

Care First: Ending Mass Incarceration in L.A.

The huge scale of mass incarceration in Los Angeles County is unlike anywhere else in the United States. For decades, jail has been the default response to people struggling with poverty, homelessness, and unmet treatment needs. This has disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx Angelenos, who are 85 percent of people in jail on any given day. After years of advocacy, Los Angeles County is trying to turn the tide with a transformative vision of community safety: a ‘care first’ approach that prioritizes health solutions and services over the historic reliance on jail.

Los Angeles is home to the largest jail system in the United States.

17,400

people held in the L.A. jail before the pandemic

2X

the next largest jails in 2019

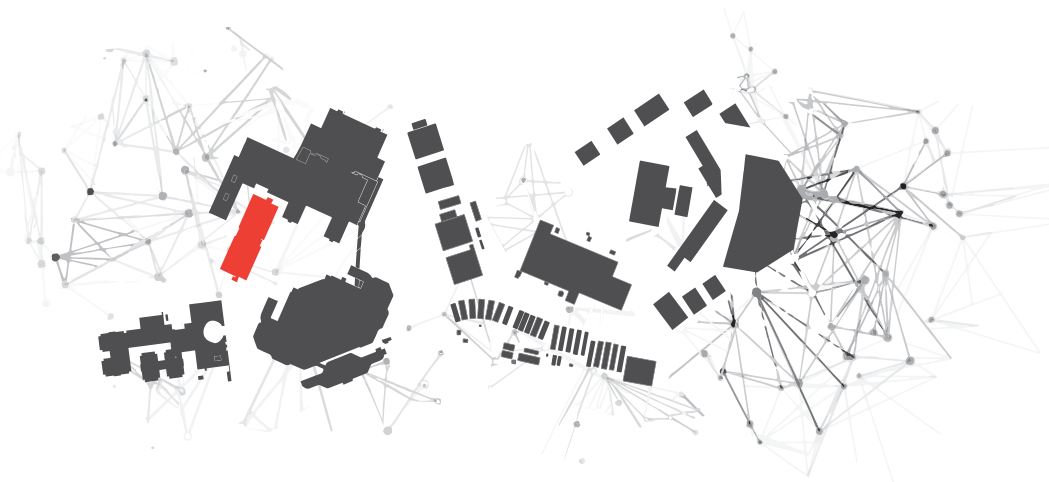
Houston
8,900

Phoenix
7,800

New York City
7,300

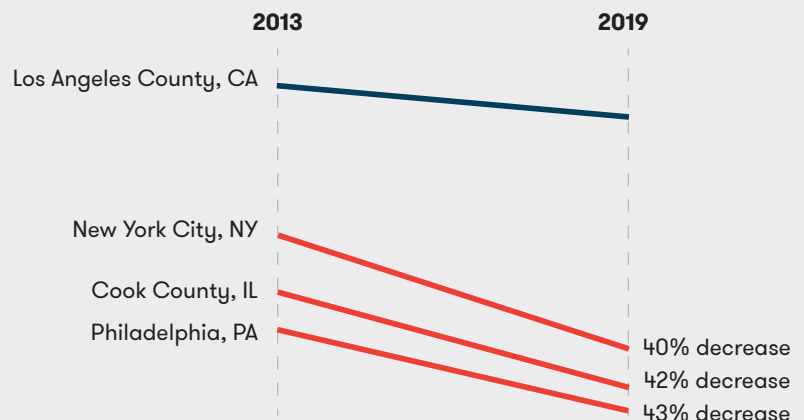
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Census of Jails, 2005-2019 – Statistical Tables, October 2021.

The notoriously inhumane **Men’s Central Jail (MCJ)** is just one of seven facilities in the massive county jail system. It is surrounded by a network of smaller police stations throughout the county. Closing MCJ is one key step toward ending mass incarceration in L.A.

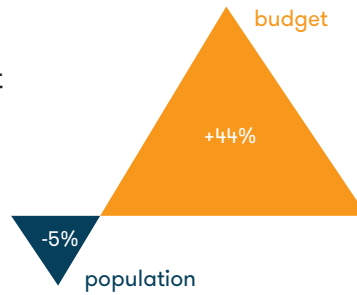


L.A. has lagged behind other large cities that have been reforming their use of jail. The jail population in L.A. only declined 7 percent between 2013 and 2019.

Source: People in Jail in 2019. Vera Institute of Justice, December 2019. Census of Jails, 2005-2019 – Statistical Tables. Bureau of Justice Statistics, October 2021.



Even though the jail population has decreased slightly since 2011, the jail budget has increased enormously, consuming resources that could be used instead to improve reentry infrastructure and build community-based systems of care.



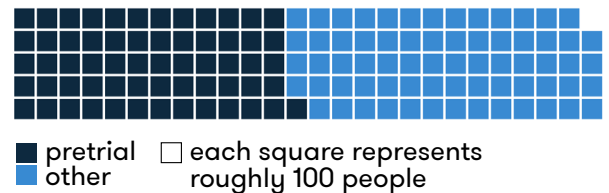
In fiscal year 2021, L.A. County budgeted \$1.3 billion for the jail system.

Source: What Jails Cost in America's Largest Cities. Vera Institute of Justice, 2022.

Using a care first approach to ending mass incarceration is humane, promotes safety, and makes better use of scarce resources.

45 percent of people in L.A. jails are held “pretrial” and have not been convicted of any charges. Being unable to afford bail is what keeps most people from freedom.

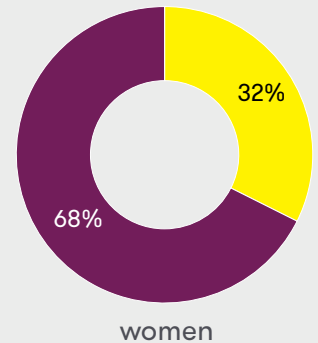
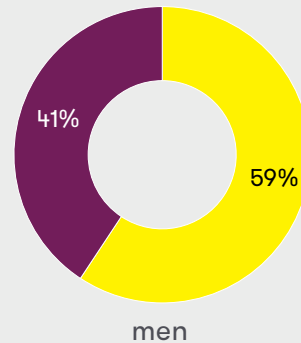
L.A. urgently needs to change this by launching and fully funding its pretrial services entity to connect people with stabilizing services and return-to-court support.



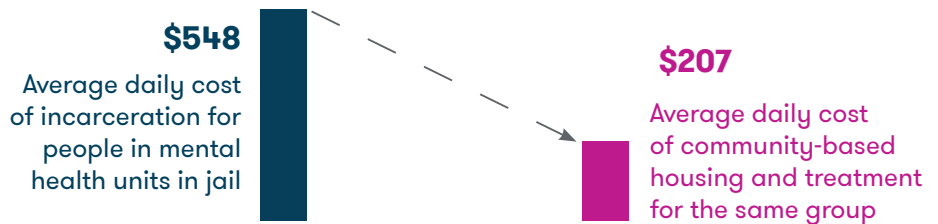
Source: Care First L.A.: Tracking Jail Decarceration, Vera Institute of Justice, 2022.

The L.A. jail system is the largest mental health institution in the United States. And the proportion of people with identified mental health needs has increased during the pandemic.

percent of population with mental health needs



A Los Angeles County workgroup found that incarcerating people with serious mental health conditions is far more costly than providing community-based housing and clinical care.



Source: LA County Men's Central Jail Closure Report, March 30, 2021

Now, L.A. County must turn their words into action by shifting budget priorities, scaling up supportive pathways out of the jail system, and creating a concrete timeline and decarceration benchmarks to close Men's Central Jail.