



For Immediate Release

NATIONAL, NON-PARTISAN STUDY DEEMS HARRIS COUNTY MISDEMEANOR BAIL REFORM ‘LARGELY A SUCCESS’

Sept. 1, 2022 — Misdemeanor bail reform in Harris County has kept low-level defendants out of jail without leading to an increase in crime, according to a new report released by a national, non-partisan criminal justice research center.

The study reported an increase in the number of defendants being released from jail within 24 hours of their arrest and a decrease in their recidivism over a three-year period. Researchers also reported fewer pleas and convictions, which they said indicated fewer innocent people were serving time for crimes they didn't commit.

The research was conducted by the Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice at the University of Pennsylvania's Carey Law School. The Center is a national research and policy hub created to produce and disseminate research that catalyzes long-term structural improvements in the U.S. criminal justice system, according to the center's website.

"This analysis demonstrates that a core component of misdemeanor bail reform in Harris County — releasing people charged with misdemeanors on unsecured bail who might have otherwise been detained due to failure to post small amounts of cash bail — was largely a success," researchers wrote in the conclusion of the report.

"It should provide some assurance to other jurisdictions considering liberalizing pretrial release for people charged with low-level offenses that it is possible to do so in a manner that reduces the costs and imprint of the criminal justice system while not adversely impacting public safety."

In Harris County, misdemeanor bail reform is mandated by a federal consent decree, which was put in place after a federal district court judge — and later the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals — found prior bail practices to be unconstitutional. The determination resulted from a federal lawsuit filed against the county in 2016.

Misdemeanor bail reform aims to level the socioeconomic playing field by ensuring no one remains in jail simply because they cannot afford to pay bail. This aligns with state law, which notes that bail is not a tool of oppression but rather a way to maintain public safety and ensure defendants, who are presumed innocent under the law, return to court to answer the accusations brought against them.

The study of Harris County's bail reform was led by Law Professor and Quattrone Center Academic Director Paul Heaton and included a review of more than 500,000 Harris County misdemeanor and felony cases dating from 2015 to May 2022. The project was funded by Arnold Ventures, a Houston-based philanthropic organization.

The report's conclusion included three key findings:

- Misdemeanor pretrial reform produced more lenient outcomes and reduced the system's imprint without adversely impacting public safety.
- Increasing pretrial release rates did not substantially impede the resolution of cases, although there were some modest impacts.
- Expanding pretrial release under the ODonnell injunction did not fuel a spike in crime, as some have claimed.

For more information, [review the full report](#) or read related news stories written by [Bloomberg News](#) and the [Houston Chronicle](#).

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