

America

'Pandemic fallout'

Should emptied Jails 'remain' in that way?

WASHINGTON, June 7, (AP) - It wasn't long after Matthew Reed shoplifted a \$63 set of sheets from a Target in upstate New York that the coronavirus pandemic brought the world to a standstill.

Instead of serving a jail sentence, he stayed at home, his case deferred more than a year, as courts closed and jails nationwide dramatically reduced their populations to stop the spread of COVID-19.

But the numbers have begun creeping up again as courts are back in session and the world begins returning to a modified version of normal. It's worrying criminal justice reformers who argue that the past year proved there is no need to keep so many people locked up in the US.



Krasner

By the middle of last year, the number of people in jails nationwide was at its lowest point in more than two decades, according to a new report published Monday by the Vera Institute of Justice, whose researchers collected population numbers from about half of the nation's 3,300 jails to make national estimates.

According to the report, shared with The Marshall Project and The Associated Press, the number of people incarcerated in county jails across the country declined by roughly one-quarter, or 185,000, as counties aggressively worked to release people held on low-level charges, dramatically reduced arrest rates and suspended court operations.

Offenses

But in most places, the decrease didn't last long: From mid-2020 to March 2021, the number of people in jails awaiting trial or serving short sentences for minor offenses climbed back up again by more than 70,000, reaching nearly 650,000.

"Reducing the incarcerated population across the country is possible," said Jacob Kang-Brown, a senior research associate at the Vera Institute of Justice and author of the new report. "We saw decreases in big cities, small cities, rural counties and the suburbs, but the increase we see is troubling."

In the Genesee County Jail in New York, where Reed recently began a six-month sentence for petit larceny, there were, for a time, only 35 people jailed, down from 90 before the pandemic, according to data compiled by the Vera Institute. Defendants had court dates pushed off, and judges went to extra lengths to allow people to wait at home rather than in jail. By March, there were 54 people jailed in the county lockup.

For Reed, who said he has struggled with an addiction to crack cocaine, going to jail has meant losing his disability checks, his only source of income. Without income, he has no way to pay rent, and he fears that unless a family member can take him in, he will be homeless when he is released in September.

He doesn't understand the point of sending him to jail now. "They could have at least offered me drug court or some type of rehab or something," he said in an interview from the Genesee County Jail last week.

Meanwhile, more than 40 people have died of COVID-19 in jails since the start of the pandemic, according to a Bureau of Justice Statistics survey of nearly 1,000 jails. That is likely an undercount; the virus has killed more than 2,600 prisoners and 207 staff in U.S. prisons, where deaths are easier to track.

Officials across the country, from small towns to suburbs and big cities, realized the danger and worked to get many people out of jail. Public defenders and prosecutors - typically on opposing sides - collaborated with judges, sheriffs and local police departments to identify those in jail who could safely be released, and to make plans to send fewer people to jail, according to interviews with officials in more than a dozen counties.

"In the first few months, really almost all we did was releases," said Florida Circuit Criminal Court Judge Nushin Sayfie in Miami-Dade County.

Bryan County, Georgia, reduced its jail population from 37 to 11, according to the Vera Institute. Sheriff Mark Crowe told police in the surrounding towns that he would only jail people charged with serious crimes like domestic violence. It was a challenge to persuade local law enforcement "to back off on some of the minor offenses you'd normally send to jail," said jail administrator Larry Jacobs. "With traffic offenses, we told them, 'Write them a ticket, give them a court date and wave goodbye.'"

Defense

As courthouses closed, many defense attorneys, with none of the hearings and motions that usually fill their calendars, focused exclusively on getting clients out of jail. In Palm Beach County, Florida, the public defenders' office set up a team "to keep reviewing and reviewing people in custody and coming up with creative arguments," said Dan Eisinger, the county's chief assistant public defender. If the judge denied bond the first time, the team went out to look for more information - additional evidence of pre-existing conditions, new medical records or information from family - and tried again, three and even four times, Eisinger said.

And it worked. By June of last year, the Palm Beach County Jail had gone from about 1,750 people before the pandemic to 1,500, according to data compiled by the Vera Institute of Justice.

"There was a real fear that people were going to get sick and die. Most judges did really factor that in," Eisinger said.

The pandemic underscored what reform advocates have been saying for years: Cramped and filthy jails are the wrong place for most people who have been arrested.

In many places, though, the push to clear out jails and rethink incarceration has been short-lived. Momentum for long-lasting change is wavering in the face of a rise in crime - including shootings and other violence - after several years at or near historic lows.

Police leaders and union officials in places like New York City and Philadelphia have blamed policies freeing people from jail, though there is little evidence that people on release are behind the surge of new crimes. Some lockups were back at pre-pandemic levels even before vaccines were ready last winter.

In Philadelphia, District Attorney Larry Krasner, elected as part of a wave of high-profile, progressive prosecutors, said the precautions brought on by the pandemic cannot solve the problems of the criminal justice system.

"I don't think that there's any way to take a completely anomalous moment - the most anomalous moment in criminal justice of the century - and say that this is the new model," said Krasner, a Democrat. "But ... if the question is whether the most incarcerated country in the world should be less incarcerated, the answer is: Hell yes."



A police officer holds a firearm as community members gather, Sunday, June 6, 2021, in Minneapolis, for Winston Boogie Smith Jr., who was fatally shot by members of a U.S. Marshals task force several days earlier. (AP)

America

Time ticking away

Dems face wrenching test on agenda

WASHINGTON, June 7, (AP) - Bracing for political trouble, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer warned Democratic colleagues that June will "test our resolve" as senators return Monday to consider infrastructure, voting rights and other stalled-out priorities at a crucial moment in Congress.

Six months into the party's hold on Washington, with Joe Biden in the White House and Democrats controlling the House and Senate, there is a gloomy uncertainty over their ability to make gains on campaign promises.

As Democrats strain to deliver on Biden's agenda, the limits of bipartisanship in the 50-50 Senate are increasingly clear: Talks over an infrastructure package are teetering, though Biden is set to confer again Monday with the lead GOP negotiator, and an ambitious elections overhaul bill is essentially dead now that Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., announced his opposition Sunday.

"We need to move the ball," said Yvette Simpson, CEO of Democracy for America, a liberal advocacy organization.

"We told everyone to come out against all odds in the pandemic and vote," she said about the 2020 election. The promise was that with Democrats in power, "we're going to have all these great things happen, their lives are going to be better. And what they're finding is that it looks like Washington as usual."

The summer work period is traditionally among the busiest for Congress, but Democrats are growing wary because time is running out for Biden to negotiate a sweeping infrastructure package and other priorities are piling up undone. The days ahead are often seen as a last chance at legislating before the August recess and the start of campaigns for next year's elections.

Schumer, in setting the agenda, is challenging senators to prepare to make tough choices. But he is also facing a test of his own ability to lead the biggest party through a volatile period of shifting priorities and tactics in the aftermath of the Trump era and the Capitol insurrection.

Goodwill

While Democratic senators have been generating goodwill by considering bipartisan bills in the evenly split Senate, they face mounting pressure from voters who put them in office to fight harder for legislation that Republicans are determined to block with the filibuster. Democrats in the evenly split Senate hold the majority because Vice President Kamala Harris can be the tie breaker.

Key among that legislation is S.1, the elections and voting overhaul bill, which now appears headed for defeat. But Schumer also said votes may be coming on gun control legislation and

the Equality Act, a House-passed bill to ensure civil rights for the LGBTQ community.

Fed up by the delays, some senators are ready to change the rules to eliminate the filibuster, which they blame for the inaction. The long-running Senate filibuster rules require 60 votes to advance most legislation, meaning as many as 10 Republicans would need to cross party lines to help Democrats achieve their priorities. Some senators propose reducing the voting threshold to 51.

But Manchin, in announcing his opposition to the voting rights bill Sunday as the "wrong piece of legislation to bring our country together," also restated his refusal to end the filibuster - for now, denying his party a crucial vote needed to make the rules change that could help advance its agenda.

"The June work period will be extremely challenging," Schumer warned. "I want to be clear that the next few weeks will be hard and will test our resolve as a Congress and a conference."

Schumer has been laying the groundwork for this moment since he became majority leader in January, trying to build the case that bipartisanship can work in some cases - with passage of an Asian hate crimes bill or a water public work package - but also has its limits, according to two Democratic aides granted anonymity to discuss the private strategy.

News in Brief

VP's plane returns: A "technical issue" forced the plane of US Vice President Kamala Harris to return shortly after take-off Sunday.

"Due to a technical issue with the VP's plane we will be returning to JBA shortly where the Vice President will switch planes and continue on to Guatemala City," Spokesperson Symone Sanders said in a statement. "It is a technical issue, there are no major safety concerns."

Harris, who is headed for a trip to Guatemala and Mexico, told reporters after the plane's return "I'm good. I'm good." (KUNA)

EU rules on terrorist content: European Union rules on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online entered into force Monday, today.

Online platforms will have to remove terrorist content referred by EU Member States' authorities within one hour, said an EU statement.

The rules will also help to counter the

spread of extremist ideologies online - a vital part of preventing attacks and addressing radicalisation.

European Commission Vice-President, Margaritis Schinas, said: "From now on, online platforms will have one hour to get terrorist content off the web, ensuring attacks like the one in Christchurch cannot be used to pollute screens and minds." (KUNA)



Harris



Schinas

Austria's far-right chooses leader: Austria's far-right Freedom Party on Monday nominated Herbert Kickl, the country's combative former interior minister, as its new leader.

The opposition party's leadership chose Kickl for the top job, the Austria Press Agency reported.

The move will need endorsement by a party congress on June 19. (AP)

Gulf Bank Announces 10 Lucky Winners of the AIDanah Monthly Draw for May

Gulf Bank held its monthly AIDanah draw on Sunday, to announce the winners for March. The 10 lucky winners received cash prizes of KD 1,000 each.

The Winners are:

TAHERAH MOHD ABBAS HUSAIN,
HUDA ABBAS ALBANDAR
ALHAMAD, LLOYD LARA
HERNANDEZ, HAMAD SOUD
ABDULAZIZ AL HASSAN, MAEN
ABDULWHAB ABDULLATIF
ALMATTOOQ, JASIM MUTER
JABER, YOUSEF MOHAMMED ASEF
SUPRIATNA, WALEED AWADH SAIF
ALNAMI, TAREQ MOHAMMED
HASSAN ALBAGHLI, RAWAN
MUSTAFA MOHD ALKANDARI

The AIDanah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's AIDanah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Numerous Benefits

The AIDanah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank.

Accordingly, all chances gained by existing AIDanah customers in 2020 (from January 1 to December 31, 2020) have been transferred to the 2021 draws. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

Customers can deposit to win AIDanah cash prizes throughout the year as part of the draws:

- **Monthly, 10 Winners, KD One Thousand per winner (KD 1,000 per winner), 7 days prior to the month's end date**
- **First Quarterly Draw, April 15, 2021, One Winner, KD One Hundred Thousand (KD 100,000), January 31, 2021**
- **Second Quarterly Draw, July 15, 2021, One Winner, KD One Million (KD 1,000,000), March 31, 2021**
- **Third Quarterly Draw, October 14, 2021, One Winner, KD One Hundred Thousand (KD 100,000), June 30, 2021**

- **Annual Grand Prize, January 13, 2022, One Winner, KD One Million and Five Hundred Thousand (KD 1,500,000), September 30, 2021**

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either keep their account with a minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their AIDanah savings - the more deposits into an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's AIDanah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

Opening an AIDanah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an AIDanah account today with only KD 200. To open an AIDanah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services, or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open an AIDanah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

Deposit More for More Chances to Win!

With Gulf Bank, depositing into an AIDanah account is easier and more secure than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts through the following

channels: Online/Mobile Banking App which includes the ePay service, ATMs and ITMs, the Customer Contact Center at 1805805 which is available 24/7, in addition to the free standing order service from other Gulf Bank accounts.

Gulf Bank's AIDanah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming AIDanah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter Gulf Bank's AIDanah draws throughout the year, for cash prizes totaling up to more than KD 2 Million.

To deposit into an AIDanah account, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches, or transfer directly through Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. Customers can also direct their queries via WhatsApp on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number. In addition, customers can visit the dedicated AIDanah account website to learn more about the account and its winners.