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## ESSEX COUNTY BEST PRACTICES ANALYSIS

In key areas, Essex County falls short of best practices for promoting community safety and reducing the number of people entangled in the criminal justice system. The county is missing opportunities taken by other communities to promote safety and justice.

**Data Collection:** While many counties across the country are collecting and reporting data on local jail populations through the American Jail Survey, conducted by the Department of Justice, Essex County has failed to provide data on the racial make-up of the county jail. Transparent tracking of data is critical to ensuring that any county is truly committed to ensuring fewer people of color end up in the criminal justice system.

**Jail Conditions:** Given local experience with the county jail, there are several areas where the Sheriff could make improvements to the conditions inside the jail including:

- Training for Sheriff's Deputies to ensure that they safeguard the life of everyone in their custody, especially during medical emergencies.

- Ending private contracts for health care provision and ensuring that people that are currently incarcerated are provided quality health care and mental health care services.
- Investigating the inconsistent visitation practices that allow family members to travel to visit their loved ones only to be told that visitation has been cancelled for the day.
- Training for Sheriff's Deputies to ensure they are treating those currently incarcerated respectfully as well as their loved ones.

**Re-Entry:** While Essex County has implemented a fair hiring policy removing the felony questions from initial job applications, re-entry for those coming home from incarceration is still an obstacle. Investing funding in re-entry services and job development programs as well as program in the county jail preparing people to come home are critical to reducing the number of people currently caught up in the criminal justice system.

**Policing:** Cities across the country have shown that is possible to reduce violence rates by building stronger, more collaborative relationships between their police departments and the community and by focusing policing resources on individuals most likely to commit violence. The Procedural Justice approach – outlined in the best practices section written by Traci Meares and detailed in the President's Commission on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing – requires the police to rebuild trust and credibility with the community.

In 2016, one Black man was shot and killed by the Lynn Police Department. Another Black man, in need of medical attention, died while in custody of the Essex County Sheriff's Department.<sup>156157</sup> The Lynn Police Department in partnership with ECCO has implemented Implicit Bias training with Rachel Godsil of Seton Hall University School of Law to increase police officers ability to work in communities of color and decrease the number of negative interactions with these communities. While this is a step in the right direction, other cities in Essex County, along with the Essex County Sheriff's Department should follow suit.

**Immigration:** In March 2016, ECCO organized over 35 legal, social service, and community organizations to ask the Essex County Sheriff's Department to withdraw its name from the list published by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of counties considering a formal agreement with ICE. Lead by ECCO, these organizations successfully prevented the Sherriff's Department of Essex County from entering into a formal agreement with ICE which would have resulted in more immigrants being deported leaving more immigrant families destroyed.

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<sup>156</sup> <http://boston.cbslocal.com/2016/01/29/lynn-police-shooting-western-avenue/>

<sup>157</sup> <http://boston.cbslocal.com/2015/07/14/man-shot-and-killed-by-lynn-police-officer-during-alleged-drug-deal-identified/>

**Criminalizing Poverty and Responsible Prosecution:** One of the major reasons why Essex County jail system has doubled between 1985 and 2014 appears to be a lack of pre-trial and diversion services that work for all communities members. It is also important that Essex County Prosecutor Jonathan Blodget provide public leadership in reducing the number of people entangled unnecessarily in the criminal justice system and eliminating racial disparities. Responsible prosecution practices include reporting on racial disparities in charging, providing pre-trial services within 24 hours to all people who've been arrested and seeking to minimize the length of probation and parole. The best practices section on Safe and Just Prosecution shows that it is possible to hold people accountable for breaking the law while prioritizing the needs of victims in the community, and seeking to limit the number of people involved in the criminal justice system.

When combined together, the best practices adopted by other cities and counties to both reduce violence and incarceration provide a road map for Essex County to dramatically reduce the number of people placed in jail each year, and under the supervision of law enforcement – perhaps by as much as one half. These best practices will also reduce glaring racial inequities in the region. The key is for those in positions of leadership to take leadership for the common good of Essex County.