

# Yamhill County

## Pretrial Justice County Profile

March 2014



Significant pretrial improvements underway in Yamhill County produced a nine percent decrease in the pretrial jail population; the largest single-year decrease in recent years. This rural Oregon County of 100,255 residents, located in the heart of the Willamette valley wine-producing region, has steadily increased its application of evidence-based decision making in the pretrial phase of its justice system in order to improve public safety, increase the effective use of public funds and reduce the unintended consequences associated with the unnecessary use of jail.

Whereas many counties undertake pretrial improvements in response to jail crowding, Yamhill County's jail operates below capacity, using around 170 out of 250 beds per day. Instead, their pretrial improvements began with county and state officials' examination of national data that indicated great harm may be done to defendants who are unnecessarily detained before trial. Detained defendants can suffer loss of employment and housing, become separated from loved ones, experience family disruption, have higher odds of recidivism and receive harsher sentences than similarly situated defendants who are released from jail before a trial. Recent research by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation substantiates these ill-effects, as well as the positive impacts of using community supervision, jail alternatives and risk assessment.

To address the problem of unnecessary detention, Yamhill County implemented a validated risk as-

essment instrument known as the Oregon Public Safety Checklist (PSC) to ensure that defendants are released from jail based on measurable, research-based factors and that the reliance on money bond to make release decisions is reduced.

Although the Yamhill County's pretrial justice improvements are in the early stages, successes include:

*"As an elected official, I have an obligation to ensure that the county is spending every dollar as judiciously and effectively as possible. Yamhill County's Pretrial Justice Program is one way I can fulfill that obligation."*

--Mary P. Stern,  
Yamhill County Commissioner

1. The PSC supports judicial decision making and public safety, helping to identify high risk defendants who might otherwise be released after paying a money bond.
2. Unnecessary days in jail are reduced by authorizing jail staff to release low risk offenders after booking and risk assessment.
3. Smaller jail populations are leading to improved conditions of confinement.
4. Local accountability in the criminal justice system decreases the likelihood of further harming people who are presumed innocent.
5. While Oregon statute goes farther than many other states to support evidence-based pretrial decisions by outlawing for-profit bonding, efforts are underway to promote legislative action that will emphasize evidenced-based release decisions, reduce the use of money bond and strengthen pretrial justice throughout Oregon.

## PRETRIAL JUSTICE in Yamhill County

Leadership Council	In 2010, a cross-agency criminal justice policy team was created. Members include the Presiding Circuit Court Judge, a County Commissioner, the District Attorney, the Sheriff, a Defense Attorney, community members, the Community Corrections Director and Supervisor, the Health and Human Services Director, an Information Systems Manager and representatives from victim services.
EBDM	The policy team examined the pretrial phase of the criminal justice system using the framework of Evidence-Based Decision Making (EBDM) which seeks to create an evidence-based, cost-effective system that protects the community and ensures justice.
Measuring Progress	After thorough analyses of the jail population, the leadership council is poised to implement a series of policy improvements that are based upon risk to the community.
Pretrial Risk Assessment	Yamhill County implemented a validated risk assessment instrument, the PSC, to ensure that defendants are released from jail based on measurable, research-based factors and to reduce reliance on money bond.
Pretrial Release	Approximately 45% of the jail population consists of pretrial defendants.
Pretrial Supervision	A quick and easy to use, computer-generated, validated risk assessment score, called the Oregon Public Safety Checklist (PSC), allows the pretrial services officer and the jail staff to determine who has the lowest, middle and highest risk of pretrial failure (i.e., a new arrest, a technical violation, or a failure to appear for court) while on pretrial release status.
Citation Release	About 26% of defendants are cited to appear and released. Ninety-three percent of the low-risk defendants who are cited and released appear for court and remain arrest free.
Bail Guidelines	Twenty percent of defendants who are released before trial are given a bail amount or security release. Twenty-six percent are given a citation and released. Forty-three percent are released with conditions, and eight percent are released on their own recognizance.

*“Implementing evidence-based pretrial practices, including the use of a validated pretrial risk assessment instrument, is a critical step in improving pretrial justice in Yamhill County and the State of Oregon.”*

--John L. Collins, Presiding Judge Yamhill County

### Helpful Resources

National Association of Counties -- [www.naco.org/pretrial](http://www.naco.org/pretrial)

Pretrial Justice Institute -- [www.pretrial.org](http://www.pretrial.org)

National Institute of Corrections -- [www.nicic.gov](http://www.nicic.gov)

Yamhill County -- [courts.oregon.gov/Yamhill/criminal.page](http://courts.oregon.gov/Yamhill/criminal.page)

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