Criminal Justice Reform

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Criminal Justice Reform Policy

Dave Biggers for Louisville Mayor 2026

Executive Summary

Louisville's criminal justice system perpetuates injustice while failing to deliver safety. With **1,271 people in jail beds on an average day in 2024** (Louisville Metro Department of Corrections fact sheet, 2024), a **two-tier justice system** where wealth determines freedom, and **unequal treatment** in every stage from arrest to sentencing, our system embodies the opposite of equal justice under law.

My Vision:

Justice that heals communities rather than destroying them. A system that holds people accountable while providing pathways to redemption. **Alternatives to incarceration** for non-violent offenses. **Treatment instead of punishment** for addiction and mental illness. **Second chances** through expungement and reentry support.

Key Proposals:

1. **Bail Reform & Pretrial Services** – End wealth-based detention, $5M annually
2. **Diversion Programs** – Treatment and accountability instead of incarceration, $8M annually
3. **Reentry & Expungement** – Remove barriers to employment and housing, $4M annually
4. **Legal Aid Expansion** – Equal access to justice regardless of income, $3M annually
5. **Prosecutorial Accountability** – Data-driven equity in charging decisions, $2M

annually

Budget Impact:

$22 million annually within $1.13 billion budget
– Funded through $40M+ in reduced incarceration costs
– Creates 150+ jobs (case managers, attorneys, counselors)
– Saves $60M+ over 4 years while improving outcomes

Current Situation: A System That Fails Everyone

The Incarceration Crisis:

Louisville Metro Corrections:
– **1,271 people in jail beds** on an average day in 2024, plus 663 on home incarceration (LMDC fact sheet, 2024)
– **Average length of stay:** 44 days (LMDC fact sheet, 2024)
– **Cost:** $161 per person per day in a jail bed, $9 on home incarceration (LMDC fact sheet, 2024)

Wealth-Based Justice:
– Poor defendants jailed because they can’t afford bail
– Wealthy defendants released immediately regardless of danger
– Pretrial detention causes job loss, eviction, family separation
– Many plead guilty just to end detention—even when innocent

Failure to Reduce Crime:
– **Recidivism rate:** 30.32% of people released from Kentucky state prisons in 2023 were re-incarcerated within 24 months (Kentucky Department of Corrections, 2025 Annual Report)
– **Root causes unaddressed:** Addiction, mental illness, poverty, trauma
– **Collateral consequences:** Legal penalties that continue after the sentence is served
– **Cycle of reincarceration:** Barriers to jobs/housing guarantee return to crime

Who Suffers Most:

Poor Defendants: Jailed because they can’t pay bail—losing jobs, homes, and time with their families while wealthy defendants go home

Families: Children with an incarcerated parent carry generational trauma and poverty

Victims: System focused on punishment rather than accountability, healing, or prevention

Taxpayers: $68.0 million a year (all funds) for Metro's Department of Corrections (adopted FY2026-27 budget) for an approach that doesn't reduce crime or improve safety

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My Vision: Justice That Works

Measurable Outcomes (4 Years):

- **50% reduction** in pretrial detention
- **40% reduction** in overall jail population
- **20% recidivism rate**, down from about 30% today
- **Equal treatment** in bail, charging, and sentencing, whatever a defendant can pay or wherever they live
- **$36.5M annual savings** from reduced incarceration
- **5,000+ people** connected to treatment, jobs, housing instead of jailed

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Detailed Policy Proposals

1. Bail Reform & Pretrial Services

See Glossary Terms: Bail Reform, Pretrial Detention, Pretrial Services, Money Bail, Risk Assessment

End Wealth-Based Detention:

The Problem: Louisville jails unconvicted people solely because they can't afford bail. This violates presumption of innocence and due process, at taxpayer expense.

My Solution:

Risk Assessment, Not Wealth:
– **Judges use validated risk assessment tools** evaluating danger and flight risk
– **Low-risk defendants released** regardless of ability to pay
– **High-risk defendants detained** regardless of wealth
– **Eliminate cash bail** for most misdemeanors and non-violent felonies
– **Transparency:** Publish bail decisions by charge, amount, and neighborhood

Expanded Pretrial Services:
– **Expand capacity** to 1,000 pretrial slots

– **Services:** Court date reminders, check-ins, electronic monitoring, treatment connections
– **Staffing:** 40 pretrial services officers
– **Cost:** a jail bed costs $161 a day, home incarceration $9 (LMDC fact sheet, 2024)
– **Support services:** Job placement, housing assistance, mental health/substance abuse treatment

Budget: $5 million annually
– Pretrial services staff and operations: $4M
– Risk assessment technology: $500K
– Legal aid for bail hearings: $500K

Expected Outcomes:
– Release 500+ low-risk defendants from jail
– Save $20M annually in reduced detention costs (a conservative figure: at $161 a day, 500 fewer people held before trial would save about $29M a year)
– 95%+ court appearance rate
– Eliminate wealth-based detention disparities

2. Diversion Programs: Treatment Not Incarceration

See Glossary Terms: Diversion Program, Drug Court, Mental Health Court, Pre-Arrest Diversion, Restorative Justice

The Approach: For non-violent offenses driven by addiction, mental illness, or poverty, **treatment and accountability work better than incarceration**.

Pre-Arrest Diversion:
– **Police discretion:** Officers can divert instead of arrest for minor offenses
– **Immediate connection:** To Community Wellness Centers for services
– **No criminal record:** Successful completion means no arrest/prosecution
– **Eligible offenses:** Drug possession, shoplifting, trespassing, prostitution
– **Partnerships:** LMPD, Community Wellness Centers, treatment providers
– **Budget:** $2M annually

Drug Court Expansion:
– **Expanded capacity:** 500 participants
– **Intensive supervision:** Weekly court appearances, frequent drug testing
– **Treatment:** Inpatient or outpatient based on need
– **Graduated sanctions:** Accountability for non-compliance short of jail
– **Successful completion:** Charges dismissed, record expunged
– **Budget:** $3M annually

Mental Health Court:
– **New specialty court** for defendants with serious mental illness
– **Treatment plans:** Developed by mental health professionals, monitored by court

– **Medication management:** Ensuring compliance with treatment
– **Housing support:** Preventing homelessness that exacerbates mental illness
– **Peer support:** People with lived experience supporting participants
– **Budget:** $2M annually

Restorative Justice Programs:
– **Victim-offender mediation:** For property crimes and minor assaults
– **Accountability:** Offenders face victims, understand harm, make amends
– **Restitution:** Repay victims rather than just serve time
– **Community service:** Repair harm to community
– **Eligible:** First-time, non-violent offenders
– **Budget:** $1M annually

Total Diversion Budget: $8 million annually

Expected Outcomes:
– 2,000+ people diverted from incarceration annually
– 60%+ successful completion rate
– 70% reduction in recidivism vs. incarcerated comparison group
– $25M annual savings vs. incarceration
– Victims receive restitution and accountability

3. Reentry Support & Expungement

See Glossary Terms: Reentry, Expungement, Collateral Consequences, Second Chances, Fair Chance Hiring, Ban the Box

The Challenge: Many Jefferson County residents have criminal records that create lasting employment and housing barriers. Statewide, 30.32% of people released from Kentucky state prisons in 2023 were re-incarcerated within 24 months (Kentucky Department of Corrections, 2025 Annual Report).

Comprehensive Reentry Services:

Louisville Reentry Center:
– **One-stop hub** for people leaving incarceration
– **Case management:** Personalized support for 18 months post-release
– **Services:** ID/documents, housing assistance, job placement, benefits enrollment
– **Peer support:** People with successful reentry experiences as mentors
– **Family reunification:** Parenting classes, family therapy
– **Budget:** $2M annually

Employment Pathways:
– **Job training:** Skilled trades, healthcare, technology (6-12 week programs)
– **Job placement:** Partnerships with fair chance employers

– **Transitional jobs:** 6-month paid work experience for hardest-to-employ
– **Entrepreneurship:** Small business development support
– **Incentives:** Tax credits for employers hiring people with records
– **Budget:** $3M annually (through Workforce Development coordination)

Housing First for Reentry:
– **Immediate housing:** 100 housing vouchers for people leaving jail/prison
– **Supportive services:** Case management preventing homelessness
– **Partnerships:** Housing Authority, nonprofits, landlords
– **Success metric:** 80%+ housed 12 months post-release
– **Budget:** $1.5M annually

Expungement Clinics:
– **Monthly clinics** at Community Wellness Centers and libraries
– **Free legal help:** Volunteer attorneys guide eligible people through process
– **Eliminate fees:** Metro covers $500+ cost per expungement
– **Automated expungement:** For eligible offenses, automatic after waiting period
– **Goal:** 2,000+ expungements annually
– **Budget:** $500K annually

Ban the Box:
– **Metro employment:** Remove conviction history from initial applications
– **Delay inquiry:** Consider criminal record only after interview
– **Individualized assessment:** Evaluate relevance to specific job
– **Private employer incentives:** Encourage fair chance hiring practices
– **No cost** (policy change)

Total Reentry Budget: $4 million annually

Expected Outcomes:
– 70% of participants employed 12 months post-release
– 20% recidivism rate
– 2,000 criminal records expunged annually
– $15M saved annually from reduced reincarceration

4. Legal Aid Expansion: Equal Access to Justice

See Glossary Terms: Legal Aid, Public Defender, Access to Justice, Indigent Defense, Civil Legal Services

The Crisis: Legal aid in Louisville cannot serve everyone who qualifies. Low-income people face eviction, custody loss, domestic violence, and consumer fraud without attorneys while opposing parties have lawyers.

Criminal Defense:

– **Strengthen Public Defender support:** While state-run, Metro can supplement
– **Holistic defense:** Social workers, investigators, mitigation specialists
– **Early representation:** Attorneys at first appearance, not days later
– **Budget:** $1M annually Metro contribution

Civil Legal Aid:
– **Partnership expansion:** With Legal Aid Society, Access to Justice Foundation
– **Weekly clinics:** At Community Wellness Centers in underserved neighborhoods
– **Focus areas:** Eviction defense, expungement, custody, domestic violence, benefits
– **Lawyer capacity:** Fund 10 additional legal aid attorneys citywide
– **Budget:** $2M annually

Total Legal Aid Budget: $3 million annually

Expected Outcomes:
– Serve 5,000+ additional people annually
– Prevent 1,000+ evictions
– Obtain 2,000+ expungements
– Win 500+ custody/domestic violence cases

5. Prosecutorial Accountability & Equity

See Glossary Terms: Commonwealth Attorney, Prosecutorial Discretion, Plea Bargain, Charging Decisions

The Problem: Commonwealth Attorney is independently elected, limiting mayoral control. But data transparency and advocacy can drive reform.

Data Transparency:
– **Publish charging data:** By charge severity, offense type, and neighborhood
– **Plea offer tracking:** Document disparities in plea bargains offered
– **Conviction rates:** Track outcomes by prosecutor and case type
– **Equal treatment audit:** Annual independent analysis of prosecutorial decisions
– **Budget:** $500K annually (data systems, analysis)

Advocacy for Prosecutorial Reform:
– **Decline low-level charges:** Possession, trespassing, quality-of-life offenses
– **Expand diversion eligibility:** Treatment over incarceration when appropriate
– **Eliminate charge stacking:** Prosecute actual conduct, not maximum possible charges
– **Sentence recommendations:** Advocate for treatment, alternatives to incarceration
– **Youth diversion:** Expand options for juvenile offenders

Support Progressive Prosecution:
– **Public advocacy:** Use mayoral platform to support reforms
– **Community organizing:** Build grassroots pressure for change

– **Electoral support:** Endorse reform-minded Commonwealth Attorney candidates
– **Budget:** $1.5M annually (organizing, data, advocacy)

Total Prosecutorial Accountability Budget: $2 million annually

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The gang-enhancement statute (HB 169). Kentucky's 2018 gang-statute revision broadened the legal definition of a "gang" — turning ordinary association among people who know each other into a chargeable conspiracy. I opposed it in 2018 and opposes the enhancement it created now: it fills jail beds without making anyone safer, and it is the same over-incarceration logic this platform's bail-reform and diversion programs exist to reverse. Louisville's prosecutors should decline to seek the gang enhancement absent an actual, provable criminal enterprise — not mere association.

Budget Summary

Total Annual Criminal Justice Reform Budget: $22 Million

Initiative	Annual Cost	4-Year Total	People Served
Bail Reform & Pretrial Services	$5M	$20M	500+ released
Diversion Programs	$8M	$32M	2,000+ diverted
Reentry & Expungement	$4M	$16M	5,000+ supported
Legal Aid Expansion	$3M	$12M	5,000+ served
Prosecutorial Accountability	$2M	$8M	System-wide impact
TOTAL	**$22M**	**$88M**	**10,000+ annually**

Funding Sources (Budget-Neutral):

Reduced Incarceration Costs:
– 500 fewer pretrial detainees: $20M annually saved (a conservative figure: at $161 a day, 500 fewer people held before trial would save about $29M a year)
– 300 fewer sentenced inmates: $15M annually saved
– Reduced recidivism: $10M annually saved
– **Total savings the budget counts: $36.5M annually**, from bail reform and diversion shrinking the jail. The estimates above add to $45M; the other $8.5M, from reduced recidivism, is not counted until it is proven.

Net Savings: $26.74M annually now ($36.5M saved – $9.76M invested now), $14.5M once the full $22M program runs, more if the other $8.5M is proven

How the reallocation ledger funds it: the budget counts $36.5M of these savings, from bail reform and diversion. $9.76M of that stays in Corrections and pays for this policy now: bail reform and pretrial services ($5M) and $4.76M of diversion. Reentry support ($4M), legal aid

($3M), prosecutor accountability ($2M) and the rest of diversion ($3.24M) are added as the jail savings are proven and outside money arrives; the other $26.74M of the jail savings goes first to the 18 wellness centers ($20.51M) and the participatory budget ($6.23M), so Corrections goes from $67.96M to $41.21M.

Return on Investment:
– Every person diverted from jail saves Metro the cost of a jail bed, $161 a day (LMDC fact sheet, 2024)
– Every expungement enables employment generating tax revenue
– Reduced recidivism prevents future crime costs

Implementation Timeline

First 100 Days:

1. Appoint Criminal Justice Reform Director
2. Convene judges, prosecutors, defenders, community for reform planning
3. Launch pretrial services expansion
4. Begin expungement clinics at 3 locations
5. Publish first prosecutorial data transparency report

Year 1:

- Expand pretrial services capacity to 900 slots
- Launch pre-arrest diversion pilot
- Expand drug court to 300 participants
- Open Louisville Reentry Center
- Conduct 1,000 expungements
- Reduce pretrial jail population 30%

Years 2-4:

- Reach full pretrial services capacity (1,000 slots)
- Mental health court operational
- Drug court serves 500 participants annually
- 2,000 expungements annually
- 50% reduction in pretrial detention
- 40% reduction in overall jail population

- Recidivism rate down to 20%

Success Metrics

Jail Population (Quarterly):

- Pretrial detention: down 50%
- Overall jail population: down 40%
- Length of stay: 45 days → 20 days average

Diversion & Alternatives (Annual):

- People diverted: 2,000+
- Successful completion: 60%+
- Recidivism rate: 20%

Equity (Annual):

- Same bail for the same charge in every neighborhood
- Equal plea offers for equal charges regardless of income or neighborhood
- Equal sentencing outcomes for same offenses

Economic (Annual):

- Cost savings: $36.5M from reduced incarceration
- People employed post-reentry: 70%+
- Expungements: 2,000+
- Tax revenue from employment: $5M+

Related Glossary Terms

Core Criminal Justice: Bail Reform, Pretrial Detention, Pretrial Services, Diversion Program, Drug Court, Mental Health Court, Restorative Justice, Plea Bargain

Reentry & Records: Expungement, Reentry, Collateral Consequences, Fair Chance Hiring, Ban the Box, Second Chances

Legal System: Public Defender, Commonwealth Attorney, Legal Aid, Prosecutorial Discretion

Full glossary: rundaverun.org/glossary

FAQ

Q: Won't releasing people pretrial make us less safe?

A: **Risk assessment releases low-risk people, detains dangerous people regardless of wealth.** Current system releases wealthy dangerous people who can pay bail while jailing poor non-dangerous people. Risk-based decisions improve public safety compared to wealth-based detention. Evidence from peer cities shows no increase in crime when pretrial release expands based on risk assessment.

Q: Don't people need consequences for their actions?

A: **Absolutely—but effective consequences that change behavior, not just punishment.** For addiction, treatment works better than jail. For mental illness, medication and housing work better than incarceration. For poverty-driven crime, jobs and stability prevent reoffending. Diversion programs hold people accountable while addressing root causes—more effective than incarceration that doesn't reduce recidivism.

Q: Can Louisville afford this when crime is high?

A: **We can't afford NOT to reform.** Metro's Department of Corrections, which runs the jail, is budgeted at $68.0 million, all funds, for FY2026-27 (adopted budget) for an approach that doesn't reduce crime. This plan costs $22M while saving $36.5M—**net savings of $14.5M annually**—while actually reducing recidivism and crime. We're currently spending more for worse results.

Conclusion

Louisville's criminal justice system fails everyone: **Victims don't get justice or healing. Offenders don't get accountability or rehabilitation. Communities don't get safety. Taxpayers don't get value.**

I offer evidence-based reforms that deliver what the current system doesn't: **Real accountability. Real treatment. Real second chances. Real safety. Real justice.**

The choice is clear: Continue expensive failure? Or embrace proven reforms that work?

I will deliver justice that actually works.

Paid for by Dave Biggers

Louisville Crime Data Dashboard

Explore interactive crime statistics for Louisville neighborhoods:

Louisville Crime Data Dashboard

Explore neighborhood-by-neighborhood crime statistics and see how my mini substation plan will dramatically improve response times and public safety across Louisville.

Data source: Louisville Metro Open Data Portal integration pending

Search Your Neighborhood

Search

Filter by Crime Level:

All Neighborhoods High Crime (700+ incidents) Medium Crime (400-700) Low Crime (<400)

Filter by Deployment Phase:

Phase 1 (Year 1 - Highest Priority) Phase 2 (Year 2)

Sort Results:

Most Incidents First Fewest Incidents First Slowest Response First By Deployment Phase

The Data is Clear: We Need Change

My mini substation plan is designed to dramatically cut 911 response times in the neighborhoods that need it most. Join us in bringing real public safety solutions to every Louisville neighborhood.

Read the Full Public Safety Plan Volunteer for Change

What This Means for YOUR Neighborhood

Every Louisville neighborhood is unique. Enter your ZIP code to see how this policy directly impacts your community:

Find Your Mini Substation

Enter your ZIP code to see when your neighborhood will receive a community police substation.

Find My Substation

63 mini substations across Louisville, at least one in every ZIP code, phased in over 4 years.

Part of my comprehensive public safety plan.

See the Budget Impact

Explore how this policy fits into my comprehensive $1.13 billion budget plan:

How Does My Budget Affect You?

See your personalized impact - zero tax increase, real benefits

Household Income $50,000 50000

Children in JCPS 0 0

 Your ZIP Code

Your Personal Impact

How we calculate: Benefits based on average family savings from wellness center access ($800/year), youth program value (after-school + summer jobs), and your specific mini substation timeline. All benefits come from the same $1.13B budget - zero tax increase.

Share your results with friends and family:

 Share My Results

⚖ Compare This Policy

See how my approach differs from current administration policies:

⚖ My Plan, Category by Category

Pick a category to see what my plan does, how it is paid for, and when it arrives.

 Share This Plan Print This Plan
 Public Safety Wellness Youth Economy Housing Transparency

Public Safety & Policing

My Plan

Community-based mini substations

Approach

- 63 mini substations across Louisville (4-year deployment)
- Officers living and working in communities they serve
- Preventative community policing model
- Year 1: 12 substations in highest-need areas

Timeline Year 1-4 phased rollout
Budget Same $1.13 billion; no new taxes; priorities re-pointed inside the adopted budget
Impact Projected response times: 3-5 minutes (campaign estimate)

Mental Health & Wellness

My Plan

Wellness centers placed by health need

Approach

- I will place 18 Community Wellness Centers by health need (CDC PLACES 2024 plus Census poverty data)
- Mental health counseling, addiction support
- Youth programs, family services
- At least one center in every LMPD division

Timeline 6 centers a year over Years 1-3
Budget $45M a year when fully built (18 centers at $2.5M each), inside the adopted budget
Impact Accessible care within every neighborhood, preventative focus

Youth Development

My Plan

Comprehensive youth investment

Approach

- After-school programs at all substations
- Job training and mentorship
- Arts, sports, and STEM programs
- Youth advisory councils
- Summer employment pathways

Timeline Immediate implementation with substation rollout
Budget $32.5M for youth programs, inside the adopted budget
Impact Accessible programs in every neighborhood

Economic Development

My Plan

Community wealth building

Approach

- Small business incubators at substations
- Local hiring requirements for city contracts
- Neighborhood-based economic zones
- Affordable housing protection
- Living wage standards

Timeline Immediate policy changes, 4-year infrastructure build
Budget Same $1.13 billion; no new taxes; priorities re-pointed inside the adopted budget
Impact Jobs and wealth stay in neighborhoods
□

Housing & Affordability

My Plan

Housing as a human right

Approach

- Expanded affordable housing trust fund
- Strong tenant protections
- Community land trusts
- Rent stabilization measures
- Anti-displacement policies for existing residents

Timeline Immediate policy changes
Budget Same $1.13 billion; no new taxes; priorities re-pointed inside the adopted budget
Impact Protects residents, prevents displacement
□

Government Transparency

My Plan

Radical transparency

Approach

- Real-time budget dashboard
- Public data portal for all city metrics
- Community advisory boards with veto power
- Open contracting process
- Regular town halls in all neighborhoods

Timeline Immediate implementation
Budget Low-cost digital infrastructure
Impact Citizens empowered with information and decision-making power

The Choice is Clear

Louisville deserves transformative change, not more of the same. Join us in building a city that works for everyone.

Join the Campaign Read Full Policy Platform

Share This Policy

Help spread the word about my vision for Louisville:

Related Policies You Might Like

How to Vote for Me

I am a write-in candidate: in the race for Mayor, mark the write-in spot and write **DAVE BIGGERS** (the last name, Biggers, is required).

Early voting, no excuse needed: October 29–31 · Election Day: Tuesday, November 3, 6 AM to 6 PM. Registration for the November 3 election closed October 5.

✓ Check My Registration and Polling Place View All Election Dates →

Stay Updated on This Policy

Get notified when this policy is updated or when I speak about this issue in YOUR neighborhood.

* indicates a required field

Email Signup Information
Fax Number (Leave blank)
Name *
Email * We'll send you updates about the campaign
Zip Code 5-digit zip code (optional)
☐ I'm interested in volunteering! We'll send you information about volunteer opportunities
Sign Up

We use your details only to reach you about the campaign. Privacy Policy

Have Ideas to Improve This Policy?

This is YOUR city. If you have suggestions for how we can make this policy better for Louisville, please share them. Every idea is reviewed.

Suggest an Improvement for Louisville

Have an idea for improving Louisville? Share your policy suggestion below. Your voice matters in shaping our city's future.

Policy Title *
Description *
0/2000 characters

Category Select a category...
Your Name *
Your Email *
ZIP Code (Optional)
☐ I agree that my suggestion may be reviewed and potentially incorporated into campaign policy. My email will only be used to notify me about the status of my suggestion.
Submit Suggestion

NOT ME, WE.

Together, we make Louisville better for everyone.