



Dane County, Wisconsin
210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd
Madison, WI 53703

**Office of
Justice
Reform**

Date: September 11, 2024

To: Public Protection and Judiciary Chair Richelle Andrae

From: Colleen Clark Bernhardt, Director

Re: 2025 Office of Justice Reform Budget Submission

The Office of Justice Reform 2025 budget request comports with the guidelines provided by the County Executive on June 14, 2024. It is my honor to complete the 2025 budget as the inaugural director of the Office of Justice Reform.

The Office of Justice Reform mission as articulated in the budget is “to marshal and coordinate resources both within and outside the county’s criminal justice system to reduce incarceration and racial disparities in the criminal justice system.”

Data Enhanced Pilot Community Court:

The first decision item adds community court case management software to the Office of Justice Reform budget. In 2022, Dane County was awarded a federal community court grant for planning and implementation of a community court. The 600K Bureau of Justice Assistance grant allows Dane County to implement a plan for a community court that will focus on racial justice, procedural fairness, and wrap-around supports. Co-chaired by Dana Pellebon and Linda Ketcham, the CJC-Community Court Advisory Committee spent over a year planning the effort in a collaborative format with justice stakeholders and community members.

In 2025, the pilot phase initialization of the Dane County community court will occur. Strong data ecosystems and case management software are required for the federal authority, Dane County officials and our community. Decision item one allows for purchase of case management software called Automon, under Catalis: Land and Court Records, LLC.

Peer Learning from the best community courts in the United States:

The next decision item is a reallocation of membership fees to conference and training expense due to the initializing of the Dane County community court and onboarding of the inaugural Community Court Coordinator. In 2022 -2023, Dane County staff, stakeholders, and community representatives were able to attend peer-learning sessions in community courts in Cook County, IL; Reno, NV; and Eugene, OR. The Community Court Coordinator will need to observe and learn from the national leader in community courts, Red Hook Community Justice Center, as well as other county-lead community courts, including Orange County, CA.

Policy Analyst/Grants Coordinator:

County Executive Kuhn's budget guidance advised against requests for new positions, and I have honored that request in my formal budget submission. Nevertheless, I would like to draw your attention to a potential new position that would have immediate and far-reaching impacts on our justice system and equitable practices. A policy analyst/grants coordinator role is a necessary function in the Office of Justice Reform. I see their primary role to assist in policy development, subcommittee coordination, and grants development and management.

Championing justice reform strategies in the re-entry and "familiar faces" space is needed. In 2023, Dane County established the Dane County Fair Chance Housing Fund (FCHF). The purpose of the FCHF is to expand affordable housing options for households in which at least one individual has been criminal justice involved. The effort to increase the success of returning residents spans beyond the purview of any one agency. Transparency and efficacy require a collaborative approach--listening to perspectives from multiple agencies, those with lived experience, and strong data. I envision a CJC-Re-entry subcommittee dedicated to improving the lives and outcomes of our returning residents. The CJC-Re-entry subcommittee could also review and recommend innovative practices and policy for those who are multi-system involved, and are familiar faces in Dane County agencies.

Annually, I have identified grants that Dane County would be well positioned to compete for including: justice and mental health collaborative program grants, homeless services grants, law enforcement and innovative practices, evaluation technical assistance grants, and strategic impact grants. In the 2009 Task Force on Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice Systemⁱ a top recommendation was to "hire a criminal justice grant writer". For many years, I attended to this role, as well as my other responsibilities. It is time to establish a full-time policy analyst/grant coordinator to ensure Dane County has the opportunity to complete for foundation, local and national grants impacting justice.

The Office of Justice Reform will strive to catalyze effective and innovative data driven approaches to justice, implement programs that are effective, equitable and accountable to all county residents, and collaborate with diverse leaders from a broad range of backgrounds, perspectives and relationships with the local criminal-justice system. In order to create a strong foundation upon which effective, equitable, and data driven justice reforms are built--resources are needed. Thank you for your consideration of our requests.

ⁱ <https://cjc.danecounty.gov/documents/pdf/2009-RD-Task-Force.pdf>