an upstream problem: disproportionality at arrest was the largest gap

in the system, and that gap produces downstream inequity even when similarly situated defendants are treated consistently in the courthouse. The JIL disparity study confirmed that framing: Black men accounted for 63.8% of cases and 67.6% of carceral sentences in the Ninth Circuit not because of differential treatment by prosecutors, but because disproportionality entering the courthouse was already compounding from arrest. Deliberate front-end practice changes reduced both booking volume and the racial gap simultaneously, with the Black-White booking RRI falling from 3.70 in 2014 to 3.39 by 2022; documenting that upstream intervention contributed to narrowing the gap. The 2023, 2024, and 2025 Annual Reports shifted to reporting raw demographic counts rather than comparative rates, leaving the trajectory of disproportionality undocumented in the same analytical framework during the years when the jail population has been rising.

The jail population is rising again.

The local jail population reached 1,163 in 2025, driven entirely by the pretrial population, which at 1,144 now exceeds the 2014 total baseline of 1,111. The sentenced population has fallen from 167 in 2014 to 19 in 2025. The rise reflects both higher booking volume and longer stays: average length of stay for General Sessions bookings jumped from 55 days in 2024 to 111 days in 2025, the highest in the series, while Summary Court average length of stay rose from 12 to 27 days over the same period. The data series does not isolate the specific drivers of the length of stay increase, which may reflect a combination of bond decisions, case processing delay, and changes in bond law affecting individuals rearrested on violent charges while on bond. What the data documents clearly is the result: more people in jail, staying longer, in a system where the pretrial population drives virtually all jail use.

Structural barriers require action beyond the local level.

The CJCC brought the right people to the table and that participation produced real gains wherever local discretion allowed it to. What it could not change were the three structural limits that surface repeatedly across the data series: South Carolina's bond structure, which constrains the range of release conditions available regardless of risk level; court and workflow capacity, which shapes case processing speed; and the behavioral health and housing infrastructure that the familiar face and reentry data consistently identify as the unmet need underlying persistent jail utilization patterns. That boundary is not a local failure; it is a structural feature of what local coordinating councils can and cannot do within a system they did not design. Closing these gaps will require the same kind of data-informed, multi-stakeholder approach at the state level that Charleston has demonstrated is possible locally.

Key Findings

The key findings below draw on the full body of research summarized above.

What Ten Years of Data Shows

1. Charleston is the only local jurisdiction in South Carolina producing publicly accessible, longitudinal, cross-agency criminal justice data at this scale, and that is itself a finding.

No other jurisdiction in South Carolina has produced a comparable record, which means the patterns documented here cannot yet be confirmed as statewide through direct comparison. That gap is the finding: Charleston's data consistently points toward structural features of how the system is designed across South Carolina, and confirming that inference requires more jurisdictions to build comparable data capacity, commit to using it with rigor (locally and

statewide), and bring that evidence to bear on policy decisions. The CJCC built that capacity, sustained it over a decade, and produced a body of research that documents what sustained local coordination can accomplish and where the limits of local action lie. The unique value of this record is not just what it shows about Charleston; it is what it makes possible to ask about everywhere else.

2. Jail use is primarily pretrial.

Jail population levels are a function of two variables: how many people are admitted and how long they remain. Admissions are shaped by law enforcement practices, charge types, and the availability of deflection and diversion alternatives. Length of stay is shaped by bond decisions, case processing speed, and pretrial release options. Jail population composition shifts with charging practices, bond decisions, and case processing speed. In 2014, 85% of the local jail population was pretrial. By 2020 that figure had risen to 98% and remained there through 2024. The sentenced population effectively disappeared over the same period, falling from 167 in 2014 to 19 in 2025. The population that remains in jail is almost entirely pretrial.

3. Repeated cycling through the jail by a small group reflects unmet housing and behavioral health needs that criminal justice intervention alone cannot address.

From 2014 to 2020, before pandemic-era court closures further reduced booking activity, the familiar face population fell from 3,618 to 1,350, a 63% reduction coinciding with cite-and-release expansion, law enforcement deflection to the Tri-County Crisis Stabilization Center, and regular jail population reviews. By 2022 that figure had fallen further to 756, reflecting both the continued reform trajectory and pandemic-era reductions in overall booking activity. Since 2022 the population has risen each year, reaching 951 in 2025. The Most Visible Persons subset numbered 174 in 2025, accounting for 13,576 bed days, with trespassing, shoplifting, and public disorder as their most common charges. The JSP deflection study found that 76% of those deflected to the TCSC between 2018 and 2020 had no subsequent arrest within the study period. The MVP initiative's inter-agency case conferencing identified housing instability as the primary unmet need for the most frequently cycling individuals. The data documents both the scale of reduction achieved through front-end practice changes and the limit of what those changes can accomplish without the housing and behavioral health resources that would address the underlying need.

4. Financial bond as a default release type is not supported by outcome data.

Studies in the Charleston series consistently find that personal recognizance produces better pretrial outcomes than financial bond across risk levels. The JSP pretrial population study confirmed this at risk levels 1 through 3. Across every study in the series, the majority of pretrial releases were successful; among those who did experience a failure, most new arrests occurred within the first six months of release. The 2024 data brief documented a notable development: for the first time in the series, financial bonds became the leading bond type for Level 1 defendants, the lowest-risk group, reversing the prior pattern in which PR bonds predominated for that group. The 2025 Annual Report documents a modest shift to 61% overall with a 50/50 split at Level 1. The consistent finding across a decade of data is that the tools to make better bond decisions exist, are in use, and point in one direction; what has not changed is the default practice and structural limitations.

5. Existing data cannot predict which individuals will commit a violent offense specifically.

The JSP pretrial population study tracked 3,724 bookings for a minimum of six months following release. Of those, 4.9% (183 bookings involving 137 individuals) had a subsequent statutorily violent charge. Initial characteristics could not reliably distinguish those individuals from others in the dataset in advance. Where differences in initial characteristics did exist between those with subsequent violent and non-violent bookings, effect sizes were small, meaning the practical ability to distinguish between the two groups in advance remains limited. Restricting pretrial release broadly in response to the risk of rare violent reoffending means detaining a much larger number of people who would not reoffend, in order to prevent harm by a group that cannot be reliably identified from available data. The data makes the trade-off visible; how to weigh it is a policy decision.

6. General Sessions cases are resolved almost entirely through guilty pleas and dismissals, not trials.

From 2018 through 2025, fewer than 1% of General Sessions cases resolved by trial in any year. Guilty pleas, prosecutorial decisions not to pursue charges, and dismissals accounted for virtually all outcomes. This matters for how the backlog is understood and addressed: because almost no cases resolve by trial, the data supports the conclusion that the backlog is primarily a function of negotiation pace and workflow management rather than trial capacity. The JIL Case for Screening recommended providing police reports to prosecutors quickly, using a screening attorney to review non-violent charges at intake for legal sufficiency and diversion opportunities, and establishing feedback sessions with law enforcement to reduce dismissal-prone arrests. The JIL Timely Justice randomized controlled trial provided causal evidence that prosecutorial intake screening speeds that process: approximately \$400,000 saved in combined jail, defense, and court costs; screened defendants spent an average of 15 fewer days in jail; better feedback to law enforcement on dismissal-prone arrests; and no statistically significant difference in rearrest rates. The interventions the data supports are known and documented at sufficient scale to inform adoption in other jurisdictions.

7. How long cases take and how fast they move shape pretrial outcomes in ways that compound across the system.

Case processing delay is not just a court efficiency problem; it is a pretrial outcomes problem. The JSP pretrial population study documented that individuals with accumulated pending charges from prior cases were less likely to succeed on pretrial release at every risk level, connecting delay directly to outcomes. The longer cases remain pending, the more opportunities accumulate for a pretrial failure and delayed justice for victims and defendants.

In 2024, people held in jail reached resolution in a median of 196 days; those out of custody waited 596 days. That gap has consequences in both directions: it creates pressure to resolve cases through a plea regardless of the merits, and it extends the window during which prior pending charges increase the likelihood of rearrest. Median time to disposition peaked between 2022 and 2023 before falling to 462 days in 2024, the sharpest single-year improvement in the series. Time to disposition continues to exceed the state's standard requiring 80% of pending cases open less than a year, which most South Carolina counties also fail to meet. The 2025 Annual Report documents a five-year high clearance rate of 113% and an 8% reduction in total pending cases to 13,644,

though median time to disposition increased 21% in 2025 as long-running cases continued to resolve. The data documents both the scale of the problem and, through the JSP and JIL findings, the direction for addressing it.

8. Racial and ethnic disproportionality compounds across every decision point.

The Phase One Report established a Black-White booking RRI of 3.70 in 2014, with disproportionality largest at the point of arrest. The 2018 midyear report documented that this gap compounded at each subsequent decision point including bond, detention, and case processing, and called for a dedicated study of what happened to that gap as cases moved through the courthouse. The JIL disparity study provided the answer: examining over 24,000 charges from 2015 to 2020, it found that Black individuals made up approximately 12% of Charleston County's population and 53% of those entering General Sessions Court in 2019. Black male adults were 4.3 times as likely to have a General Sessions case than White male adults. Once cases reached the Solicitor's Office, similarly situated defendants were generally treated comparably regardless of race; the source of downstream inequity was the scale of disproportionality arriving from upstream. Deliberate front-end strategies targeting the most frequently booked low-level charges, which had the largest disparate impact, contributed to improvement in booking rates over the reform period, with the Black-White booking RRI falling from 3.70 in 2014 to 3.39 by 2022. The 2023, 2024, and 2025 Annual Reports shifted to reporting raw demographic counts rather than comparative rates; those counts show Black adults consistently representing 55% to 65% of bookings and the majority of open cases, familiar faces, and the detained population. The shift in reporting methodology limits the ability to track the trajectory of disproportionality in recent years, leaving the question of whether the gap has continued to narrow or has reversed unanswered in the most recent data.

9. Practice changes at the case lifecycle level produce measurable, replicable results.

Charleston's data documents replicable practice changes across the case lifecycle. At the front end, cite-and-release expansion, law enforcement deflection to services, and targeted charge reduction each produced documented results that are replicable wherever local law enforcement and court leadership choose to prioritize them. At bond court, routine PSRs, public defender representation, and structured observations each produced a documented evidence base on pretrial outcomes that other jurisdictions can draw on directly. In case processing, earlier assignment of counsel, faster discovery transfer, and prosecutorial intake screening each show consistent improvement in Charleston's data.

Because fewer than 1% of General Sessions cases resolve by trial, waiting time is driven by how long it takes to reach a negotiated resolution; speeding up discovery transfer, counsel assignment, and prosecutorial screening shortens exactly that window. The JIL Timely Justice randomized controlled trial provides the first causal evidence of prosecutorial screening's impact, producing \$400,000 in combined savings, better feedback to law enforcement, and an average of 15 fewer jail days per defendant with no statistically significant difference in rearrest rates. Some of these changes required investment and others required only leadership, data, and the commitment to act on what the evidence showed. Charleston's record documents both what it took and what it produced, and every element of it is replicable.

10. Sustained reform requires deliberate institutional infrastructure, authentic community engagement, and internal capacity.

What Charleston built across a decade required deliberate choices on three interdependent tracks: data infrastructure, institutional governance, and community engagement. Each supported the others, and all three depended on sustained professional staff capacity to develop and endure. The data made governance accountable and gave community engagement substance to report against. The governance sustained the data investment and the staffing across leadership transitions. The community engagement shaped CJCC priorities.

Institutionally, oversight moved from a single elected official to county administration, backed by formally updated bylaws and a County Council resolution. On community engagement, representation was built in from the start in 2015, deepened through public reporting and forums, expanded to include individuals with lived experience, and reached shared governance with a community member serving as Co-Vice Chair. All three tracks were deliberate and sustained across leadership transitions.

Charleston's record demonstrates that when formal accountability structures, genuine community governance, and dedicated staff capacity are built and maintained together, coordinating councils can produce the kind of sustained, measurable progress this report documents. The data and the governance model are inseparable: without the data, there is no accountability; without the governance, the data has no mechanism for producing change. Whether that model transfers to other jurisdictions depends on the same three things that made it possible in Charleston: political will, institutional capacity, and dedicated professional staff.

Part III. Conclusion

Building better systems starts with understanding how the current one actually works; not how it is designed to work, but how it operates in practice, for whom, and with what results. Charleston has done that work across a decade, and the findings documented here are among the most rigorous, longitudinal, and locally grounded in the country. This publication record is itself an act of accountability: it documents what worked, what did not, and why, with the same precision applied to both.

Across a decade of data, the same structural features recur: disproportionality is largest at the point of arrest and compounds downstream; financial bond produces worse pretrial outcomes across risk levels; case processing delay is a pretrial outcome problem, not just a court efficiency one, and given that fewer than 1% of cases resolve by trial, the backlog is primarily a function of negotiation pace and workflow management; and a small group cycles repeatedly with underlying behavioral health and housing needs the booking and release cycle does not address. Taken together, these are not separate findings. They describe a connected mechanism: a discretionary arrest leads to a bond hearing where limited options mean ability to pay determines who goes home; months in jail create pressure to plead regardless of the merits; years of delay accumulate new exposure to rearrest; and a small group cycles back to the same unaddressed behavioral health and housing conditions. The consistency of these findings across ten years is itself a conclusion: these are structural features of how the system operates, not anomalies. Other jurisdictions in South Carolina almost certainly have the same patterns even if they do not yet have the data capacity to know.

Charleston's record does not just document a local story; it provides the evidentiary foundation for a statewide one. Charleston's decade of data establishes what is possible through sustained local coordination and what requires action at a different level. The strategies that produced the clearest and most durable gains were those where local actors could change their own practice without requiring statutory change or statewide resource reallocation. Where results have been limited or have not held, the pattern is consistent: bond type distribution, case processing speed at scale, and pretrial and reentry infrastructure are all areas where local practice improvements have run up against the statewide structure. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the familiar face data, which documents repeated cycling on low-level charges among individuals whose primary unmet needs include behavioral health and housing instability. The JSP deflection study found that 76% of those deflected to the TCSC had no subsequent arrest; for those with the most acute behavioral health needs, diversion alone did not interrupt the cycle, pointing to the gap between crisis response and the sustained housing and treatment resources that would address the underlying condition.

That boundary is not a local failure; it is a structural feature of what coordinating councils can and cannot do within a system they did not design. Charleston's publication record documents that boundary with precision, and in doing so provides the evidentiary foundation for a statewide conversation grounded in the same data-informed, multi-stakeholder approach this record demonstrates is achievable locally.

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*Report available at
kpdta.org/publications-and-helpful-resources*

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