

Santa Cruz County Probation Department

**Pretrial
Division
Annual
Report**

2024

Our **VISION** is a safe and thriving community.

Mission Statement: Pretrial’s mission is to conserve the presumption of innocence of individuals and determine a non-bail release, making detention a limited exception. Recommendations for release with the least restrictive condition will be made by utilizing an evidence-based assessment, which reduces subjectivity.

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Introduction:

Santa Cruz County's Pretrial Program aims to reduce incarceration while ensuring public safety and upholding defendants' rights to least restrictive conditions. The County continues to enhance pretrial practices, promoting fair and evidence-based decision-making.

Bail reform remains a priority at state and national levels, emphasizing research-based alternatives to monetary bail. While concerns exist regarding potential bias in assessment tools, evidence supports their role in balancing community safety with appropriate supervision.

Executive Summary:

The Pretrial Program supports due process as outlined in the 14th amendment to alleviate jail overcrowding using evidence-based assessments to guide release decisions based on the following risk levels:

- Low: Demonstrate a likelihood to appear and likelihood to remain arrest-free and should be recommended for release without supervision (appropriate overrides for particularly egregious crimes or unique circumstances)
- Moderate: Should be recommended for supervised release
- High: Structured supervised release, which may include location monitoring and home detention, or be detained (where significant community well-being and safety concerns exist)

SB 129 mandates courts and counties *to implement* and advance evidence-based monitoring practices with the *least restrictive* interventions and practices necessary to enhance community well-being and safety, and to ensure the individual's return to court.

Santa Cruz County Probation uses standard pretrial outcome measures to assess program effectiveness. There are four key outcome measures to assess program effectiveness: 1) Appearance; 2) Safety Rate; 3) Concurrence Rate; and 4) Success Rate.

County Strategic Plan/ Pretrial Division Goals:

The Court and County Probation worked closely to enhance and expand pretrial release services pursuant to Senate Bill 129 (SB 129). Pretrial will use the following strategies to support judicial officer decision making that results in the least restrictive conditions to address community well-being and safety and ensure court appearance.

Strategy 1: Expand Staffing and Services:

- Increased staff in 2024 to support the growing average daily population.
- Expanded Court Liaison and Expeditor assignments to facilitate daily operations
- Screened pretrial clients for health benefits and provided linkage to the Medi-Cal application process

Strategy 2: Judicial officers Training:

- Although there was no specific training, Pretrial began regularly sharing program performance data with the court.

Strategy 3: Pretrial Advisory Committee:

- Established in 2022; met in January and July 2024 to discuss program improvements and technical support grant outcomes.

Strategy 4: Automation and Information Sharing:

- Enhanced e-filing for expedited access to Public Safety Assessments (PSA)
- Continued piloting two-way communication with judges and worked in collaboration with the Sheriff's and Court to expand and pilot three-way communication for Pretrial facilitated releases

Strategy 5: Court Appearance Support:

- Provide transportation assistance and court reminders via text, email, and telephone calls
- Piloted a cellphone project which resulted in 47 phones and 9-minute cards issued
- Created temporary caseload to provide court reminders to individuals released pre-arraignment on OR/COR

Strategy 6: Pretrial Assessments and Diversion Opportunities:

- Supports early assessments during booking to divert individuals to mental health treatment
- The development of the sober center has impacted on the number of people who would have been diverted to SUD intervention

Strategy 7: Collaborate Court Linkages:

- Support participants through coordinated monitoring and services to promote successful outcomes

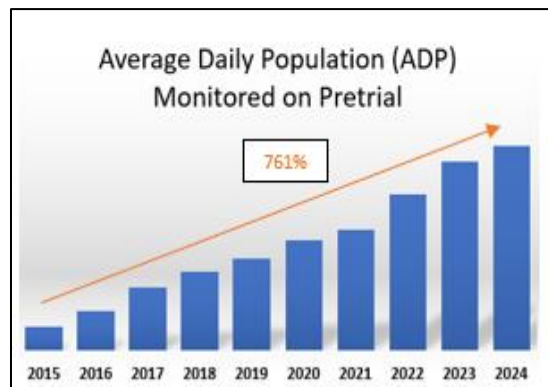
Pretrial Division Highlights

Population



The Pretrial Services Program aims to safely release people arrested/charged with the least restrictive level of monitoring while safeguarding community well-being and ensuring court appearances, utilizing actuarial assessments and a decision-making framework. The Pretrial program provides monitoring to those deemed eligible by the courts to remain in the community.

- Since 2015, the average daily population (ADP) has steadily increased.
- 2023 ADP: 301; 2024 ADP **327**
- The highest daily census rose from 331 in 2023 to **343** in August 2024
- 629 individuals on Supervised Own Recognizance (SOR)
- **1147** individuals monitored in 2024



Pretrial continues to see a reliance on pretrial assessment and monitoring in Santa Cruz County. Although the pretrial population had a slight decrease of 4%. The number of individuals placed on Supervised Own Recognizance increased by 9%. The number of individuals monitored by Pretrial Services is only expected to increase in the upcoming years with changes in legislation and as the County continues to advance pretrial practices.

Pretrial Staffing



The Pretrial Division continues to meet demand, particularly in location monitoring and supportive services. In 2024, we expanded into two key roles:

- Court Liaison – Improves courtroom communication with judicial officers
- Expeditor: Facilitated expedited releases, including pre-arraignment and medical releases

Pretrial staff opened 890 new cases (1,145 episodes) and closed out 1,237 case episodes in 2024. Committed to balancing community well-being and safety, the division ensures pretrial success through dedicated staff, effective tools, and strong collaboration.

Public Safety Assessment (PSA)



In 2024, Pretrial staff completed 2,812 assessments utilizing the Public Safety Assessment-Court (PSA-Court)¹ tool and local decision-making framework to inform judicial decision for release or detention pending case disposition. In addition to the PSA, Pretrial staff utilize the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) for individuals who have been arrested for domestic violence charges, incorporating findings into court recommendations.²



2024 Concurrence Rate



The concurrence rate measures the ratio of court released, and detained individuals compared to the submitted public safety assessment results for release. It reflects the system's compliance at the pretrial stage.

- 69% Public Safety Assessment (PSA) Recommendations were followed by Judicial Officers.

Pre-Arraignment / Medical Releases



Historically, persons arrested could secure pre-arraignment release by posting bail. The shift to non-monetary pre-arraignment release removes financial barriers, using an evidence-based tool and interview to assess an individual's likelihood of success. This approach aligns with SB 129 and County Operational Objectives. Pretrial staff typically make release recommendations within 24 hours of arrest, prior to arraignment (which typically occurs within 72 hours). In 2024 seven individuals were released pre-arraignment. While some are released on Own Recognizance (OR) outside the local pretrial program, we began providing limited court reminder support for Pretrial-initiated OR releases. Additionally, Pretrial staff facilitated six medical releases for individuals pre and post arraignment while their cases were pending. In 2025 we strive to continue to better

¹ "In partnership with leading criminal justice researchers, the Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF) developed the Public Safety Assessment™ (PSA) to help judges gauge the risk that a defendant poses. This pretrial risk assessment tool uses evidence-based, neutral information to predict the likelihood that an individual will commit a new crime if released before trial, and to predict the likelihood that he will fail to return for a future court hearing. In addition, it flags those defendants who present an elevated risk of committing a violent crime." - PSA-Risk-Factors-and-Formula.pdf (craftmediabucket.s3.amazonaws.com)

² The ODARA was the first empirically developed and validated domestic violence risk assessment tool to assess risk of future domestic assault, frequency, and severity of future assaults (male offenders against female victims/survivors).

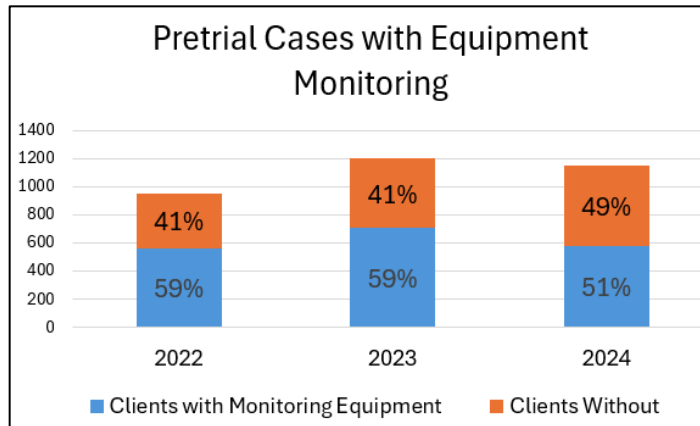
identify appropriate pre-arraignment. In 2025, we aim to improve pre-arraignment release identification and strengthen jail collaboration in other ways to support successful outcomes.

Location Monitoring (LM)



Over half of pretrial releases include court-ordered location monitoring (GPS and/or alcohol monitoring). Pretrial aims for the least restrictive release conditions and, in 2024, introduced Veri-Watch, a discreet GPS alternative or step down from traditional ankle monitoring. Our LM vendor provided training on the SmartLINK software application for communication and check-ins. In 2025, we will pilot SmartLINK with clients on home confinement to support scheduling, activities, and real-time communication.

To promote fairness in the pretrial system and to abide by statute, individuals are not charged with any costs associated with their monitoring (including location monitoring equipment).



Pretrial Services in Action



Probation’s Pretrial Services assisted an individual facing medical and mobility challenges. After being granted pre-arraignment release and securing a court date for the very next day. Pretrial staff coordinated bridge housing and transportation to the facility. On the day of the hearing, Pretrial staff transported the individual to court and stayed by their side until the case was resolved. This is one example of how Pretrial Services goes above and beyond to support a fair and effective pretrial system – reducing reliance on incarceration while maintaining public safety and upholding individuals’ rights.

Outcome and Performance Measures



Pretrial effectiveness is measured by four key outcomes:

- **Safety Rate:** The percentage of supervised individuals who remained arrest free (not charged with a new offense) while on pretrial supervision;
- **Appearance Rate:** The percentage of supervised individuals who attend all scheduled court appearances;
- **Success Rate:** The percentage of supervised individuals who appeared for all scheduled court appearances, and remained arrest free during pretrial supervision; and
- **Concurrence Rate:** The ratio of court released, and detained individuals compared to pretrial’s submitted recommendations for release and detention.

In 2024, the success rate was 76%. Following national standards, technical violations were tracked separately.

Collaboration with justice partners continues to support safe community reintegration while improving court appearance rates and reducing new offenses. Below are the outcomes of these efforts.

Safety Rate						
<i>The percentage of supervised defendants who were <u>not</u> charged with a new offense during their period of pretrial monitoring/supervision</i>						
Monitored/supervised Pretrial	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
Safety Rate	87%	90%	93%	93%	91%	90%
Goal	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%

Appearance Rate						
<i>The percentage of monitored/supervised defendants who attend all scheduled court appearances.</i>						
Monitored/supervised Pretrial	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
Appearance Rate	75%	85%	87%	88%	86%	86%
Goal	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%

Success Rate						
<i>The percentage of released defendants who appeared for all scheduled court appearances <u>and</u> remained arrest free during pretrial monitoring/supervision. In 2024, Pretrial adopted NAPSA’s definition of success.</i>						
Monitored/supervised Pretrial	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
Success Rate	52%	49%	62%	58%	60%	76%
Goal	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%

The Pretrial Division collaborates with state and national researchers to advance fairness and support successful outcomes. Efforts include enhancing intake and screening processes to connect individuals with resources and services such as North and South County Success Centers, community-based organizations, grant funded services, and other funding streams.

Health Care Access



To promote access to health care, Pretrial participates in the Cal-AIM (Medi-Cal) initiative by screening pretrial individuals for health benefits and providing information and outreach for Medi-Cal enrollment. Pretrial is also actively involved in many Cal-AIM workgroups, planning meetings and committees. Additionally, Pretrial management participated in the Cal-AIM strategic planning with county partners to enhance population eligibility and access to Medi-Cal funded programs and services. Pretrial continues to provide Medi-Cal screening and linkages to the application and enrollment process.

Cell Phone Pilot Program



Reminder calls and texts are shown to increase court appearance rates. Pretrial launched a pilot program providing cell phones and service to those without personal phones due to financial or documentation limitations. In 2024, 47 cellphones and 9-minute cards were distributed.

Continued SB 129 Implementation and Advancing Practices



SB 129 Enhancement Implementation Meetings: Quarterly meetings with the Court, Pretrial Leadership, and partners to discuss and plan the SB 129 expansion project.

SB 129 Information Sharing Meetings: Monthly meetings between Pretrial, Courts, and system partners to improve information sharing, system integration, and technological efficiencies for better client outcomes.

Pretrial/Corrections Meetings: Monthly meetings with Corrections to improve communication, create workflows, and collaborate on the custodial pretrial population. In 2024, Corrections took the lead in distributing Probable Cause Declarations to the court. We are collaborating on an electronic process to streamline medical releases.

The Center for Effective Public Policy (CEPP) / Advancing Pretrial Policy & Research (APPR): Pretrial staff attended multiple CEPP/APPR training sessions on topics including supervision, safety assessments, and quality assurance.

Judicial Council: Pretrial staff participate in Judicial Council Brown Bag Webinars to learn best practices and advance pretrial practices.

O'Connell Consulting: Consultant Kevin O'Connell provided technical assistance on improving electronic information sharing with the Court and Corrections, including developing a DocuSign process for better communication with judicial officers and justice partners.

HARVARD Kennedy School Government Performance Lab: Harvard supported Pretrial with data-driven performance management, including training on standardized case closure and technical violation documentation.

Strategic Planning: Probation and Pretrial started strategic planning sessions in 2024, focusing on implementation plans.

Public Defender's Office Early Representation and Holistic Advocacy Program: Pretrial collaborates with the PDO Holistic Advocacy Program for client services, resource connections, and Medi-Cal application support.

Pretrial Equity and Transformation (PET)/Safety and Justice Challenge: Pretrial Director participates in national research groups and virtual webinars on improving fairness and equity in the pretrial phase, presenting work with Harvard Kennedy School in 2024.

Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) Conference: The Pretrial Division Director participated in the CPOC conference and presented on "Unlocking Pretrial Excellence: County Best Practices on Pretrial."

CPOC Pretrial Academy Advisory Committee: Pretrial Director contributed to the creation of California's first Pretrial Academy curriculum for 2025.

CPOC Pretrial Point of Contact Meeting: Meetings with California Pretrial program leadership for legislative updates and networking on SB 129 implementation.

Words to Deeds Convening: Pretrial Director presented on local programs at California's forum on decriminalizing mental illness in September 2024.

Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA): Pretrial continues to participate in MAA to generate revenue based on reimbursable activities.