



OKPOLICY.ORG

Oklahoma Policy Institute

2018 POLICY PRIORITY: REFORM PRACTICES THAT TRAP OKLAHOMANS IN JAIL BEFORE TRIAL

Background

Oklahoma's jails are overflowing with people who haven't been convicted of any crime but who can't afford to pay a bail bondsman to get out before their case is resolved. Our jail incarceration rate was lower than the national average as recently as 2002, but it has skyrocketed since then and is now 40 percent higher than the national average. Many of those detained were charged with low-level, nonviolent crimes and will be sentenced to probation.

This system creates huge incarceration costs for counties with no public safety benefit. Further, every day a person is jailed makes it more difficult to keep their job, their housing, and their family intact, which adds to the risk that they'll reoffend.



The Solution

Courts should make pretrial release decisions based on the risk a person poses, not on their ability to pay. Judges in Oklahoma County have begun to expand the use of own recognizance bonds and other non-monetary release, leading to a sharp drop in the jail population with no adverse public safety effects. They can be a model for the rest of the state to decrease jail incarceration, save money, and promote strong families and communities.

Oklahoma should use a validated risk assessment to make pretrial release decisions and make non-monetary bond the standard for non-violent offenses. Research shows that simply reminding defendants of their court dates works just as well as money bail in ensuring that defendants appear in court.

What You Can Do

Contact your state Representative and Senator and urge them to vote for bail reforms that ensure that defendants are released or kept in jail based on their risk to the community, not on their bank account. You can look up your Senator and Representative at <http://okpolicy.org/find-your-legislator/>, call the House switchboard at 405-521-2711, and call the Senate switchboard at 405-524-0126.

To join the coalition of Oklahomans working to ensure that our criminal justice system is smarter, makes our communities safer, and gives us the return on our taxpayer dollars that we deserve, visit www.okjusticereform.org. To receive SMS advocacy alerts on important criminal justice issues, text OKJUSTICE to 51555.