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Reform Data Systems for Responsible Pretrial Risk Assessment

Modernizing pretrial data systems to combat mass incarceration in California

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California counties have limited technical resources for improving pretrial data systems, yet they increasingly rely on algorithmic risk assessment tools to inform pretrial release decisions. At stake is the liberty of individuals not yet convicted of crimes, and the reduction of the massive pretrial jail population, a main driver of mass incarceration.

Algorithmic risk assessment tools can speed pretrial release decisions, but to be used responsibly, they should be accompanied by consistent data collection, access, and analysis practices. This project recommends that the Judicial Council of California invest in pretrial data needs by creating customizable tools for use across under-resourced counties, leading to more accurate, speedy, transparent and just risk assessment.

THE PROBLEM

A growing body of research from criminal justice reform advocates and statistics researchers calls for improved assessment of the effectiveness of pretrial risk assessment tools, and transparency in the data feeding their recommendations. A few California counties have begun to take steps towards responsible data practices. Others are limited by a lack of resources and technical expertise but they continue to use risk assessment tools without the ability to properly analyze outcomes and validate the tools.

> *At stake is the liberty of individuals not yet convicted of crimes, and the reduction of the massive pretrial jail population, a primary driver of mass incarceration.*

THE SOLUTION

This project recommends that the Judicial Council of California develop pretrial data tools that scale for use across resource-constrained counties in order to encourage a more transparent, just, and efficient pretrial risk assessment systems. The project offers steps to execute this recommendation quickly and cost-effectively by contracting with software shops and utilizing open source software instead of traditional enterprise procurement. Leveraging agile, iterative development practices, the project recommends the Judicial Council build secure and customizable data analysis tools that can integrate with existing legacy data systems across the state. Such an effort will produce the modern analytics, dashboards, and reporting necessary for data-driven pretrial reform and responsible risk assessment.