



MacArthur Foundation Safety and Justice Challenge Criminal Justice Community Advisory Committee *Annual Report 2020-2021*

Introduction

Since 2015, Philadelphia has been engaged in ongoing criminal justice reform efforts that aim to advance safety and racial equity while reducing the size of the local jail population. The cornerstone of Philadelphia's community engagement work through the reform effort has been the creation of the Criminal Justice Community Advisory Committee (CAC), announced in October 2019 and established in January 2020. While plans for the first year of the CAC were fundamentally altered by COVID-19, the CAC remained resilient. Despite these obstacles, CAC members were able to promote change within the Philadelphia criminal justice system by hosting virtual meetings with various city agencies, providing formal recommendations to the criminal justice partners, and engaging in important policy conversations regarding racial equity and criminal justice reform. This annual report outlines (1) the background, purpose, and structure of the CAC, (2) impact of the CAC and accomplishments from the past year, (3) obstacles faced by the CAC and, (4) future goals and recommendations.

A. Background, Purpose, and Structure of the CAC

Purpose. The Criminal Justice Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was established by the City of Philadelphia, Managing Director's Office of Criminal Justice in collaboration with the local Criminal Justice Partner Agencies. The role of the Community Advisory Committee is to support and contribute to the implementation of the MacArthur Foundation Safety and Justice Challenge reform plan, which aims to reduce the size of the local jail population by 58% over seven years and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system. The members will hold the criminal justice partners accountable for the commitments they have made to the collaborative and data-driven reform effort.

Mission. The Community Advisory Committee will 1) help the criminal justice partner agencies better understand what is important to those directly impacted by the criminal justice system, 2) provide advice to the criminal justice partners on concrete ways to further the criminal justice reform effort, 3) create pathways for the inclusion of knowledge and experience of community members of varying perspectives in the reform work, and 4) promote greater transparency and accountability of the criminal justice partner agencies with the broader community as it relates to criminal justice reform.

Selection Process and Member List. Inaugural members of the CAC were selected based on an open application process, followed by interviews with representatives of the criminal justice partners who serve as members of the MacArthur Safety and Justice Challenge Community Engagement Workgroup.

The process of selecting community members was designed to ensure that the final body includes individuals with lived experience with the justice system and that it is diverse across race, ethnicity, gender, and geographical location in Philadelphia. Many of the CAC members are deeply involved with advocacy and service provision in the community. Approaching the one-year mark, the CAC has already begun conversations about how to include additional perspectives and identities. Going forward, the selection process for new members will include participation by both criminal justice partner representatives and current CAC members.

The CAC is composed of a minimum of twelve (12) and a maximum of twenty-seven (27) members. The members must be residents of the City of Philadelphia, over the age of 18, willing to commit the required number of hours, and have been directly impacted or have significant experience with the criminal justice system. Participation in the CAC is on a volunteer basis. For more information about the individuals who make up the CAC, read their biographies [here](#).

B. Onboarding & Orientation

Purpose and Current Process. For the first CAC onboarding in 2020, the City of Philadelphia, Managing Director's Office of Criminal Justice established an onboarding and orientation schedule with the goals of introducing the new CAC members to the work and structure of the Safety and Justice Challenge in Philadelphia, sharing an overview of the reform work to date, providing background on the various government partners that are part of the collaborative effort, and to establish working relationships between CAC members.

Orientation & Onboarding included the following components:

1. Initial Introductions (October 2019): A half day session that included overview of the Safety and Justice Challenge, introductions to the agency liaisons, a review of CAC policies, and a public announcement of the CAC.
2. Orientation (January 2020): A 2-day session that included presentations from each agency liaison on the role of their organization, presentations by each Workgroup on the role of their team in the reform effort, discussion among CAC members and government partners around priorities for the coming year, election of CAC Leadership, and selection of member workgroup preferences.
3. Onboarding (Spring/Summer 2020): Over the course of a few months, CAC members were more thoroughly onboarded. Members were installed on each of the Workgroups and meetings were held with each workgroup chair to do a specific orientation to the group's work. A planning session was held during a site visit with the Vera Institute of Justice to establish priorities among CAC members. Tours were scheduled to learn more

about the various partner organization's operations, however they were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future Onboarding Recommendations. While the Onboarding & Orientation process proved helpful in many respects, feedback from CAC members highlighted some key components that should be updated to ensure that members are fully prepared to assume their new responsibilities. The following are additions to the Onboarding & Orientation Process that will be implemented for future CAC members:

1. **Broad Overview of the Philadelphia Criminal Justice System:** To ensure that all CAC members can comfortably engage in conversations among themselves and City agencies, CAC members need an understanding of the various elements and operation of Philadelphia's criminal justice system.
2. **CAC Expectations and Operations:** CAC members will be provided with records and notes from previous CAC meetings to gain an understanding of what they can expect when they are in attendance. They will also get an overview of the reform infrastructures and the opportunities for engagement afforded to CAC members.
3. **Strategy and Training:** CAC members will gain the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively voice their concerns and opinions when meeting with agency liaisons.

C. CAC Structure

Officers. Leadership of the CAC is comprised of a Chair, a Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. These officers, along with a representative from the Office of Criminal Justice, shall serve as the CAC Executive Committee.

- **Chair.** The Chair is appointed by the CAC through a voting process. The Chair of the CAC presides at all public meetings of the CAC, is called upon from time-to-time to be the spokesperson for the CAC, ensures that the CAC complies with all requirements, and collaborates with the Executive Committee to set the agenda for all meetings.
- **Vice Chair.** The Vice Chair is appointed by the CAC through a voting process. In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair presides over meetings and ensures that the CAC complies with all requirements. The Vice Chair collaborates with the Executive Committee to set the agenda for all meetings.
- **Secretary.** The Secretary is appointed by the CAC through a voting process. The Secretary records the minutes of all regular meetings of the CAC, and shares those minutes with the CAC and the MacArthur Community Engagement Workgroup.
- **Treasurer.** The Treasurer is appointed by the CAC through a voting process. The treasurer manages the budget for the CAC and approves any expenditure through the Managing Director's Office through their fiscal agent, the Mayor's Fund for Philadelphia.



CAC Weekly Meetings. The Chair and Co-Chair are responsible for running meetings, setting the agendas, and ensuring effective communication of information between members. In response to the pandemic, the CAC's meetings were held virtually on a weekly basis. During these meetings, members:

- Provided updates from their various workgroups.
- Shared reminders of upcoming meetings and events.
- Scheduled time for CAC members to discuss issues in more depth.
- Developed recommendations.
- Strategized around stakeholder engagement.

Liaisons. Each of the City's eleven (11) criminal justice agencies appointed an agency liaison to the CAC. The Agency Liaisons serve as a resource to the CAC by providing information as requested, answering questions, and responding to recommendations on behalf of the agency they represent. The criminal justice partner agencies include: The City of Philadelphia Managing Director's Office (Office of Criminal Justice, Office of Reentry Partnerships), Philadelphia Police Department, Philadelphia Department of Prisons, Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbilities Services, District Attorney's Office, Defender Association of Philadelphia, and First Judicial District of Pennsylvania's Municipal Court, Court of Common Pleas (including the Adult Probation and Parole Department and Pretrial Services Department), and the Department of Research and Development.

Workgroup Participation. CAC holds seats on the MacArthur Safety and Justice Challenge Implementation Team, as well as each of the (8) Workgroups. These Workgroups include Pretrial, Case Processing, Violations of Probation, Racial and Ethnic Disparities, Mental Health, Data, Community Engagement, and Communications. CAC members are encouraged to participate in all workgroup meetings and activities, offering their feedback and perspective to the work of implementation.

CAC participation in SJC workgroup meetings has resulted in several positive outcomes. These include highlighting what parts of SJC are working well, where there is room for improvement, and the ability to push forward pertinent and timely policy conversations. Additionally, the CAC members bring lived experiences and broader community insights to the work, which is a new and deeply needed perspective. Incorporating and valuing the importance of this rich source of information from the agency perspective will be important for the SJC going forward.

While the inclusion of the CAC in these previously-established teams has been critical to the work, it has not been without challenges. Part of the difficulty may come from differing expectations of the role of the CAC across agency representatives and community members. Additionally, there has been some frustration around the sharing of information between agency partners and the CAC. Going forward, the SJC will work to set attainable expectations around information sharing that are reflective of the ongoing challenges.

Strategic Planning & New Structure. The CAC, along with a technical facilitator from Nexus Community Partners, hosted a strategic planning retreat in February 2021 to discuss the history of the CAC as well as the priority issues that members wanted to focus on. The most significant change coming out of the retreat was the creation of subcommittees. Moving forward, CAC members will be divided into subgroups, each with their own specific points of focus that have been identified as priority issues by the committee. Each subcommittee will have a Chair (and an alternate) responsible for organizing subcommittee meetings and reporting back to the larger group. The members of the subcommittee will be responsible for attending working group meetings and updating the larger group around emerging issues and needs. Subcommittee members will advise the CAC of actions or strategies which other CAC members can take part in to better advocate for those policies. Each committee will also hold an open meeting where they will be responsible for facilitating a conversation among stakeholders to discuss the issues that the subcommittee is working on. The chairs of each subcommittee as well as the CAC officers will make up the executive team of the CAC.

While each subcommittee will have their own sub-set of priority issues, they will all work to build strong relationships with criminal justice reform community organizations. In addition to working with agency liaisons, it is vital that the CAC actively engage with a broader group of community organizations on criminal justice reform policy changes in order to effectively advocate for the communities most impacted. These organizations are on the front-lines of this work and are an important resource for the CAC in pushing forward criminal justice reform policies.

The Committee Subgroups will work on the following priority issues:

- **Subcommittee 1**
 - Early Bail Review (EBR)
 - Bail Reform
 - Certifications of youth as adults
 - Probation Violations
- **Subcommittee 2**
 - Co-Responder/Alternative Responder Teams (ART)
 - 911 Call-Taker Script
 - Police Assisted Diversion Program (PAD) and Violence Prevention Programs
 - Resources for Returning Citizens
- **Subcommittee 3**
 - Jail conditions
 - Covid Releases among jail population
 - Other COVID policies
 - Vaccine Distribution
- **Subcommittee 4**
 - CAC Onboarding
 - Building relationship with community groups
 - Townhalls and Trainings

D. CAC Activities

Town Halls. Over the past year, the CAC hosted virtual Town Halls to engage with a broader range of community members. The first Town Hall was focused on the criminal justice system's response to the pandemic. The CAC hosted two Town Halls in September 2020 around the theme of "Reimagining Community Safety," which featured panels of community leaders and agency liaisons.

- [CAC town hall: June 23, 2020](#)
 - **Reimagining Community Safety: Part 1-** Members of the CAC spoke with community leaders and experts on how to create community safety and reduce the disproportionate impacts of the criminal justice system.
- [CAC town hall: September 17, 2020](#)
 - **Reimagining Community Safety: Part 2-** The CAC continued the conversations on advancing community safety with Government Stakeholders and agency leaders.
- [CAC town hall: October 28, 2020](#)
 - **Responses to COVID-19-** The CAC held a conversation with leaders across the criminal justice system on their agency's policies and practices in response to the pandemic.

Recommendations. In addition to ongoing participation in the reform effort as described above, the CAC issues written recommendations to the MacArthur Implementation Team, Workgroups, or to a criminal justice partner agency. This past year, the CAC has made the following [formal recommendations](#):

1. **COVID-19 Response to Jail Population: March 20, 2020**
 - This recommendation was in response to the City's delayed response to the pandemic as it relates to the growing jail population. Among the many recommendations the CAC made to reduce the spread of COVID-19 among the jail populations included releasing elderly and at-risk individuals who are incarcerated, eliminating the use of money bail to detain individuals, collaborating with medical professionals to ensure safe jail conditions, and expanding overall release options. After issuing these recommendations, the CAC hosted follow-up conversations and a town hall on the topic.
2. **Virtual Hearings: July 15, 2020**
 - This recommendation was an effort to ensure transparency and inclusion of community voices within meetings pertaining to reopening the courts during the pandemic. The committee was alerted to pertinent meetings which would impact the jail population and requested to join the working group to offer a community perspective. Ultimately the CAC was not invited to those conversations.

3. **Reappointment of Arraignment Court Magistrates (ACMs): Feb 12, 2021**

- The recommendation was in response to the notice of reappointment of ACMs in January 2021. The CAC urged the Selection Panel to consider past harmful actions of the ACMs, such as consistently imposing cash bail in cursory hearings without inquiring about ability to pay.

Public Meetings. The CAC, in partnership with the Office of Criminal Justice, hosted three public meetings with representatives from the government partner agencies.

1. **Goal Setting- January, 2020.** During the orientation period, a planning session was held to establish the goals of the CAC for the coming year, and for members to share their perspectives with representatives from the government partner organizations. This served as an initial introduction and relationship building session for the collaborative.
2. **Sustainability Planning- February, 2020.** During their Site Visit with Philadelphia, the Vera Institute of Justice facilitated a planning conversation with the CAC members to set shared priorities. This session helped identify areas of common interest and further solidify the areas of focus for the CAC. It also focused on how the CAC's work will ensure sustainability for criminal justice reform in Philadelphia going forward.
3. **Liaisons Meeting - March 2021.** After a period of unprecedented emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic for both agency representatives and CAC members, the collaborative came back together to discuss what had worked well over the last year and what policies needed modification. The group workshopped changes to CAC operations that would improve functionality and relationships going forward. These changes will be implemented as new CAC members are installed.

Microgrants. The Criminal Justice Microgrant Fund provides resources to community-based organizations doing innovative work on criminal justice reform. This initiative is one of the strategies funded by the Safety and Justice Challenge, and is overseen by the Managing and Director's Office of Criminal Justice. The CAC has been integral at every stage of this initiative, including the development and grantee selection processes.

The Fund aims to support projects that:

- Develop new and creative approaches to criminal justice reform in Philadelphia.
- Engage communities disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system.
- Provide services to individuals who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system.
- Are BIPOC-led organizations seeking general operating support.



Awardees. The Criminal Justice Microgrant Fund awarded grants to 20 community-based organizations in September 2021, awarding a total of \$200,000 in funding. This link provides more information on the first group of [grant recipients](#). An additional round of funding will be released in the Spring of 2022, awarded \$200,000 in grants in [summer 2021](#). A second round of grants is expected for winter 2021-2022. The fund will award grants in the following categories:

- *Sustainability grants* to support existing initiatives.
- *Innovation grants* to support new projects and unique approaches.
- *General operating grants* to support operations of BIPOC-led organizations.

Application review process. All applications were reviewed by the Criminal Justice Grantmaking Committee using a standardized process. The Grantmaking Committee includes members of the Community Advisory Committee and partners from local government.

E. Impact & Accomplishments

The CAC has had a tremendous impact on criminal justice reform in Philadelphia and on the implementation of the Safety and Justice Challenge reform plan. Community members who are either directly impacted or have significant experience with the criminal justice system have devoted their time and expertise to making sure that promises made to community members are delivered: To decrease incarceration rates, to reduce the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on Black and Brown people, and to increase community safety.

Creating space for CAC members to share their lived experiences and perspectives has been critical to the strategizing and implementation of criminal justice reform efforts in Philadelphia. CAC members shine a light on the real lived experiences of people who are in jail or experiencing the harm of the criminal justice system. Allowing CAC members access to criminal justice agencies provides them the opportunity to elevate concerns from various perspectives and challenge the status quo. They are able to bring questions and concerns directly to decision-makers through various forums, such as informal suggestions or formal recommendations to workgroups or agency liaisons. Committee members are a necessary component in creating public dialogue pertaining to how the criminal justice system needs to change in order to achieve community safety and racial equity goals.

F. Challenges

- **COVID-19 Pandemic:** Limitations on in-person activities made it difficult to create a strong community bond among CAC members and with outside agencies. Furthermore, overwhelmed with living through the pandemic, CAC members had difficulty staying focused and motivated on committee goals.
- **Ineffective Structure:** The past year highlighted the unrealistic and unbalanced division of labor among CAC members. Inaccurate time commitment estimations caused members to lose motivation throughout the year, which was further exacerbated by the pandemic. Additionally, too much responsibility was put in the hands of just a few members, which impacted member motivation and delayed major decisions.
- **Institutional Challenges:** The CAC has faced obstacles in engaging with various city agencies over the past year, in particular due to the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Communication challenges have left committee members uncertain as to whether their recommendations have been considered or implemented. Moving forward, it is vital that all criminal justice partners listen to and respect the opinions, recommendations, and lived experiences of CAC members. The CAC is committed to bridging the gap between community members and agency liaisons and creating a respectful and effective working relationship.
- **Reimagining Community Safety:** The CAC seeks to strike a balance between promoting community safety while also addressing the problematic impacts of mass incarceration. Currently, the City's approach to community safety focuses highly on arrests and incarceration, which has not proven to decrease violence in any measurable way. Therefore, members of the CAC hope to work with the police department and other justice partners to reimagine community safety in a way that protects communities from violence without depending on a criminal justice system that disproportionately impacts communities of color.

F. Gratitude

Despite the difficulties in the first year, the CAC is proud of the work we have accomplished, and are excited for more to come. We are grateful to all of the individual CAC members for giving of their time and passion, above and beyond during such a tumultuous time. We appreciate the criminal justice partners for collaborating with us and having difficult conversations when they were needed to push the reform work forward. Thank you to the MacArthur Foundation, Vera Institute of Justice, and Nexus Community Partners for their support of our work. Finally, and most importantly, words cannot express our gratitude we have for our colleagues, collaborators, and friends in neighborhoods across the City who have been impacted by mass incarceration and who have lifted us up to be able to advocate for the changes we know need to happen in our City. We are in this with you.



Community Advisory Committee- Original Members:

Devren Washington- <i>Chair</i>	Brittney Keith
Brittany Weston- <i>Vice Chair</i>	Aja King
Reverend Dr. Michelle Anne Simmons- <i>Treasurer</i>	Sam Lufi
Marcus Hall- <i>Secretary</i>	Eric Marsh
Anthony Dickerson	Malik Neal
Connie Grier	Margaret E. Robertson
Eileen Horgan	Lourdes Rivera
Anthony Johnson	Abdur Scott
Aundria Johnson	Samuel White
	Katerine Zuk

For more information on the Community Advisory Committee, visit their website [here](#).