

# NJ now a leader in showing that bail reform works as expected

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Nearly three years ago, New Jersey replaced its system of releasing defendants based on posting cash bail with one that evaluates whether a defendant would pose a safety risk to the public if released.

At that time, some expressed fears that as a result crime would increase, many defendants would skip their court dates and the court system would be thrown into chaos. None of that has happened.

In fact, violent crimes in New Jersey have declined, from 21,914 in 2016 to 18,357 last year, according to the FBI.

A new report using state data — “Evaluation of Pretrial Justice System Reforms” — has found that those arrested while on pretrial release increased a negligible 1% after bail reform. And while there has been a slight uptick in defendants missing court appearances — up about 4 percentage points — the effect on the time it takes to resolve cases also looks negligible.

The big change happened exactly where it was expected — the jail population in New Jersey plunged 45% under the new safety-evaluation rules.

The administrative director of New Jersey courts, Judge Glenn Grant, told the New York Daily News, “Absolutely, it’s working.”

The New Jersey American Civil Liberties Union, a strong supporter of the reform, said it was far better than cash bail, “a rotten system that preyed on poor people and just extracted wealth.”

Area counties seem to have done well, exceeding expectations on reducing incarceration under bail reform.

Atlantic County had 12% fewer defendants in jail than expected, with 15% fewer in Cumberland and Cape May counties.

Atlantic County led the state in the percentage of defendants released without conditions, 88%. The comparable figure for Cape May and Cumberland counties was 65%. That may not be an issue, but Atlantic officials should review their practices and outcomes to ensure they're not erring on the side of unconditional releases.

New Jersey led the nation in replacing cash bail with a fairer system that is based on the public's interest in safety.

With each round of data on how that system is working, the state is helping give others the courage to do likewise.