

PFJ's Impact

The Problem

America is having a crisis of public safety policy: Each year, more than 5 million people are arrested and jailed, with one out of every four people arrested more than once in that year. The scale of harm is massive: 1 in 37 Americans is currently under correctional supervision of some kind, or 7% of the total population, and an estimated 45% of Americans have an immediate family member who has been incarcerated—and who will suffer the lasting fallout with their loved one. In short, this isn't a problem impacting a small minority: it's a profoundly widespread American crisis.

The crisis has ripple effects:

- Incarceration makes economic stability or mobility immensely challenging. Individuals who have been incarcerated see future earnings reduced by 52% annually. Cumulatively, this is a loss of \$55.2 billion, borne by the 7.7 million living Americans who have experienced incarceration.
- Over 60% of those who spend time in local jails struggle with mental illness or substance use disorder. Being behind bars only exacerbates these challenges: separation from family and friends, loss of autonomy, poor jail conditions, and trauma combine to trigger or worsen mental illness.
- Each additional year in prison produced a nearly 16% increase in the odds of death, adds 10-15 years to someone's physiognomy, and can take 2 years off their life expectancy per year behind bars.

The U.S. spends \$182 billion annually on the current approach to public safety: prisons, jails, parole and probation, policing, judicial and legal system costs (including \$4.5 billion for public defense), bail fees, civil asset forfeiture, and the direct costs to families (like telephone and commissary). Locking more people up has had essentially zero impact on the crime rate.

Our Solution

1. In the national conversation about public safety and crime, the piece of the puzzle that is all too often missing is public defense. Public defenders are the first point of contact for low-income people entering the criminal legal system and represent nearly 80% of accused people, uniquely positioning them with proximity, trust, and no-barrier-entry.
2. They also have better tools than police and prosecutors: while law enforcement's primary tool is a cage, defenders hold the information and trust necessary to form solutions as unique as the people they serve.
3. **PFJ is transforming public defenders into a robust network of dynamic, people-centered service centers to reduce incarceration, increase equity, and positively impact the lives of those harmed by cycles of incarceration, poor health, and poverty. Since 2018 they have connected thousands of people with stabilizing services and eliminated over 200 years of jail time.**
4. PFJ's flagship program brings defenders ready-to-use personnel and expertise. Across the country, PFJ embeds specialty-trained teams within PD offices to meet their clients' housing, employment,

educational, health and mental health needs. They then channel the achievements they make in partnership with clients back into the criminal matter, securing better outcomes—and eliminating jail time—for their clients.

What Does PFJ Look Like Every Day?

Discussing collaborative defense from 30,000 feet up can erase our work's human impact. Every day in 12 locations around the country, Client Advocates sit with their clients, assisting with their complex, intersecting challenges, and then spring into action, often creating incredible results. During just one week of 2021, a Client Advocate secured over \$40,000 in rental assistance for a client facing eviction, while her colleague eliminated a 7-year prison term with powerful mitigation and the suggestion of a tailored treatment plan. Another Client Advocate supported a client, who only spoke Spanish, through acquiring letters of support so powerful they brought his legal team to tears and resulted in a treatment court option in lieu of jail.

Often, people assume that treatment options are easy to access, but without a strong team, getting out of jail and into supportive care can be impossible. Another story demonstrates this:

To be admitted to treatment, our client needed a recent negative COVID-19 test. Upon release, the client was given an un-usable test result that was months old. The jail declined to do a same-day test because the client had already been released. When the client arrived for check-in at the treatment program with 30 minutes to spare, the facility was upset that he had not arrived sooner and threatened that his bed was no longer available. Paradoxically, the client's release terms required him to check-in with Pretrial Services in person daily, while the inpatient program mandated he not leave its premises.

Fortunately, his Client Advocate was committed to helping him get into treatment, regardless of obstacles and:

- Insisted the jail complete an additional COVID-19 test for him.
- Rushed this client to treatment in the nick of time & persuaded the facility to honor their promise of the bed.
- Negotiated to change the terms of release so that the client wasn't saddled with two opposing requirements.
- Enrolled him in health insurance and helped him obtain medical treatment that he couldn't access in jail. He also helped restore the client's driver's license so that he had identification to register for a GED class.

Great policy doesn't reach the people on the ground without a strong team to ensure each person gets the best options available. And that same kind of strong team can prevent the worst policy harms from destroying lives. Our goal is systemic, but it is essential to not lose sight of the true intent of system change: meaningful solutions for real people, every day, on the ground.

5. PFJ's goal is to infuse dignity and connection into an otherwise traumatic and dehumanizing experience of legal system contact. One client in the Yolo practice, Jason M., described how his Advocate, Eliana, had changed his circumstances—and the difference it made to have help coming from his own team instead of a carceral agency:

When I normally get out, me and my mom basically are on our own to try to figure out how to do social security, food stamps, general assistance. [Eliana got] anything that I needed, really. Health, health insurance, medication, even getting clothes and whatnot, and steering me through all the paperwork that would've took me months, she had it done in a day. ...And it's such a difference to where all these things aren't weighing on me no more. It's a fresh start. And then you got this team of people behind you, so you don't want to let them down either. ...When you're working with [parole], it seems like you're not able to speak up about what you want, what you need. You're just hoping they don't throw you in jail, you

know? But when you're dealing with somebody who's not in a power position above you, but instead is coaxing you along and helping you, it takes your mind and puts it in a positive area, rather than being in your negative, "everything's against me, I don't know what's going on, I'm lost." It takes it and switches it to where, yeah, now I'm on an even playing field, and I feel confident because I trust this person.

6. Key Facts and Stats:

- a. PFJ started in 2 cities in 2018 and **will be in about 20 locations by July 2022.**
 - b. **PFJ has connected over 4,300 people to social services and eliminated an estimated 200+ years in jail.**
 - c. When you offer people help in an easy-to-access, client-led format, you get **better engagement**: fewer than 8% of clients decline to work with an Advocate.
 - d. PFJ **works with people deeply**: on average clients get 3+ services apiece, ranging across housing, employment, medical and mental health treatment, benefits access, educational advocacy, and family unity. Some get as many as 12 services.
 - e. This **changes how defenders practice**: 95% of defenders surveyed by PFJ feel better able to assist clients with non-criminal matters and 77% have had a case dropped, dismissed or resolved without conviction due to Advocate work.
 - f. PFJ has **robust success**, achieving service goals (connections to housing, benefits access, etc) about 75% of the time.
7. PFJ is performing powerful direct services, but achieving **system change**: after growing tenfold since 2018, PFJ's program has begun convincing governments to invest in expanding public defense. Since just 2021, PFJ has partnered with defenders to secure about \$3.7 million in government revenue, creating new wraparound service hubs with full governmental buy-in and support.
8. This creates a **re-definition of public defense**, where defenders are seen as more than a legal resource—they become a community service hub, empowered to defend whole people instead of just legal cases.
9. **The result is a world in which every person gets the kind of collaborative, interdisciplinary service team that ensures race and wealth no longer determine legal outcomes, and that every person has a chance to walk away with their life—and future—intact.**