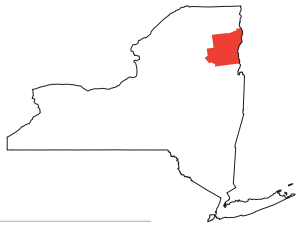
Exploring Jail Incarceration Trends in

Essex County



In April 2019, New York State passed historic bail reforms that went into effect in January 2020. One major policy goal of the reforms was to limit the use of pretrial detention for people unable to pay money bail. The statewide jail population decreased more than 18 percent in the three months leading to implementation, and hit its lowest point at 11,089 in July 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.[1] Since that time, statewide jail population numbers have gradually increased, reaching beyond pre-pandemic levels.[1]

Little research has been conducted to examine the changes in pretrial incarceration that have occurred since the reforms. This fact sheet illustrates these changes on a county level using jail administrative data obtained through Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests.

Jail incarceration at a glance

On an average day in May 2022, 67 people were incarcerated in Essex County (fig 2). The Essex County jail population decreased by 13 percent from May 2019 to May 2022.

FIGURE 1

Jail incarceration rate in Essex vs. non-NYC counties

Rate calculated per 100,000 residents

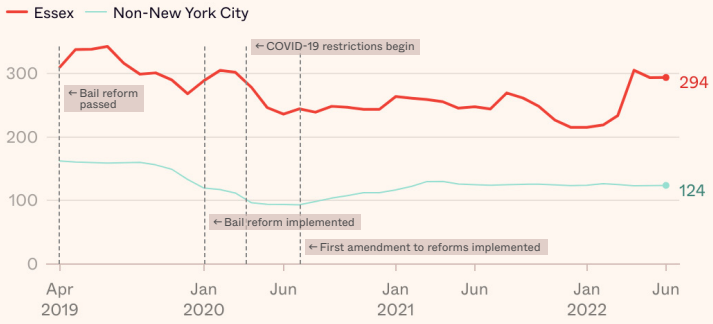


FIGURE 2

Essex jail monthly snapshot

May 2019	May 2022	
77	67	Average daily population
29%	21%	Percent pretrial
20%	21%	Percent Black
15%	17%	Percent female
49	27	Total admissions
42	49	Median length of stay

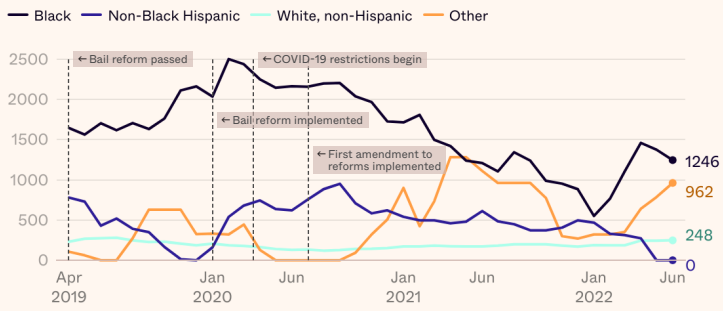
Changes in the racial makeup of the jail population in Essex County

Racial disparities in Essex County jail population numbers have decreased since bail reform. In the second quarter of 2019, Black people made up 4 percent of the Essex County population, but an average of 23 percent of the jail population. In the second quarter of 2022, an average of 21 percent of the jail population was Black. That quarter, incarceration rates for Black people in Essex were over 6 times those of non-Hispanic white people.

FIGURE 3

Incarceration rate by race

Rate calculated per 100,000 residents in Essex County



Vera INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

Changes in the charge profile of jail incarceration in Essex County

The goal of the 2020 bail reform was, in part, to reduce the number of people held in jail pretrial. This effort largely has been successful for low-level offenses (fig 5). The number of people admitted to jail for drug, property, and vehicular crimes in Essex County fell between 2019 and 2021[2] (fig 4). Median length of stays across all charges in Essex County jail rose from 16 to 37 days between the second quarters of 2019 and 2022 (fig 6).

FIGURE 4

Annual jail admissions by charge type [3,5]

Essex County

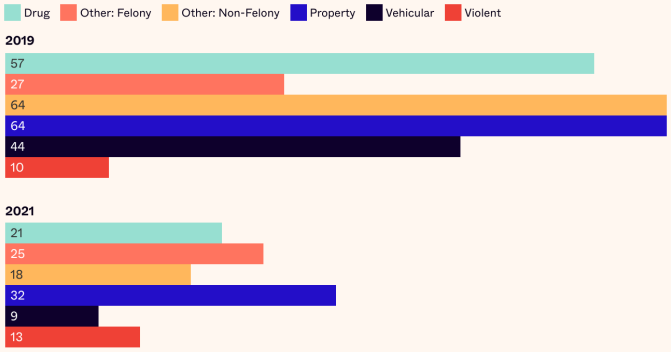


FIGURE 5

Average share of Essex jail population by charge severity [3]

Q2 2019	Q2 2022	
15% (4)	**18%** (5)	Violent felonies
41% (11)	**36%** (10)	Nonviolent felonies
44% (12)	**46%** (13)	Misdemeanors

FIGURE 6

Median days spent in jail in Essex County by charge severity [3]

Q2 2019	Q2 2022	
12 days	**78 days**	Violent felonies
28 days	**24 days**	Nonviolent felonies
12 days	**48 days**	Misdemeanors

Changes in the use of bail in Essex County

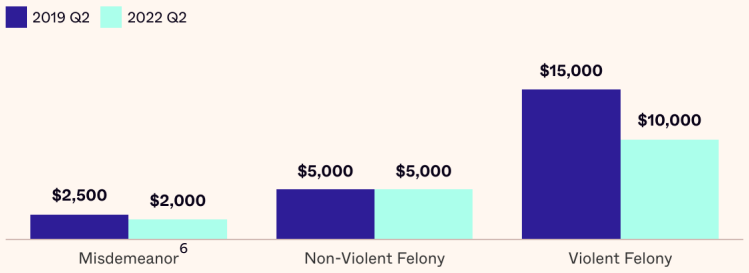
Bail reform eliminated the use of cash bail for most misdemeanors in New York, but bail is still regularly set at the discretion of judges for a wide range of charges. Despite the reduction in the use of bail, racial disparities remain in bail setting throughout New York State.[4]

The median cash bail[4] set for people across all charges held in Essex County jail in the second quarter of 2022 was $1,500, down from $5,000 in 2019 (fig 7).

FIGURE 7

Median cash bail set for incarcerated people by charge severity

Essex County



Data sources

New York Division of Criminal Justice Services and Office of Court Administration data, available at https://ww2.nycourts.gov/pretrial-release-data-33136. Allegany jail data obtained from FOIL request and analyzed by Vera researchers.

© 2023 Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.

Endnotes

1 Jaeok Kim and Christopher Gernon, *New York State Jail Population Brief, January 2019–June 2021* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2023), https://perma.cc/69AD-VZ56.

2 See methodology document for details on how charge categorizations were defined. https://www.vera.org/inline-downloads/exploring-jail-incarceration-trends/County-Factsheet-Methods.pdf

3 Calculated excluding "Other" and "Unknown" charge severities, which include people whose charge information is missing, or who are detained on probation or parole violations, immigration or federal charges, or civil warrants.

4 https://datacollaborativeforjustice.org/work/bail-reform/two-years-in-2020-bail-reforms-in-action-in-new-york-state/

5 2022 is excluded from fig.4 due to incomplete charge detail information for this year.

6 After bail reform, few misdemeanors remain bail eligible. In certain counties, no one had bail set or was detained on bail for misdemeanor charges.