

THE HARRIS COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL
COMPLETES COMPREHENSIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE STUDY
AND APPLIES FOR MACARTHUR GRANT

HOUSTON – The Harris County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) has applied for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s *Justice Challenge Grant*. The grant is part of the Foundation’s \$75 million initiative to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

In May, the MacArthur Foundation awarded the CJCC \$150,000 to study and develop a plan to improve Harris County’s Criminal Justice System. The CJCC’s project is now complete and its comprehensive plan has been sent to the MacArthur Foundation. In March, as many as 10 jurisdictions from around the country will be awarded a second round of funding from the Foundation (\$500,000 to \$2 million annually) to implement their plans over two years.

In the last 6 months, CJCC members looked into nearly every aspect of the Harris County Criminal Justice System. CJCC gathered data on; arrest and release decisions, case processing and diversion opportunities, racial and ethnic disparity, and looked into recidivism and re-entry initiatives. The objective was to improve the way Harris County makes use of its jail and criminal justice resources.

In the end, the data driven research uncovered several issues that if addressed, would reduce the jail population and could elevate Harris County’s Criminal Justice System into one of the best in the country. A summary of the data and application to the MacArthur Foundation is attached to this release.

While the CJCC waits to find out if Harris County is one of the recipients of the grant, two new programs to improve our criminal justice system will start February 1st.

- 1) ***Retail Theft Diversion***: For those first time offenders charged with Class B Misdemeanor Theft (retail only), the Harris County District Attorney’s Office will be offering a 90 day post charge program. The offender will take an 8 hour cognitive class, pay a one fee and restitution (if any) and refrain from any new offenses. The case will be dismissed upon the defendant’s successful completion of the terms of the program.

- 2) ***Felony Diversion for First Time Offenders: Felony PCS less than 1 gram and Felony PCS 1-4 grams***: For those offenders with no felony priors (including prior DADJS, probations, and pretrial diversions) charged, we will be offering a one year post charged intervention program in which the defendant will be assessed by the Probation Department and then agree to follow the recommendations in the report. The Probation Department will monitor the defendant’s progress using graduated sanctions

and a behavior matrix. What we have in place is not working. Currently 75% of these offenders are re-offending.

- 3) ***Rethinking Criminal Justice Training***: The Harris County District Attorney's Office will have a two day mandatory training for all prosecutors as we move forward with this cultural change. (January 21-22)

The Harris County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council is committed and focused on the issues revealed in the detailed research. The CJCC has a comprehensive plan and is moving forward.

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MacArthur Foundation Safety + Justice Challenge Grant

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