EAST BATON ROUGE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL
AWARDED ADDITIONAL $800,000 BY MACARTHUR FOUNDATION SAFETY AND JUSTICE CHALLENGE TO RETHINK LOCAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

New Funding Will Help Support Initiatives Aimed at Safely Reducing East Baton Rouge Parish’s Jail Population and Advancing Racial Equity

Baton Rouge, LA, February 9, 2021 – The East Baton Rouge Criminal Justice Coordinating Council is the recipient of a $800,000 grant by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to continue building on efforts in collaboration with local leaders and the community to rethink the local criminal justice system, safely reduce East Baton Rouge Parish’s jail population, and eliminate racial inequities. The grant brings the Foundation’s total investment in East Baton Rouge Parish to $1.35 million to date, and is part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, a $246 million national initiative to reduce over-incarceration and advance racial equity in local criminal justice systems by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

The Safety and Justice Challenge is supporting local leaders, individuals directly and most impacted by the justice system, and the broader community in East Baton Rouge Parish and across the country who are determined to address one of the greatest drivers of over-incarceration in America – the misuse and overuse of jails. East Baton Rouge Parish was first selected to join the Safety and Justice Challenge Network in 2017 and has since used the resources and funding provided by the initiative to implement evidence-based solutions.

These solutions include the creation of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), the Pre-Trial Diversion and Recovery Program, and Rapid Case Assessment Teams (RCAT) at Baton Rouge City Court and the 19th Judicial District Court. As a result, East Baton Rouge Parish Prison reached a 20-year low for its inmate population in 2020 (a 46% reduction since 2017), newly arrested individuals are more quickly being connected to much needed behavioral health services and are being diverted from jail, and approximately 80% of the defendants appearing for the first time in Baton Rouge City Court have their cases resolved by plea or dismissal.

Today, East Baton Rouge Parish was one of 15 jurisdictions selected for additional funding based on the promise and progress of work to date. This new round of funding will provide the CJCC and partners with continued support and expert technical assistance to strengthen and expand strategies that address the main drivers, and resulting racial inequities, of local jail incarceration.
"We are proud of the progress we have made in safely reducing East Baton Rouge Parish’s jail population over the last 4 years. We are also thankful to the MacArthur Foundation for continuing our partnership and we look forward to advancing our overall goal of eliminating unnecessary incarceration, which directly impacts the health, safety and recovery of our communities,” said Judge Yvette Alexander, judge at the Baton Rouge City Court and Chairperson of the CJCC.

In partnership with Baton Rouge Police Department, East Baton Rouge Sheriff’s Office, Baton Rouge City Court, the 19th JDC, the 19th Judicial District Attorney’s Office, Baton Rouge City Prosecutor’s Office and the East Baton Rouge Public Defender’s Office, the CJCC has developed a comprehensive plan for additional strategies and initiatives over the next two years to invest in a safer, more effective, and more equitable system. These include: expanding the CJCC to include community representation, implementing pre-trial resources as an alternative to jail, integrating justice data systems, and identifying racial and ethnic disparities at key intercepts in the justice system.

“A sustained partnership with the community is critical to redefining safety and identifying disparities as we continue to build on the foundation of the CJCC. The additional support from the Safety and Justice Challenge will help us center the voices and experiences of those most impacted, strengthen trust, and ensure our work actively responds to the community’s needs,” said Chris Csonka, Executive Director of the CJCC.

More than five years after its public launch, the Safety and Justice Challenge has grown into a collaborative of 51 jurisdictions in 32 states modeling and inspiring reforms to create more fair, just, and equitable local justice systems across the country.

“We must confront the devastating impacts of mass incarceration by a system that over-polices and over-incarcerates Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people,” said Laurie Garduque, MacArthur’s Director of Criminal Justice. “Over the past five years, the Safety and Justice Challenge has safely reduced the ineffective and harmful use of jails, while learning that jail population reduction alone does not undo the racial inequities perpetuated by an unjust system and our nation’s history of systemic racism. We are committed to supporting cities and counties as they reimagine a definition of safety that is inclusive of all communities and makes meaningful progress towards our goal of ending racial and ethnic disparities in jails.”

Several of the nation's leading criminal justice organizations will continue to provide technical assistance and counsel to CJCC, East Baton Rouge Parish partners, and the other jurisdictions
involved in the Safety and Justice Challenge. These include the Center for Court Innovation, Everyday Democracy, Nexus Community Partners, the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, JFA Institute, the Justice Management Institute, Justice System Partners, the Pretrial Justice Institute, Policy Research, Inc., the Vera Institute of Justice, the W. Haywood Burns Institute, Urban Institute, and Bennett Midland.


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