



Louisiana Justice Coalition
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SHREVEPORT – The Louisiana Justice Coalition (LJC) releases its report, “Slipping Through the Cracks: A Profile of Incarcerated Adults at Caddo Correctional Center”. This report is part of the Caddo Community Defense Project, a collaboration between LJC and the Office of the Public Defender.

“Slipping Through the Cracks” is a study of 100 pre-trial indigent defendants in the Caddo Correctional Center (CCC) conducted by LJC between March 12-May 15, 2008. The study was designed to create a profile of clients in Caddo Parish based on their race, gender, income, age and criminal history; assess the needs of the CCC prison population based on clients’ self-reported history of learning disabilities, mental illness, addiction, homelessness, incarceration, family life and employment; and record the scope and diversity of treatment options and alternatives to incarceration that clients request.

The Caddo Community Defense Project provides social worker staff to the Office of the Public Defender to create additional resources and services for select clients. An individual’s first contact with the criminal justice system offers a public defender a rare moment in which to assess many of that individual’s most salient needs, including those that lie outside of the immediate realm of the legal system. The Caddo Community Defense Project seeks to replace the inevitability of incarceration with effective alternatives achieved through a strong collaboration between community service providers and the public defender office. The presence of social workers in the public defender office – integrated as part of the defense team – can address the social service needs of select clients so that they do not cycle back and forth through the criminal justice system. By aggressively addressing unmet social service needs, the community defense model increases public safety and decreases criminal justice costs while supporting individuals and their families to become healthy members of our community.

Prison overcrowding has created the need for innovative solutions. Being “tough on crime” is no longer the responsible position – we must be “smart on crime”. The Caddo Community Defense Project aims to expedite the process for certain clients so that they are housed no longer than necessary on the taxpayer’s dime, find alternatives to incarceration when appropriate to reduce prison populations, and fight recidivism to staunch the flow of excessive arrests from the Caddo community.

Caddo Parish has one of the highest incarceration rates in the state of Louisiana, which in turn has the highest rate of incarceration of any state in the nation. The United States holds the

highest of incarceration among industrialized nations.¹ Louisiana has held this distinction for a number of years, and has a prison population that continues to rise faster than the national average. In January 2008, Louisiana had more than 106,600 people in state or parish prisons.²

Sheriff Prator notes that the cost of pre-trial detention in Caddo Parish – an expense burden largely shouldered by Caddo Parish taxpayers – is more than \$50 per prisoner per day. On July 10th, 86 of the 100 prisoners that were interviewed for this study were still in prison. With so many people in jail and expenditures related to incarceration increasing, the costs of prisons in Louisiana make up an increasing percentage of state and local budgets. In 2007, \$552 million— 7.5% of the State’s total general fund expenditures—went towards corrections.³ Tax dollars spent on incarceration take money from other programs, including education, health care and infrastructure. When investments in social services face cuts, more and more people begin slip through the cracks of safety nets designed to support the homeless, the unemployed, and those suffering from mental and physical disabilities.

The study underscores the need for overwhelming changes to the broader criminal justice system. Caddo Parish Sheriff Steve Prator reports that it takes longer in Caddo Parish to be tried and sentenced than the national average. Bonds are high, trials are backlogged and sentences are severe. Public defenders, through the use of social workers, can elevate the quality of representation available to their clients while simultaneously championing systemic changes within the criminal justice system that benefit the larger community.

A study by the Pew Center on the States finds that, “Prison costs are blowing holes in state budgets but barely making a dent in recidivism rates. At the same time, policy makers are becoming increasingly aware of research-backed strategies for community corrections – better ways to identify which offenders need a prison cell and which can be safely handled in the community... In exploring such alternatives, lawmakers are learning that current prison growth is not driven primarily by a parallel increase in crime, or a corresponding surge in the population at large. Rather, it flows principally from a wave of policy choices that are sending more law-breakers to prison.”⁴ Developing and supporting innovative programs like the Caddo Community Defense Project will improve the performance of other agencies in the criminal justice system, leverage state resources more efficiently, and strengthen the Caddo Parish community.

The Caddo Community Defense Project is principally funded by the Charles T. Beard Foundation in Shreveport, LA.

¹ The Pew Center on the States, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, pg 35.

² U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2003*. Bulletin NCJ 205336 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, July 2004) p. 7

³ National Association of State Budget Officers, “State Expenditure Report”, in *Pew Report: 1 in 100*, p. 14

⁴ The Pew Center on the States, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, pg 3

Slipping Through the Cracks: A Profile of Incarcerated Adults at Caddo Correctional Center (March 12-May 15, 2008)

Major Findings:

This study supports the relationships between crime and unmet social needs. This research reveals that the vast majority of pre-trial prisoners awaiting trial in jail are suffering from at least one kind of crisis, be it a crisis in housing, addiction, employment, or mental or physical health:

- **Addiction:** 38% reported being addicted to drugs or alcohol.
- **Mental Illness.** 35% were diagnosed with a mental illness or personality disorder.
- **Homelessness.** 34% reported being homeless at least once in their lives.
- **Prior experience in jail.** 43% and 85% had a prior juvenile and adult conviction, respectively.
- **Foster care.** 11% of prisoners surveyed reported having been in the foster care system as a child.
- **Literacy and special education.** 10% reported very little or no ability to read or write. 23% reported being placed in special education classes when in school. More than half lacked a high school diploma or GED.
- **Employment.** 55% of prisoners reported that they were working at the time of arrest. 66% had children and 21% of prisoners reported that they were the primary providers for others.
- **Support Systems.** While a substantial number of pre-trial prisoners were seemingly integrated into their communities, a significant number had trouble identifying any support system at all. 53% of the prisoners we interviewed had received no visitors at the time of our interview (conducted an average of 10 days of arrest).
- **A Local Problem.** 64% of prisoners that we interviewed had lived in either Bossier or Caddo Parish all their lives. More than 75% of those we interviewed had lived in either Bossier or Caddo Parish for “most” of their lives.



About LJC:

Vision Statement:

The Louisiana Justice Coalition seeks to ensure access to qualified, appropriately resourced counsel for all indigent persons accused of crime in order to prevent wrongful convictions, over-incarceration and excessive sentencing.

The achievement of high-functioning public defense in Louisiana will improve the performance of the entire criminal justice system, leverage state resources more efficiently, and strengthen communities throughout the state.

Mission:

The Louisiana Justice Coalition protects the constitutional right to counsel and ensures the respect and dignity of each practitioner and every client by improving the delivery of public defense services and creating a receptive climate for positive change.

What we do:

The Louisiana Justice Coalition (LJC) achieves its objectives by:

- Increasing awareness of the importance of the right to counsel, and the continued needs of public defenders and their clients through state-wide educational outreach and programming to diverse audiences
- Elevating the frequency and quality of media coverage of public defense issues through vigilant monitoring, proactive reporter education, and an aggressive media campaign
- Conducting relevant research to inform policy discussions and support advocacy efforts
- Providing technical support for innovative projects within public defender offices to enhance the quality of representation for adult and juvenile clients
- Empowering clients, their families and their communities to participate in the development of public policy to guarantee equal access to fair treatment in the criminal justice system
- Facilitating effective, collaborative relationships between public defenders, service providers, advocates and clients to maximize the impact of scarce resources and strengthen communities