

# Dane County: Selected for strategic Pretrial Planning project

Posted on Thursday, Feb 5, 2026

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

DANE COUNTY - Dane County has been selected by the national Advancing Pretrial Policy and Research (APPR) initiative to participate in [Pathways to Pretrial Advancement](#), a competitive program supporting jurisdictions committed to improving fairness, effectiveness, and public safety in their pretrial justice systems.

As one of only eight local jurisdictions selected nationwide, Dane County will receive 12 months of technical assistance from APPR experts to review its pretrial system, analyze data, and engage in strategic planning. The process will result in a detailed implementation plan with clear goals and performance metrics aligned with evidence-based best practices.

“We want a justice system that is effective, fair, and results-oriented,” said Dane County Executive Melissa Agard. “This process allows Dane County to examine critical decision points from the first point of contact with law enforcement through case resolution, using data and evidence to help identify where we can improve outcomes while strengthening community safety and well-being.”

The initiative emphasizes systemwide collaboration and includes an assessment for potential research partnerships by the [Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities](#) (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame. County stakeholders will build evaluation skills and explore opportunities for research to inform future policy decisions.

Pretrial justice protects community safety while upholding the rights of people accused of a crime to be presumed innocent. The U.S. Supreme Court has stated unequivocally that “In our society, liberty is the norm, and detention prior to trial or without trial is the carefully limited exception.” Effective pretrial systems focus on

detaining those who pose significant public safety or flight risks while releasing those with appropriate services designed to help them return to court and remain law-abiding during the pretrial period.

“It is vital our pretrial system makes deliberate and informed decisions throughout the process,” said Judge Nicholas McNamara, Chair of the Community Justice Council – Pretrial Subcommittee. “By using jail only when necessary to protect community safety, we uphold constitutional principles and deliver safer, more equitable outcomes for our community.” The technical assistance grant will contribute to the Pretrial Alternatives goals in the Dane County Community Justice Council (CJC) strategic plan for the CJC is available [here](#).

This work builds on Dane County’s ongoing commitment to justice reform and positions the county as a national leader in data-driven, collaborative approaches to public safety. “Pretrial justice is the front door to the criminal justice system. When we get it right, communities are safer and outcomes improve for all.” said Colleen Clark Bernhardt, Director of the Dane County Office of Justice Reform. The Dane County Office of Justice Reform will be coordinating this effort.

### **About APPR**

[APPR](#) is led by the Center for Effective Public Policy (cepp.com) with support from Arnold Ventures. Learn more at [advancingpretrial.org](https://advancingpretrial.org).

### **About LEO**

[LEO](#) is a research center that partners with governments and nonprofits to rigorously evaluate programs that help people move out of poverty. Learn more at <https://leo.nd.edu/>.