



Suffolk County

The use of jail—how many people are in jail, why, and for how long—changed significantly across New York State in 2020. In April 2019, the State passed watershed bail reform that eliminated cash bail for most misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies. Courts quickly began implementing the new law in anticipation of its January 2020 effective date, and from March 2019 to February 2020, jail populations fell more than 30 percent. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York, and jail populations fell another 24 percent, to just over 11,000 in July 2020. The legislature enacted a partial bail reform rollback, and the initial crisis of the first wave of COVID-19 soon began to wane, causing jail populations to climb again—to 13,600 by December 2020. The impact of these momentous events varied widely from county to county.

How bail reform changed the jail population

In March 2019, the month before the New York State legislature passed bail reform, Suffolk County held 1,187 people in jail on any given day. Of those, 765 were detained pretrial. In February 2020, the month after bail reform went into effect, the average daily jail population in Suffolk County was 687—a 42 percent decrease from March 2019, compared to a 31 percent drop statewide. The pretrial population changed from 765 in March 2019 to 367 in February 2020.

How COVID-19 changed the jail population

New York confirmed its first case of COVID-19 on March 1, 2020. Soon after, court appearances became virtual, jury trials were suspended, and counties began to change their policies and practices to prevent further outbreaks in jails and to protect the broader community. By June 2020, the average daily jail population in

Suffolk County stood at 485—a 29 percent decrease from February 2020, just before the pandemic hit.

Suffolk County's jail population in December 2020

In April 2020, New York's legislature amended the bail law, expanding the limited circumstances in which judges may set bail. These reform rollbacks went into effect in July 2020. At the same time, the initial crisis of the first wave of COVID-19 began to wane. Thereafter, jail populations climbed across New York. By December 2020, the average daily jail population in Suffolk County had changed to 620, a 28 percent increase from June and a 10 percent decrease from its pre-pandemic population in February. By comparison, the statewide jail population increased 17 percent from June to December.

Fast facts about jail in Suffolk County

2020 jail incarceration rate

60 per 100,000 people

2020 average daily jail population

570

2019 jail budget

\$137,230,230

Cost to incarcerate one person for one night in 2019

\$347

Suffolk County 2020 jail incarceration rate

Overall, in 2020 the jail incarceration rate in Suffolk County was 60 per 100,000 people, compared with a statewide average of 101 per 100,000 people. Among New York City and the 57 counties outside the city, Suffolk County had the 4th lowest incarceration rate.

Methodology

The Vera Institute analyzed jail population data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, accessible at <https://perma.cc/3AYZ-N4NP>. The *total jail population* reflects the people the county is responsible for incarcerating, including those held in the county's own jail(s) and those being held at other facilities. The *pretrial population* reflects the people held pretrial in the county's jail(s), including those being held from other counties. County budget data is from the New York State Comptroller's Office, accessible at <https://perma.cc/BJ58-T8WZ>.

Quick facts about Suffolk County

County population

1,476,601

Racial demographics

Asian/Pacific Islander: 4.3%

Black/African American: 8.7%

Latinx/Hispanic: 19.8%

Native American: 0.6%

White: 84.4%

Percent living below the poverty line

7.3%

This brief is part of a series examining jail incarceration in New York State in 2020. Fact sheets for the rest of New York State are available at <https://www.vera.org/state-of-incarceration>.

Suffolk County jail population

● Total jail population ● Pretrial population

