SAC Juvenile Justice Evaluation Partnership Project

Pre-Trial Juvenile Detention Practices in Illinois
Illinois’ Statistical Analysis Center:

• is housed in the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA).
• ICJIA is an agency located in Chicago, instituted by legislative act, and includes a unit of approximately 15 full-time research staff members.
Illinois’ State Advisory Group:

- is the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission (IJJC).
- is affiliated with the Illinois Department of Human Services.
Prior ICJIA / IJJC Partnerships:

- A report examining disproportionate minority representation in Cook County, IL.
- An implementation evaluation examining large-scale Illinois juvenile justice system changes that primarily took effect in 1999.
JRSA Project Topic Areas:

1. Providing information to SAG on state detention practices / detention alternatives, and how practices / alternatives compare to other states.
2. Collecting data / developing a data system to learn who is detained and why.
3. Developing and pilot testing an assessment tool or guidelines intended to help detention decision-makers.
4. Conducting a needs assessment and implementation / evaluation plan addressing use of detention and programs for more effective use.
5. Evaluating a new detention initiative.
ICJIA’s Best Idea:

- Focusing on pre-trial detention.
- Using JRSA funds to complete aspects of Topic Area 1, as a prelude to completing aspects of Topic Area 3 and 4.
Why Focus on Pre-Trial Detention?

• There has been a push in Illinois to use objective scoreable pre-trial screening instruments in order to:
  – minimize use of detention to only most serious cases.
  – eliminate detention of status offenders.
  – encourage use of alternatives to detention.
Why Choose Topic Area 1?

• We wanted to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of scoreable instruments (Topic Areas 3 and 4).

  BUT

• There was a great deal we did not know about pre-trial detention screening practices and processes (necessitating Topic Area 1 as a prelude).
We Wanted to Know:

- What counties are using scorable instruments.
- What instruments they are using.
- Why they chose to use the instrument.
- Whether instruments are used rigidly (the absolute determining factor) or loosely (discretion is still used).
- Inter-county variation.
- Use of alternatives.
- Whether scorable instruments reduce detention of status offenders.
Two-Phase Project.

- Phase 1: gathering general front-end information on pre-trial detention practices and processes (Topic Area 1)

  THEN

- Phase 2: Using Phase 1 information to guide evaluative activity (Topic Area 3 and 4).
Phase 1 Plan.

• Conduct detailed semi-structured interviews with head probation officers (or their designees) and heads of juvenile detention centers (or their designees).
Potential Results.

- A large majority of counties use scoreable instruments (typically, the instrument promulgated by an agency lobbying for use of scoreable instruments).

- A reasonable number of counties chose to use the scoreable instrument primarily in response to external pressure to do so.
Potential Results.

- A number of counties reported that the use of the instrument curtailed detention of status offenders.
- A number of counties reported that the use of scoreable instruments has not increased the use of alternatives.
- A number of counties reported that the instrument makes it easier to “defend” detention decisions to law enforcement and, potentially, the state’s attorneys office.
Potential Results.

- It can be tricky to apply the scoreable instrument to domestic battery cases.
- Despite the objectivity of the instrument, local philosophy plays a large role. This role manifests itself in “borderline” cases, where discretion is more justifiable.
- Rural, small counties tend to use more discretion in “borderline” cases.