



BARS TO CARE

A Comparison of County Spending on Mental Health Services vs. Local Jails in 2019

March 4, 2020

On January 1st, New York's new bail reform law went into effect. This law, fought for by communities across the state, was designed to reduce the number of people and families harmed by pretrial incarceration, protect the constitutional right to the presumption of innocence, and address the criminalization of poverty and of Black and brown communities.

Before the passage of bail reform, New York's fifty-seven counties outside of New York City spent \$705.5 million jailing legally innocent people each year.¹ This system of mass pretrial incarceration coerced plea deals and destabilized individuals who were often in dire need of support, not pretrial punishment. By some estimates as many as 84% of people in New York jails had a substance use disorder or mental illness.² National surveys show that 20% of people incarcerated in local jails have a "serious mental illness" like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.³ Without bail reform, New York's local jails would have continued to function as warehouses for people failed by social services and social policy, including people struggling with mental health needs, substance use, and homelessness.

Bail reform is already working. Each day, there are 6,000 fewer people incarcerated pretrial in New York's local jails.⁴ Thousands of people can thus return to their families and receive the treatment and care they need as they await their date in court. With the state budget deadline fast approaching, this is a critical moment for New York's legislature to protect the new law from regressive changes, and instead commit to shifting resources to the services - education, healthcare, mental healthcare, and housing - that keep communities safe and thriving. To do so, we must re-examine the staggering sums counties have historically spent on jailing compared to community-based resources.

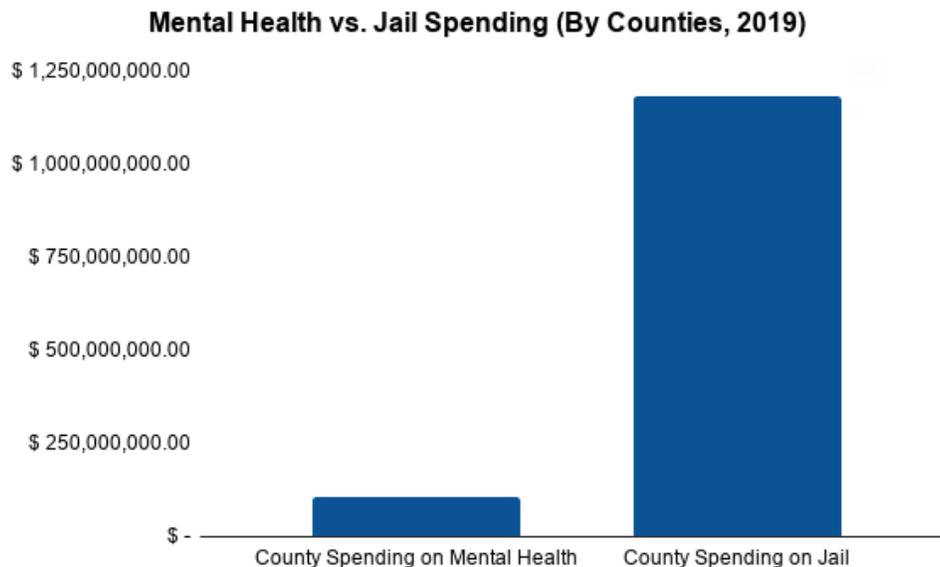
Key Findings

By analyzing county budgets state-wide, we found that in 2019 the fifty-seven New York counties outside of New York City spent:

- **\$1.18 billion** on local jails - **nearly 11 times** as much as they spent on community-based mental health services.
- An estimated **\$236 million** incarcerating people suffering with serious mental illnesses, like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.
- **\$705.5 million** incarcerating legally innocent people at a cost of **\$87,241 per person** per year.

An Opportunity to Provide Care Instead of Jail

In 2019, we found that the fifty-seven New York counties outside of New York City **spent nearly 11 times as much on their jail systems as on mental health services** in the community. County spending on jails amounted to \$1.18 billion, compared to \$107 million on community-based mental healthcare.

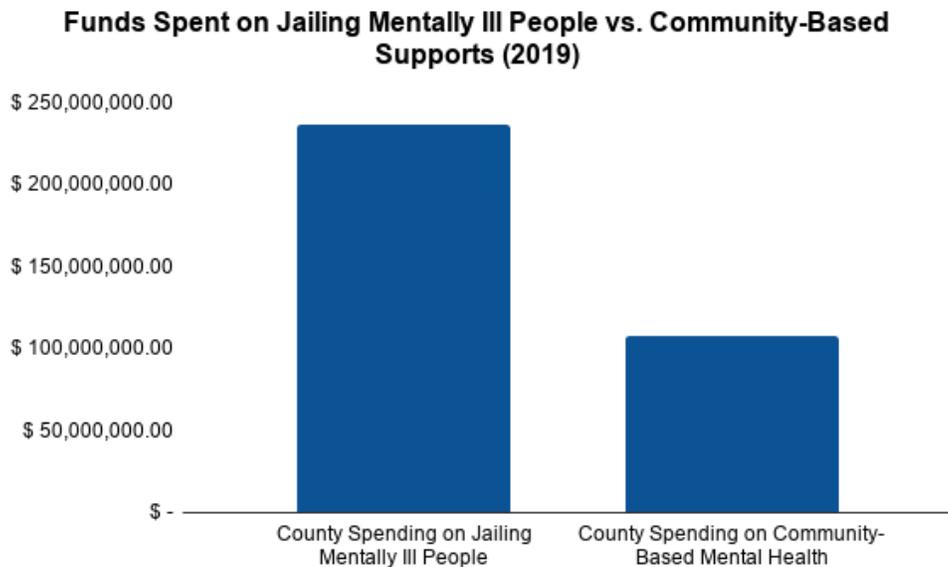


These figures represent a clear and damaging misuse of funds. **Across the state, the average annual cost of incarcerating a single person is \$87,241 per year** - money that could otherwise be invested in community services and supports.⁵ County expenditures on jailing are particularly offensive when contrasted with the minimal spending on community-based mental health.

As many advocates and researchers have noted: jails and prisons have replaced hospitals as the primary facility for people with mental illness. This is not because people with mental health needs are more violent - in fact, people with mental illness are far more likely to be victimized - but rather that mental health crisis is often criminalized. There are more people with serious mental illness on Rikers Island than in any psychiatric hospital in the United States.⁶ In a 2014 report, the New York City Mayor's Task Force on Behavioral Health in the Justice System found that 38 percent of people incarcerated in the city's jails have a mental illness, 7 percent have a serious mental illness, and 85 percent or more have substance-use disorders.⁷ Similarly, in March 2018, the Cortland County Sheriff's Office released a report that found 84% of people in the jail identified as having a substance use disorder or mental illness.⁸

While New York does not collect state-wide data, national surveys estimate that 20 percent of people incarcerated in local jails have a serious mental illness, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.⁹ Extrapolating to New York State, in January 2019, nearly 4,300 people

with serious mental illness were languishing in New York's jails.¹⁰ Given the annual cost of incarceration, the 57 counties outside of New York City spent **an estimated \$236 million dollars incarcerating people suffering with serious mental illness in 2019 - nearly twice what they spent on community-based mental health services.** This figure almost certainly underestimates the human and financial cost of using jail as a de facto mental health institution, as it accounts only for people in jail with serious mental illness. As evident in the statistics above, a much larger percentage of people in jail pretrial had mental health and substance use needs.



Across the board, pretrial jailing is harmful, traumatizing and destabilizing. When people are incarcerated pretrial - whether for a day, a week, a month, or longer - they can lose their jobs and their homes, while families lose a caregiver or household earner. While some sheriffs have argued that jails are necessary mental health providers, jail is an inhumane and uniquely harmful site for treatment. People with mental health needs decompensate in jail, getting worse, not better.¹¹ Tragically, suicide is the leading cause of death in jail, self-harm rates are staggeringly high, and overdose deaths after detoxing in jail are all too common. Even after leaving jail, the harm of pretrial incarceration continues. Many no longer have access to needed healthcare and benefits. For those who took a plea deal, a criminal record makes it harder to find a job or housing. Many, especially those without access to mental health services and support, wind up homeless, in emergency rooms or re-arrested.¹² It is thus unsurprising that pretrial jailing worsens community safety¹³ as it aggravates the root drivers of harm, including poverty, trauma, housing instability, mental illness, and substance use disorders.

In contrast, community-based mental health services and supportive housing programs provide interventions, support, and treatment, addressing homelessness and reducing both incarceration and hospitalization rates. These services are vastly more effective, humane, and a fraction of the cost.¹⁴ People who gain access to supportive services and affordable or permanent housing receive treatment and opportunity to get well - to the benefit of themselves, their families, and their communities.

Recommendations

New York's elected officials must oppose any rollbacks to bail reform and instead focus their efforts on meeting the basic needs of all New Yorkers for housing, mental health services, education, and healthcare. It is these community-based resources - not money bail or pretrial jailing - that keep New Yorkers safe.

While the figures reported here relate specifically to county-level spending, New York State has a critical role to play in providing funding for community-based services. Already, New York State and the federal government contribute to county mental health budgets, including \$383.3 million in 2019 to the fifty-seven New York counties outside of New York City. However, state support continues to be insufficient to meet local needs. To rectify this, New York State should provide support to counties to robustly implement bail reform, elicit savings from reductions in incarceration, and redirect them to investments in housing and mental health services. New York must also allocate additional funds in State Budget for supportive housing, mental healthcare, treatment.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING: In the State Budget, Governor Cuomo and New York's Legislature should enact the Supportive Housing Network of New York's agenda, which includes:

- \$40 million for the OMH Community Housing Budget to support chronically underfunded housing for 40,000 mentally ill New Yorkers state-wide.
- \$128 million for the Homeless Assistance Program to increase supportive housing development.
- \$2.8 million to the Homeless Housing Preventative Program to provide services to 18,000 tenants.
- A pledge to fund the next 7,000 units of supportive housing through the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative to realize the Governor's promise to fund 20,000 units in 15 years.

MENTAL HEALTHCARE, HOUSING & TREATMENT: Additionally, New York State must:

- Fund community-based organizations to deliver culturally competent counseling and treatment, and bring rapid response mental health services to scale across the state.¹⁵
- Pass the Home Stability Support (HSS) (S.2375/A.1620) to bridge the difference between inadequate public assistance shelter allowances and actual rents for families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.¹⁶
- Pass Good Cause Eviction (S.2892A/A.5030A) to prevent landlords from evicting renters without good cause.¹⁷
- Provide effective substance use treatment through: creating safer consumption sites (S.498/A.60), expanding syringe access (S.875/A.1634), creating dedicated state funding for Naloxone, and rejecting failed drug war tactics like increasing penalties for fentanyl.¹⁸
- Support the 3for5 Campaign by adding \$170 million to address chronic underfunding and increase contracts for human services organizations.

Mental Health vs. Jail Spending (By County, 2019)

County	County Spending on Mental Health	County Spending on Jail
Albany	\$19,262,885	\$49,788,598
Allegany	\$543,203	\$6,810,692
Broome	\$924,256	\$28,149,066
Cattaraugus	\$783,564	\$6,889,960
Cayuga	\$347,426	\$6,838,834
Chautauqua	\$161,995	\$10,562,949
Chemung	\$517,039	\$8,943,438
Chenango	\$80,036	\$7,940,961
Clinton	\$4,143,406	\$10,452,631
Columbia	\$1,377,507	\$4,937,717
Cortland	\$300,211	\$5,862,316
Delaware	\$552,527	\$4,858,169
Dutchess	\$8,767,176	\$39,397,592
Erie	\$4,341,579	\$90,047,296
Essex	\$983,106	\$4,369,121
Franklin	\$109,312	\$6,819,334
Fulton	-\$27,157	\$5,757,185
Genesee	\$972,812	\$4,734,527
Greene	\$709,513	\$4,730,141
Hamilton	\$270,690	\$454,231
Herkimer	\$316,110	\$5,927,346
Jefferson	\$2,899,991	\$9,205,085
Lewis		\$2,246,195
Livingston	\$153,663	\$5,179,109
Madison	\$659,257	\$6,195,538
Monroe	\$5,434,815	\$79,921,271
Montgomery	\$44,990	\$4,413,793
Nassau	\$8,954,303	\$149,357,915
Niagara	\$1,150,981	\$15,410,913
Oneida	\$239,037	\$23,759,649
Onondaga	\$983,595	\$71,546,710
Ontario	\$1,639,076	\$14,924,630
Orange	\$8,081,068	\$47,659,201

County	County Spending on Mental Health	County Spending on Jail
Orleans	\$194,291	\$4,146,423
Ostego	\$901,205	\$3,230,463
Oswego	\$167,685	\$13,582,392
Putnam	\$1,366,634	\$10,005,476
Rensselaer	\$125,025	\$18,481,790
Rockland	\$10,356,775	\$37,618,410
Saratoga	\$3,692,933	\$10,846,764
Schenectady	\$186,845	\$18,050,273
Schoharie	\$389,080	\$3,051,937
Schuyler	-\$389,080	\$1,572,436
Seneca	\$536,026	\$5,636,823
St Lawrence	\$344,740	\$6,997,945
Steuben	\$1,057,523	\$7,462,101
Suffolk	\$1,521,307	\$92,198,495
Sullivan	\$224,600	\$12,422,938
Tioga	\$830,854	\$4,858,924
Tompkins	\$2,147,584	\$5,537,716
Ulster	\$3,854,961	\$20,716,182
Warren	-\$1,494,177	\$10,621,667
Washington	\$82,371	\$9,680,400
Wayne	\$171,416	\$8,129,691
Westchester	\$5,328,834	\$123,568,190
Wyoming	\$158,214	\$4,348,171
Yates	\$23,179	\$3,253,856
TOTALS	\$107,456,797	\$1,180,111,576

*Negative amounts indicate that counties are receiving more other source revenue (including state and federal assistance, fees, and intergovernmental transfers) for mental health services than they are spending to provide services to their residents.

A note on methodology: The county spending figures reported here come from each county's publicly reported 2019 budget, with the exception of Delaware County where the 2018 budget was substituted where 2019 as not available. In order to compare local spending decisions as well as the local opportunities presented by bail reform, we have focused on county-level spending. Counties also receive funding from other sources (including state and federal aid and fees for services) for mental healthcare and the jail system.

Endnotes

- 1 Each day in January 2019, 8,087 New Yorkers were in jail pretrial. Costs calculated using the budget data in the table above.
- 2 Cortland County Sheriff's Department (2018). Cortland County Correctional Facility Population Data on Substance Abuse and Mental Health 2015-2017.
- 3 Steadman, H.J., Osher, F.C., Robbins, P.C., Case, B., Samuels, S. (2009). Prevalence of serious mental illness among jail inmates. *Psychiatric Services*, 60(6), 761–765.
- 4 Vera Institute of Justice (2020). Bail Reform's Impact on Incarceration: What We Know So Far. <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/bail-reforms-impact-on-jail-incarceration.pdf>
- 5 New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services (2020). Jail Population in New York. https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jail_population.pdf.
- 6 Torrey, E. F., Kennard, A. D., Eslinger, D., Lamb, R., & Pavle, J. (2010). More mentally ill persons are in jails and prisons than in hospitals: A Survey of the States. Treatment Advocacy Center.
- 7 Abraham, Roshan. Reports Indicate City's Progress is Slow on Mental Health Planning for Inmates. City Limits.
- 8 Cortland County Sheriff's Department (2018). Cortland County Correctional Facility Population Data on Substance Abuse and Mental Health 2015-2017.
- 9 Steadman, H.J., Osher, F.C., Robbins, P.C., Case, B., Samuels, S. (2009). Prevalence of serious mental illness among jail inmates. *Psychiatric Services*, 60(6), 761–765.
- 10 On any given day in January 2019, 21,406 New Yorkers were in jail. If 20% suffered from mental illness, as national surveys suggest, then 4,281 people with mental illness were caged in New York's jails each day and 2,705 mentally ill people were caged in the 57 counties outside of New York City. https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/jail_population.pdf
- 11 Fellner, Jamie (2006). A Corrections Quandary: Mental Illness and Prison Rules. *Harvard CR-CLL Rev.*
- 12 Otokiti, Ahmed and Alabi, Olutoyin (2018). Challenges Faced by the Homeless Population in New York City. *The New York Medical Journal*, 12(2).
- 13 Rempel, Michael et al. (2017). Jail in New York City: Evidence Based Opportunities for Reform. https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/NYC_Path_Analysis_Final-Report.pdf
- 14 Dunthorn, Michael et al. Comparative Costs and Benefits of Permanent Supportive Housing. <https://shnny.org/uploads/Knoxville-study.pdf>. Evidence and Effect of Permanent Supportive Housing on Health. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519591/>
- 15 See NYC Against Hate Coalition Policy Framework: <https://bit.ly/2URwjEr>
- 16 See Housing Justice For All platform: <https://www.housingjusticeforall.org/our-platform>
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 NYC Against Hate Coalition.

About Center for Community Alternatives

Center for Community Alternatives (CCA), founded in 1981, is a leader in community-based alternatives to incarceration and policy advocacy to reduce mass incarceration and mass criminalization in New York State. We provide direct services to communities in New York City, Syracuse, and Rochester, working with approximately 2,500 youth and adults annually who would otherwise be incarcerated.

For more information: www.communityalternatives.org



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