RESEARCH BRIEF

Criminal-Legal System Involvement Among Permanent Supportive Housing Residents

June 2026

King County DCHS Department of Community and Human Services

Introduction

Homelessness and the criminal-legal system are deeply intertwined. Living outside increases the likelihood of interaction with law enforcement because of citations or arrests for low-level offenses like loitering or sleeping in parks. These interactions, and subsequent entanglement with the criminal-legal system, in turn contribute to homelessness by leading to housing and job discrimination.[1] Permanent supportive housing (PSH) and Housing First are proven methods of interrupting the homelessness-jail cycle.[2, 3, 4]

DATA AND METHODS

Jail bookings involve the administrative process of collecting and entering information about the individual into the jail system and subsequently detaining that person in a jail facility. Almost all arrests lead to at least some time in jail. Some jail bookings are the result of past criminal-legal involvement, such as bench warrants and failures to appear in court. Thus, not all jail bookings reflect a new criminal activity.

DCHS receives booking data from five municipal jails located within King County and two County jails , representing nearly all jail bookings throughout the county. These data sources do not contain information about state and federal prisons.

These records are then matched to Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) records using names and dates of birth among those who consent to share their information via HMIS. Among the 5,371 residents of adult-serving PSH programs in Seattle-King County between 1/1/2021 and 12/31/2025, 90 percent shared their identifying information in HMIS.

Key Findings

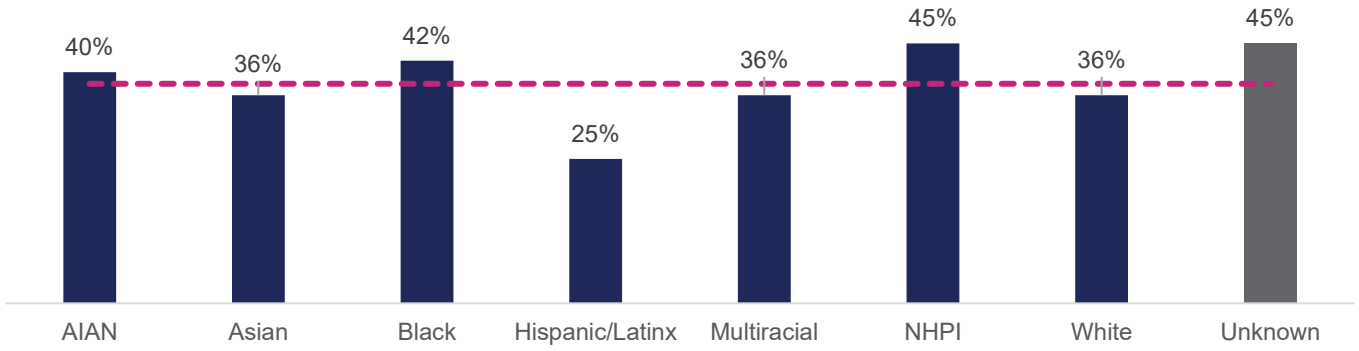
PREVIOUS CRIMINAL-LEGAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

Overall, 38% of residents had a jail booking at some point in the five years prior to their enrollment in a PSH program. Rates did vary by race, in many cases reflecting the known racial disparities within the criminal-legal system.[5] Black, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (NHPI), and American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous (AIAN) residents were more likely to have a history of jail bookings, while Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, and White residents were less likely.

[1] Five Charts That Explain the Homelessness-Jail Cycle – and How to Break It. Urban Institute, September 2020.
[2] Breaking the Homelessness-Jail Cycle with Housing First. Urban Institute, July 2021.
[3] Exposure to project-based Housing First is associated with reduced jail time and bookings. Seema L. Clifasefi, Daniel K. Malone, Susan E. Collins. International Journal of Drug Policy, Volume 24, Issue 4, 2013.
[4] Frequent Users Service Enhancement 'FUSE' Initiative, New York City FUSE II Evaluation Report. Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2013.
[5] Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Justice System. National Conference of State Legislatures. May 2022.

Residents with a Jail Booking in the Five Years Prior to Enrolling in PSH, by Race

Dotted line represents overall rate of 38% with a prior booking.



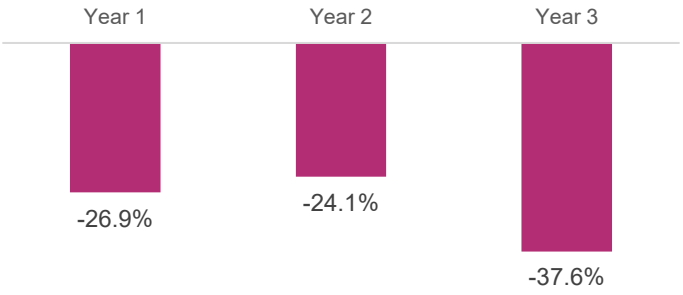
CHANGES IN CRIMINAL-LEGAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

When compared to the number of jail bookings in the year prior to enrollment in PSH, there is a significant decrease in the number of jail bookings among residents in subsequent years. Furthermore, this drop isn't just temporary — it generally continues and even improves over the three years tracked.

Differences emerge as well when comparing outcomes by race. More pronounced decreases are observed among AIAN and White residents than among multiracial and Black residents, though jail bookings decreased across the board.

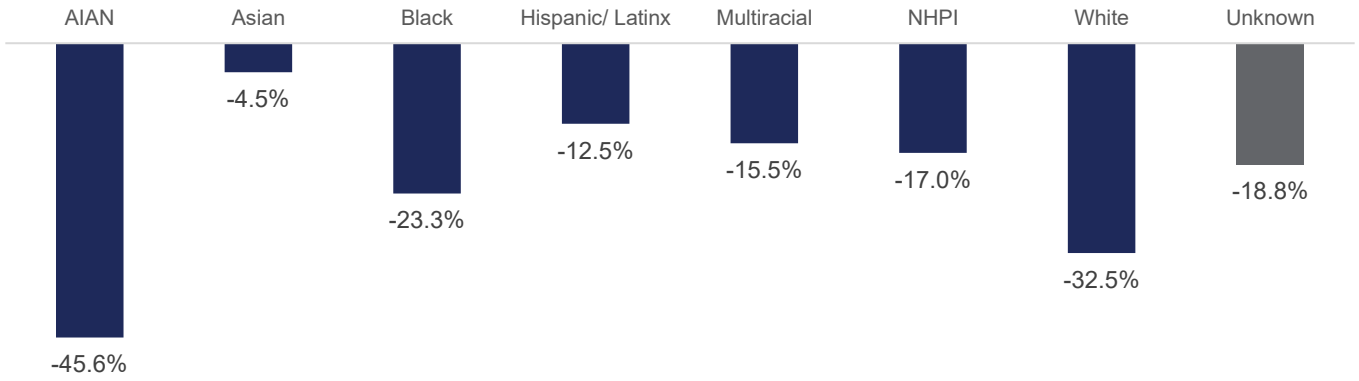
Change in Total Jail Bookings among PSH Residents

Adult-serving PSH programs, 2021-2025



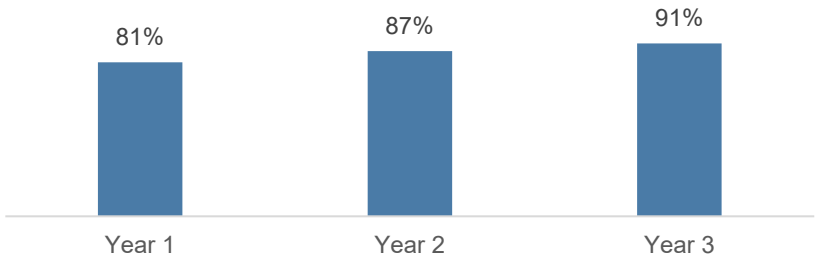
Change in Total Jail Bookings by Race/Ethnicity, Year 1

Adult-serving PSH programs, 2021-2025



Percent of Recent Booking Residents with a Reduction in Jail Bookings

Residents with 1+ jail booking in the year prior to their enrollment in PSH, 2021-2025



An overwhelming majority (81%) of individuals who had a jail-booking in the year prior to their enrollment in PSH ('Recent Booking Residents') saw a personal reduction in the number of bookings after enrollment into the program, and this number continues to increase over time. This may indicate increasing stability associated with longer time spent housed.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this analysis. In some cases, jail bookings may have declined because a person moved out of County/State, passed away, or was institutionalized (State prison, State hospital, etc.). We have excluded individuals who passed away while residing in PSH from this analysis, but a more targeted analysis could be done only on those individuals who remain enrolled in the program. Still, we will not know if a person is incarcerated outside of King County, e.g., Pierce County jail. However, past sensitivity analyses done by the King County Department of Community & Human Services' Performance Measurement & Evaluation teams have revealed little difference in the overall outcomes when we have controlled for death, movement out of County, and imprisonment.

Appendix: Data Table with Statistical Significance

COHORT	TIME PERIOD	CHANGE IN BOOKINGS	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE[6]
All residents	Year 1	-26.8%	p = 0.000 ***
	Year 2	-24.1%	p = 0.000 ***
	Year 3	-37.6%	p = 0.000 ***
AIAN residents	Year 1	-45.6%	p = 0.001 ***
Asian residents	Year 1	-4.5%	p = 0.908
Black residents	Year 1	-23.3%	p = 0.013 **
Hispanic residents	Year 1	-12.5%	p = 0.672
Multiracial residents	Year 1	-15.5%	p = 0.276
NHPI residents	Year 1	-17.0%	p = 0.533
White residents	Year 1	-32.5%	p = 0.000 ***
Unknown residents	Year 1	-18.8%	p = 0.616

[6] Statistical significance is a measure of how likely it is for a result to have occurred by random chance, providing confidence that the observed effect is real. A smaller p-value and more stars indicate a higher likelihood that there was a true decrease in the number of jail bookings compared to the pre-PSH time period. It is influenced by the number of observations and the size of the effect.

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