

2025 Community Justice Members: Judge John Hyland, Chair, Courts; Ismael Ozanne, District Attorney, Vice Chair; Melissa Agard, County Executive; Kelvin Barrett, Sheriff; Jerome Dillard, Community Representative; Myra McNair, Community Representative; Patrick Miles, County Board of Supervisors; John Jay Miller, Community Representative; Jeff Okazaki, Clerk of Courts

Advisory Members: Richelle Andrae, Public Protection and Judiciary Committee; Jay Laufenberg, Department of Corrections; Peter Middleton, Public Defender; Sabrina Madison, Madison Mayor Designee; Todd Meurer, Municipal Judge; John Patterson, Madison Police Department; Brent Plisch, Chiefs of Police Association; Heidi Wegleitner, Health and Human Needs Committee

A Year of Change and Progress

In 2025, the Dane County Community Justice Council (CJC) entered a period of renewal. The Office of Justice Reform, which staffs the CJC, reached full capacity, and key stakeholders re-engaged around our shared mission. The Office of Justice Reform supports the CJC and its subcommittees by providing project management, policy research, data analysis, and meeting coordination.

Throughout the year, the CJC advanced new strategies—beginning with foundational efforts and expanding toward broader, systems-level change. Key initiatives included:

- Community Court planning and implementation coaching
- Sequential Intercept Model training
- Development of a CJC strategic plan
- Housing Solutions Lab technical assistance

As we sharpen our focus in 2026, we remain committed to collaboration with CJC stakeholders, community partners, and individuals with lived experience in the justice system. Together, we will continue building on this momentum and work toward greater justice for all Dane County residents.

Thank you to every member of the CJC and its subcommittees, as well as to community members, research partners, staff, and agency thought partners, for your collaborative work to advance meaningful improvements in the criminal justice system.

Visit
www.cjc.danecounty.gov
for more information



Dane County Advances Community Court Initiative

In March, Jael Currie joined the Office of Justice Reform (OJR) as Dane County's first Community Court Coordinator. Her onboarding included shadowing existing diversion programs and specialty courts. In May, the Community Court Core Team—an advisory group supporting the development and implementation of Community Court—began meeting. The team meets monthly and helps guide implementation strategies, courtroom procedures, and court team roles.

OJR also hired Brett Taylor, J.D., as an implementation coach for Community Court. Brett is a criminal justice reform expert with more than 17 years of experience assisting jurisdictions with assessing, planning, and launching reform initiatives. His experience includes serving as a defense attorney in the Red Hook Community Court, NY.

As a Bureau of Justice Assistance grantee, Dane County has benefited from opportunities to connect with peer community courts nationwide. In May, Jael Currie and Judge Trammell traveled to New York to visit the Red Hook Community Justice Center in Brooklyn and the Felony Alternative to Incarceration Court in Manhattan. In July, members of the Core Team visited Chicago to observe the Avondale Restorative Justice Community Court.

These site visits have been invaluable, showcasing a wide range of reform approaches and offering practical insight into how courts design and adapt non-traditional programs to address the unique needs of individuals and jurisdictions. Dane County Community Court is expected to launch in the first quarter of 2026.



Jael and Judge Trammell at the Red Hook Community Justice Center

Wrapping up the MacArthur Safety and Justice Challenge: Dane County 2016-2025

Since 2016, Dane County's Community Justice Council has served as an innovation partner with the MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC). The SJC was established to reduce America's reliance on jails, enhance public safety, and address racial disparities in the justice system.

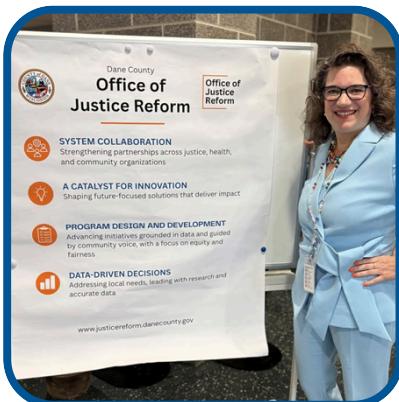
Dane County's innovation efforts were led by the Community Restorative Court (CRC), a pretrial data modeling project, and expanded community engagement. At the April 2025 national convening, Dane County participated via presentations by Chief John Patterson of the Madison Police Department, who presented "Creating Safer, Stronger Communities through Enhanced First Responder Support for Arrest Alternative Programs," and Colleen Clark Bernhardt, Director of the Office of Justice Reform, who presented "Advancing Fairness and Equal Opportunity in County Justice and Behavioral Health System."

Participation in the Safety and Justice Challenge provided valuable opportunities to collaborate with national researchers, strengthen justice policies, programs, and practices, and advance meaningful system improvements for Dane County residents.



Madison Police Chief John Patterson at the SJC conference

Updates on the Sequential Intercept Model



County Executive Melissa Agard at the SIM workshop.

In June, the Office of Justice Reform hosted a Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) training workshop, funded by a MacArthur Foundation grant. Stakeholders across various systems such as mental health, substance use, law enforcement, pretrial services, courts, jails, community corrections, housing, health, social services, people with lived experiences, and many others attended to collaboratively identify existing justice gaps in Dane County for individuals with mental and substance abuse disorders. These gaps were identified among six distinct intercept points: (0) Community Services, (1) Law Enforcement, (2) Initial Detention and Initial Court Hearings, (3) Jails and Courts, (4) Reentry, and (5) Community Corrections.

Facilitators Dr. Violette Cloud and Regina Huerter from the Policy Research Association, Inc., national leaders in mental health research and application to social change, helped keep conversations structured, transparent, and collaborative. For two days, Dane County community stakeholders, including

Department of Human Services, Journey Mental Health Center, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Community Alternative Response Emergency Services (CARES), JustDane, Safe Communities, and more were able to come together and identify existing community needs, coordinate systems to mitigate the gaps, and draft an action plan.

The SIM workshop highlighted several priority needs, including improved data-sharing across agencies, interventions targeted towards the intersection of behavioral health and housing needs, and expansion of Emergency Services. Housing and healthcare needs were reiterated, as well as the need to integrate peer-based support across systems. Each session presented various opportunities for improvement as stakeholders shared their perspectives, priorities, and concerns.

Throughout the intercept timeline, themes emerged and resulted in the following priorities: 1) increase cross-system informed decision-making, 2) use data to drive system planning and strategy, 3) focus on “Familiar Faces” with complex needs, 4) use data to shape sanctions, incentives, and alternatives to jail, 5) build a response to methamphetamine and stimulant use disorder, 6) integrate peer support specialists across systems and crisis response, 7) build complex care response teams and access pathways, and 8) expand crisis response capacity with telehealth.

Workgroups made up of members across different systems drafted action plans to each priority, mapping out key factors such as action steps, resources, and outcomes. To read more about this workshop, [click here](#) or scan the QR.



CJC Chair Judge John Hyland leads a workgroup discussion.

Office of Justice Reform Hires a Full Staff



**Colleen
Clark Bernhardt**



**Shar-Ron
Buie**



**Tamarine
Cornelius**



**Delia
Young**



**Jael
Currie**



**Emelia
Currin**



**Chee
Yang**

The Office of Justice Reform (OJR) brought on three new staff members in 2025 and is now fully staffed.

Continuing from last year are Director **Colleen Clark Bernhardt**, Data and Evaluation Coordinator **Shar-Ron Buie**, Research Analyst **Tamarine Cornelius**, and Clerk I-II **Delia Young**.

New staff members include:

- **Jael Currie**, Community Court Coordinator. Jael is a master's level social worker with over a decade of experience working in the fields of health, human, and social services. Having worked almost exclusively with disenfranchised populations, Jael seeks to use her leadership to disrupt unjust systems, while also centering the experiences and voices of those most marginalized. She brings experience in collaborative systems level work having previously served as YWCA Madison's Housing Director, along with various leadership roles within the Homeless Services Consortium of Dane County and on Madison's Common Council. When not serving her community, Jael enjoys taking in live music, traveling, and trying new foods and restaurants.
- **Emelia Currin**, Intern. Emelia joins OJR from the master's in social work program at UW-Madison. Emelia has been working on documenting research around court appearance rates and supporting the Community Justice Council. She enjoys crocheting, with her cat Gus by her side.
- **Chee Yang**, Research Assistant. Chee is a recent graduate with a master's degree in public affairs. At OJR, she works in a variety of areas such as research, public relations, and strategic program support. In her free time, she enjoys biking around Madison — the views of Lake Monona are her favorite.

Strategic Planning Process Tackles Future Priorities for CJC

In 2025, the Community Justice Council initiated a strategic planning process to enhance justice outcomes, strengthen coordination, and promote fairness across the local justice system. This effort demonstrates a shared commitment among county leaders, justice agencies, and community partners to collaboratively build a system focused on effectiveness, equity, accountability, and opportunity.

The strategic plan development was guided by input collected through surveys, interviews, and workgroups, which helped identify focus areas. The Justice Management Institute led and facilitated the planning process which involved justice system leaders, county officials, and community members working together. The plan sets priorities for the next three years, aiming to bring substantial improvements to Dane County in justice operations and equity.

The strategic plan is anticipated to be finalized in the first part of 2026, setting a clear direction for the future work of the Community Justice Council.