



MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Cash Bail Reform Statement from Montgomery County

We have received questions from individuals and organizations regarding Montgomery County's commitment to cash bail reform and to the Public Defender's office.

We remain wholly committed to supporting the vitally important work of the Public Defender's office and their dedication to defending the Constitutional rights of indigent individuals accused of violating the law. Their zealous advocacy on behalf of their clients must continue to extend beyond the courtroom, and their efforts to provide a holistic approach to the extra-legal concerns of those they represent is a model for Public Defenders offices across the country.

Montgomery County is in full support of justice reform efforts and specifically cash bail reform. We recognize that people of color as well as economically disadvantaged people are disproportionately impacted by our justice system. Pennsylvania ranks 7th highest in the nation for racial disparity for incarcerated people. We know this impacts not only individuals, but their families, neighborhoods, and communities. We are committed to developing strategies to combat this injustice.

In early 2019, the County and Courts began a collaborative effort across County departments to develop an alternative to cash bail that could eliminate pre-trial detention of individuals that have been charged with certain crimes, simply because of their inability to pay bail. This administration wants to put an end to people being held in pre-trial detention solely for economic reasons.

This team includes representation from the Public Defenders' Office, District Attorneys' Office, Courts, Prison, Commissioners Office, and Adult Probation. This group has been working together, reviewing various program models across the state and country. Representatives from these offices traveled to Pittsburgh to view Allegheny County's model pre-trial services program, and researched others around the country for best practices to develop our own program here in Montgomery County.

Based upon this work, the team presented a plan to the County Commissioners to fund a comprehensive Pre-Trial Services Unit in the 2020 budget. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Commissioners gave their full support for this plan and voted to include a new position in the 2020 county budget to launch this initiative. This position was advertised in January 2020; interviews are underway and this role will be filled shortly.

Montgomery County is dedicated to eliminating the negative impacts currently felt by many people of color as well as economically disadvantaged members of the community due to the current cash bail system. The creation of the Pre-Trial services program is a significant step in the ongoing effort for meaningful and equitable justice reform in Montgomery County.

- February 28, 2020