

Attachment A



MARCH 14, 2025

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

JAIL POPULATION OVERVIEW AND PROJECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In June of 2022 and January 2024, MW Consulting completed reports analyzing Santa Barbara’s criminal justice system. This summary report updates portions of those previous reports, including current jail population and future jail population projections. We requested booking and release data from the Sheriff's Office that includes records through December of 2024. The individual level data from the Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Office is used to update the booking, release, and jail population analyses. The detailed jail data and updated demographic projections from the California Department of Finance are used to update the long-term jail projections.

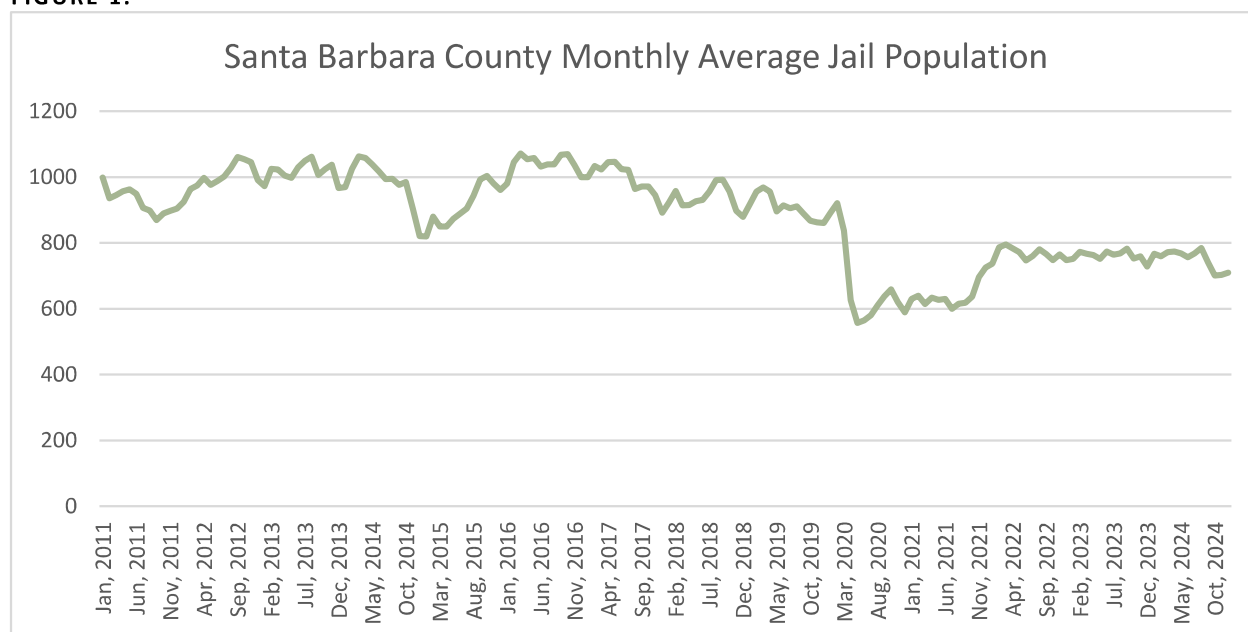
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- The number of people in jail in Santa Barbara County fell sharply during the pandemic, reaching a low of around 550. Since the end of 2021, the jail population has stabilized, with an average of 750 inmates in 2024.
- More recently, beginning in September 2024, the jail population began to trend downward with the December monthly average 10 percent below the August monthly average. It is too early to determine if this short-term decline will result in a long-term trend.
- Jail bookings have been up every year since the pandemic, with 11,738 bookings in 2024, but still lower than pre-pandemic years.
- The average length of stay has been increasing over time with the first significant drops occurring in 2023 and 2024. In 2024, the average length of stay was the lowest since 2016, at 23.3 days, but still higher than the average length of stay between 2011 and 2016.
- The jail population is projected to grow over 9 percent over the next 10 years, driven by the projected increase in the at-risk population of the county. In the absence of any additional policy changes, this gradual increase is expected to result in an average jail population of over 800 beds in future years.
- The Public Defender’s READY program has reduced the jail population by an estimated 14 beds. Expansion to the south county is expected to further reduce the jail population.

JAIL ANALYSIS

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office provides monthly individual level data for those booked or released from jail. This report contains data on individuals who were in jail between January 1, 2011, and December 31, 2024. The data includes demographic information, crime detail, sentence date, booking and release type, time in jail, and arresting agency. The data presented below has one notable difference compared to the original report. This summary data presented below removes individuals on alternative sentencing. Our initial report included these individuals, resulting in a slightly higher jail population and longer average length of stay estimates.

FIGURE 1.

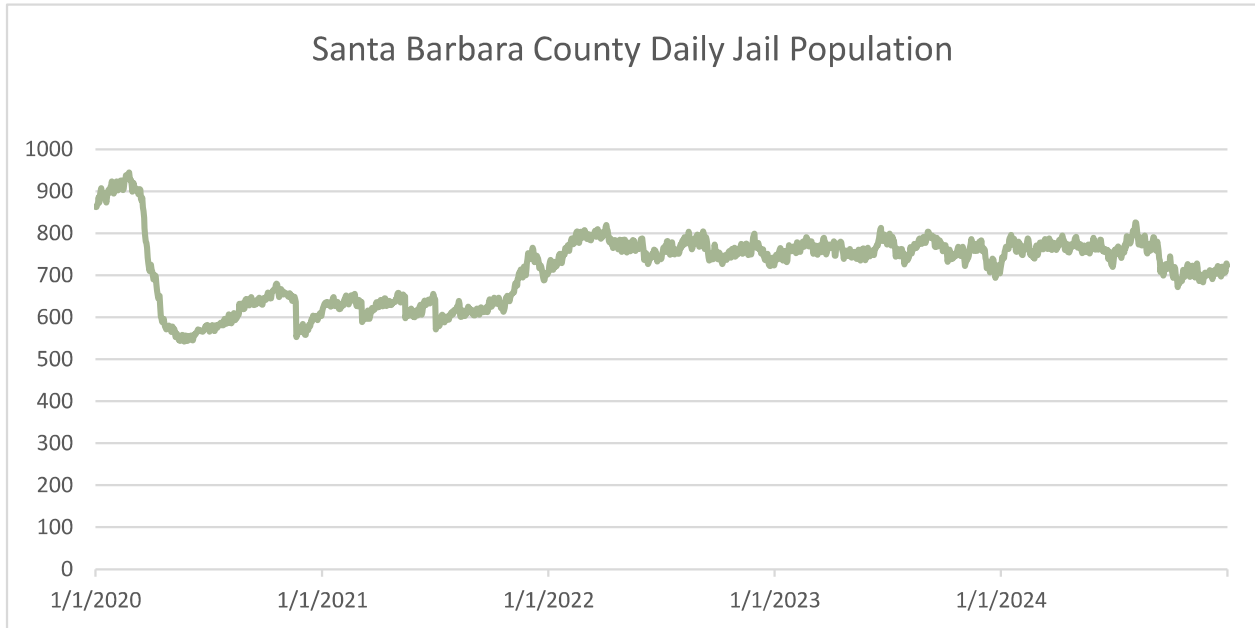


Between 2011 and 2019, the Santa Barbara County jail population remained relatively flat, fluctuating between 800 to over 1000 inmates. Near the end of the decade, the population started to slowly trend downward, but was still around 900 inmates on any given day. After years of a relatively flat jail population, the population fell sharply in early 2020 when the pandemic disrupted most areas of everyday life. As governments tried to figure out how to continue operations both safely and effectively, law enforcement adjusted who they arrested and booked, the courts instituted zero bail for many crimes, and probation adjusted how they supervised clients. Each of these factors influenced the number of individuals in jail on a given day. Figure 2 shows the daily jail population during the start of the pandemic through the end of 2024. The population dropped sharply following the start of the pandemic, fluctuating between 550 to 650 individuals until October of 2021. Near the end of October 2021, the practice of zero-bail for warrants was discontinued, increasing the jail population by over 100 beds. By early 2022 the jail population stabilized at a new level of around 750 beds, with daily highs slightly above 800 and daily lows slightly below 700. More recently, beginning in September 2024, the population began to trend downward with the December¹ monthly average 10 percent below the

¹ The December jail population is typically lower than summer months, but 10 percent is larger drop than an average year.

August monthly average. At the time of this report, the January 2025 population was up slightly but was still below the peaks of the summer.

FIGURE 2.



Since the previous jail report, the overall population of the jail and the overall make up of those who are in jail has remained mostly unchanged. The average jail population for 2024 was 11 beds, or 1.4 percent, lower than the average population in 2023.

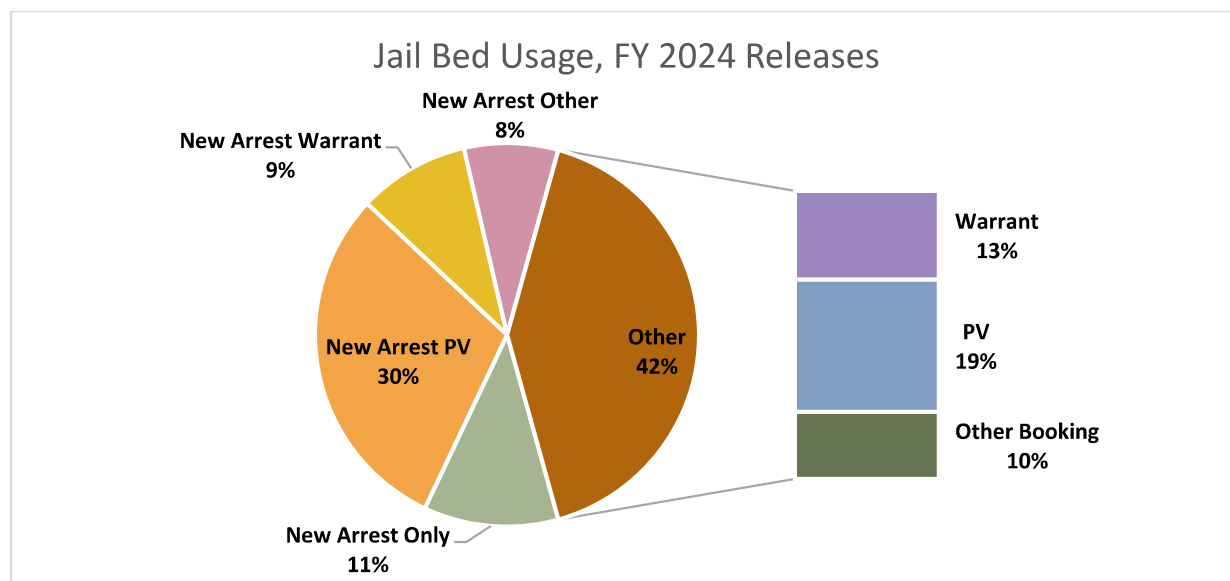
Jail bookings declined sharply since 2011, hitting a low during the pandemic. Since 2020, bookings have increased each year, and in 2024 they were more than 30 percent higher than the 2020 low. The average length of stay had steadily increased since 2011, with the only substantial decreases happening in 2023 and 2024, dropping by 22 percent over those two years. The average length of stay in 2024 was 23.3 days and was the lowest since 2016. The increase in bookings was offset by a decrease in length of stay, resulting in a stable jail population over the past two years.

Historical Jail Bookings and Average Length of Stay		
Year	Bookings	ALOS
2011	15997	20.5
2012	16033	22.3
2013	16371	21.9
2014	17047	21.8
2015	16619	20.2
2016	16525	22.3
2017	15071	23.4
2018	14034	24.7
2019	13043	24.5
2020	8691	24.3
2021	9333	26.5
2022	10092	30.0
2023	10681	27.3
2024	11738	23.3

Individuals enter the jail through a complex series of events. For example, one individual was booked with three new arrests (one felony vandalism and two misdemeanors), three arrest warrants, and a probation violation. This example is not unique, as many of the individuals entering the jail are booked on multiple charges with a mixture of new arrests, warrants, and probation violations. In 2024, a little over half of the individuals who were booked into the jail were booked with only a new arrest and no warrants, violations, or other booking types. But those individuals had very short average lengths of stay and made up only 11 percent of the jail population (Figure 3). The figure below shows that 58 percent of the jail bed usage in 2024 is from people who were booked into jail with a new offense. However,

like the example above, many of those individuals had additional reasons that they spent time in the jail. The most common admission type for jail bed usage in 2024 is for individuals booked with a probation or parole violation and a new crime. Individuals with these booking types made up 30 percent of the jail bed days in 2024.

FIGURE 3.



Finally, we also examined the number of individuals in the jail on a given day who have an overall length of stay of under two days. We used this estimate as a proxy for the number of jail beds used by individuals who would be released prior to classification. For this calculation we examined the jail population on the first of the month over the past six months. The number of jails beds occupied by individuals who stayed two or fewer days ranged from one to six with an average of three over the six-month period.

JAIL PROJECTIONS

The long-term jail population is determined by the number of daily admissions multiplied by the average length of stay in days. To project Santa Barbara County’s future jail population, it is necessary to estimate the number of individuals who will enter the jail in future years, as well as how long those individuals will stay. Future jail populations are difficult to estimate because many factors can influence the number of people booked into the jail. Future crime and the severity of those crimes, law enforcement’s response, economic conditions and county budgets, population demographics, law changes, local practice changes, and the values of elected officials all factor into future jail populations. In 2020 and 2021, criminal justice systems were drastically impacted by a completely unexpected pandemic, making it even more challenging to predict future jail populations. While there are challenges and risks to predicting the long-term jail population, it is still important to use the best data that is available along with reasonable assumptions based on that data to project the future population.

In our initial report, the jail population projections were based on pre-pandemic trends in the average length of stay, bookings, and the projected population growth in Santa Barbara County. At the time of the original report, there was little expected growth in Santa Barbara County's at-risk² population. When all of these factors were included in the projections model, we predicted that the population would rise from the pandemic lows, but the long-term population would trend downward.

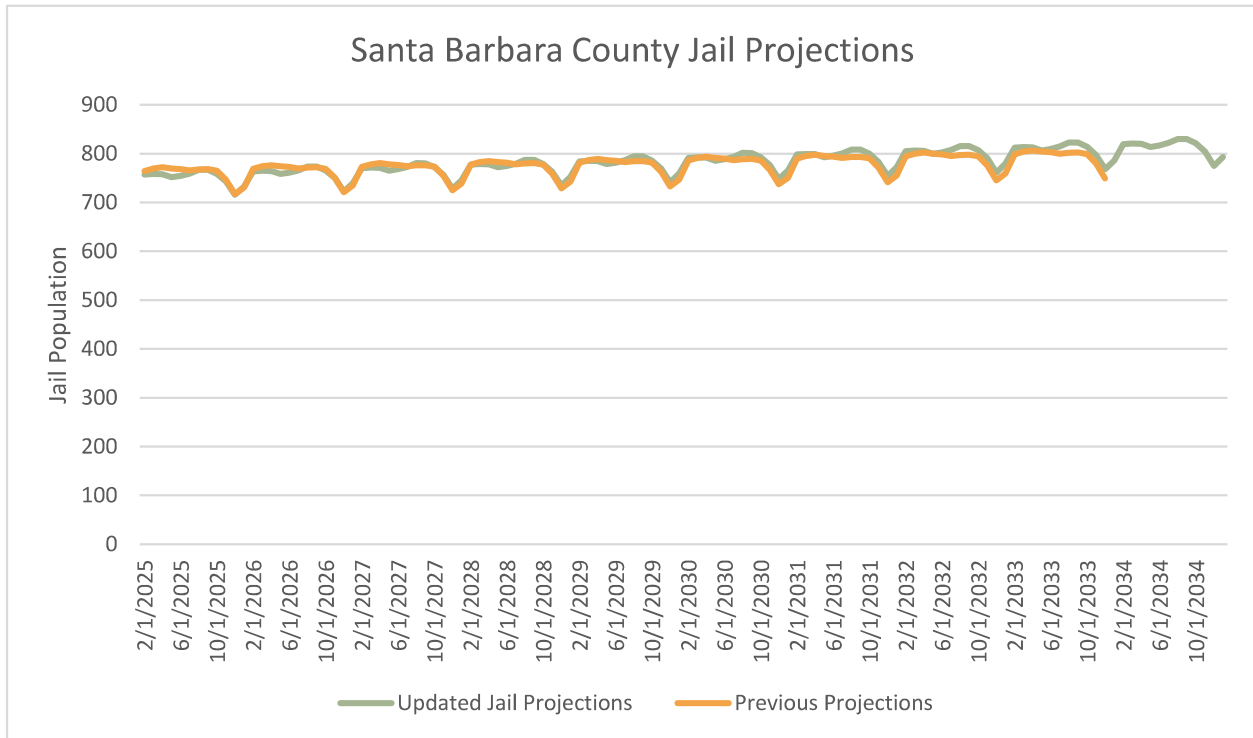
Over the past two years, the jail population has remained relatively flat and in 2024 averaged 750 inmates on a given day. The pandemic policies and practices are no longer in place. The jail population appears to have stabilized at a lower baseline than prior to the pandemic. The long-term pre-pandemic trends in bookings and average length of stay do not seem to be relevant for predicting future jail population growth. Since we do not have a reliable historical baseline, the new baseline jail projections assume no growth in the booking rate or average length of stay, which is consistent with the past three years following the elimination of zero bail for warrants. In September of 2024, the California Department of Finance (DOF) updated their demographic projections for California counties. Based on the current age and gender breakdown of the jail population³ on January 1, 2025, and the updated population projections, we created a weighted average of the estimated at-risk population growth for the county. Between 2025 and 2035, Santa Barbara County's at-risk population growth is expected to be 9.2 percent. We expect this to directly increase the number of individuals booked into jail over this period. The projections presented below are entirely driven by the estimated increase in the county's population and historical monthly fluctuations in the jail population.

The new projections are similar the previous projections with some small adjustments. The reduction in the jail population during the last few months of 2024 means the projections started at a slightly lower baseline. However, the expected growth rate is higher, meaning the long-term projections are estimated to be higher than the previous projections. Over the next 10 years, the long-term projections are expected to be about 20 beds higher than the previous projections. This is because the long-term population forecast was updated by the DOF to reflect more people moving into the county than previously anticipated.

² The at-risk population was based on the age distribution of people in the jail. This distribution was used with population estimates from the California Department of Finance (https://dof.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/352/2023/07/P2C_County_Age-Group_Sex.xlsx) to create a weighted average of the expected population growth in the county.

³ The jail population was broken down into five-year age groups for both men and women. These five-year age groups were compared to the Department of Finance expected population growth for Santa Barbara County to estimate an overall 10-year growth rate for those who are the highest risk for occupying a jail bed.

FIGURE 4.



Without changes in policy or practice, the current jail population is expected to average around 750 inmates in 2025. By the end of the ten-year projections, the population is expected to rise by 60 beds or, just over 9 percent, to a level of over 800 inmates in jail on a given day.

POLICY CHANGES

The jail projections presented above assume that policy and practice continue as they have for the past three years. However, the County is actively working on policies and practices that will reduce the future jail population. One of these policy changes is the Public Defender’s READY Program. This program provides early representation for individuals charged with certain crimes and is expected to reduce the amount of time that defendants spend in jail. The preliminary analysis of this program, described in more detail in the appendix below, is estimated to have already reduced the jail population by 14 beds by reducing the average length of stay of individuals receiving a READY interview. The length of stay reduction is estimated to be 12 days, or nearly 48 percent. The jail projections above reflect the initial reduction from READY as the baseline population already reflects the 14-bed reduction. Expansion of this program to the south county is just under way and will likely have a similar impact on the jail population for south county defendants. Currently well under half of eligible defendants receive a READY interview in the north county, meaning there are additional reductions possible if the program were to further expand in the north county.

Proposition 36 will also likely impact the jail population through increased penalties for certain drug and property offenses. While the law changed became effective on 12/18/2024 it is still too early to determine the impact on the long-term jail population, but it will likely increase the future jail population.

Changes to the bail schedule will likely have the opposite effect as Proposition 36. Increasing the number of individuals who can be released with no monetary conditions will reduce the amount of time that individuals spend in jail. It is unclear how great an impact this change will have on the jail. Both Proposition 36 and changes to the bail schedule should be tracked in 2025 to determine their impact on the long-term jail population.

CONCLUSION

The number of people in jail has been stable over the past three years, with between 700 to 800 people in jail on a given day. The population is up from the pandemic lows, but still well below the pre-pandemic population. The Department of Finance projects that Santa Barbara County's population will grow over the next 10 years. We expect this increase in county residents to result in a small increase in the jail population if no action is taken to reduce the number of intakes or the average length of stay in jail.

The Public Defender's READY program has been underway for the past year and initial analyses show it is reducing the jail population. Expansion of this program into the south county will likely further reduce the jail population. The policy and law changes listed above will likely have opposite impacts on the jail population so it is unclear how the long-term jail population will be impacted by these changes. We will continue to closely monitor the jail population and provide updated estimates as data becomes available.

APPENDIX A: READY ANALYSIS

Based on data received from the Public Defender's Office, there were 639 READY interviews in 2024, with the monthly total growing each month through April and then declining sharply in May. Twenty-eight percent of individuals with a READY interview had no arraignment, these individuals were excluded from the analysis below. On average, there were 41 interviews per month with an arraignment in 2024.

When possible, this data was merged with Santa Barbara County jail data to compare the length of stay for individuals who received a READY interview to individuals who did not. After speaking with the Santa Barbara Public Defender's Office, we decided to focus on arraignments for the six-month period between June 2024 and November 2024. This allowed five months for implementation issues to be worked out on the front end and did not include December 2024 since not enough time had passed to capture jail length of stay. In addition, we focused the analysis on misdemeanor and wobbler cases as those are the types of cases most likely to receive a READY interview.

Comparing individuals from Santa Maria who received a READY interview, had their first arraignment event between June 2024 and November 2024, and had a misdemeanor or wobbler as their most serious offense to similar individuals who did not receive a READY interview, we see a reduction in the average length of stay of just over 12 days or a 48 percent reduction. Between June 2024 and November 2024 there were just over 34 READY interviews per month with an arraignment. Assuming the roughly 34 people per month who receive a READY interview continues into the future, this is expected to reduce the jail population by nearly 14 beds on a given day. Based on the current data, most individuals who were in jail and arraigned in Santa Maria did not receive a READY interview. Using 2024 data we see

that 73 percent of Santa Maria bookings for a new arrest with a matching arraignment did not have a READY interview. As this program continues to reach more clients and potentially expands to south County the impact will likely be larger.

More detail on the analysis: The first step was to merge public defender data with jail data. That was accomplished using the county identification number (CID). However, the CID was not always available in the public defender's data, so we were not able to match those individuals with a corresponding jail record. The jail booking also had to take place within seven days of the arraignment or READY interview. With perfect data, Public Defender READY interview records should match to jail records since the interviews were given while the client was in jail. Because of data issues, only 89 percent of the records matched. For this analysis we assumed the records that did not match had a similar length of stay as those that did match.

We also found that 73 percent of 2024 arraignments in Santa Maria for a misdemeanor or wobbler, with a matched jail record and booking type of new arrest or detainer, did not have a READY interview. We used this group as our comparison group and found that those with a READY interview had a shorter length of stay in jail. One additional adjustment we needed to make to the jail length of stay was to cap jail time at 60 days. This was done because not enough time had passed for all individuals in our analysis group to be released from jail. We were able to track everyone's jail stay for at least 60 days but have no way of knowing when people who are still in jail will be released. Therefore, all jail stays over 60 days were assumed to stay only 60 days for this analysis. If READY interviews have a significant impact on jail stays of over 60 days this estimate will understate the true impact. Using this truncated jail length of stay estimate we found that those with a READY interview stay for 13 days compared to those without an interview who stayed for just over 25 days. While not included in this analysis, the length of stay for arraignments in Santa Barbara with a matching jail record was 27 days.