

There is wonderful work being done by an ever-growing coalition of professionals who refuse to accept a status quo that is anything less than the best we can do for our communities. For many criminal justice professionals and advocates looking to reform their bail systems, the District of Columbia continues to be the model of fair and effective pre-trial decision-making and programming.

*Timothy J. Murray,
Former Executive Director
Pretrial Justice Institute*

Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia

Clifford T. Keenan, Director

633 Indiana Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

202-220-5500
www.PretrialServices.gov

May 2016



The Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia

A Leader in the Justice Field

Fifty Years of Service

Throughout nearly 50 years of service to the Nation's Capital, the Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia has earned a national reputation as a leader in the justice field.

PSA's mission is to promote pretrial justice and enhance community safety. Our goals are to *promote public safety* by minimizing rearrests among pretrial defendants released into the community, *enhance court appearance rates* by reducing the risk of failures to appear for scheduled court appearances, and *encourage defendant accountability* by maximizing the number of pretrial defendants who remain compliant with court-ordered conditions. *PSA employs proven, evidence-based practices to help judicial officers in the city's local and Federal courts make appropriate and effective bail decisions.* The result for the D.C. community is smarter use of jail resources, enhanced public safety, and a fairer and more effective system of release and detention.

Building a Strong Foundation

The District operates an “in or out” court system with open and transparent decisions about release or detention. Our bail statute is that system's foundation. **It emphasizes least restrictive release for eligible defendants, statutory-based detention for those who**

would pose an unacceptable risk to the community, and an absolute prohibition on money-based detention. The statute allows judges to detain defendants in a way that not only protects public safety, but safeguards due process.

Most significantly, the District's bail law encourages strong pretrial outcomes without the use of money bonds. ***Money bonds that detain people are illegal in Washington, DC, as they should be everywhere.***

Effective Risk Assessment, Supervision and Treatment

PSA has used some form of risk assessment since its inception in 1967—the longest continuous use of a risk instrument in the pretrial field. PSA's current risk assessment is the result of independent research to identify factors that are predictive of failure to appear for a scheduled court appearance and rearrest on a new offense during pretrial supervision. ***This helps ensure that defendants are matched to appropriate and effective levels of supervision when release is appropriate, or detained when that is consistent with public safety.***

PSA provides a continuum of supervision for defendants released into the community pending trial, based on each individual's assessed level of risk. PSA promotes defendant accountability to court-ordered conditions, court appearance and public safety by employing supervision levels consistent

with a defendant's identified risk level, and promotes swift and effective consequences for pretrial misconduct.

Illicit drug use and mental health issues contribute significantly to public safety concerns and flight risk. When appropriate, PSA integrates substance dependence treatment and mental health services into supervision. This includes referrals to community-based treatment providers and PSA's own specialized treatment and supervision programs. ***The District of Columbia Superior Court's nationally-recognized Drug Court and Mental Health Community Court are two examples of how PSA and the court have committed to providing help and support (in lieu of punishment)*** for defendants with substance use disorders and/or mental health issues, and thus breaking the cycle of drug use and crime.

Results

Effective practices lead to positive results. ***PSA is proud to have helped its local courts secure non-financial release for over 85% of pretrial defendants, a much higher percentage of such releases than in any other court system nationwide.*** About 88% of all released defendants return to court as required; also, about 89% of released defendants are not again arrested prior to trial, and of those who are, less than 1% are alleged to have committed a violent crime.