



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Middlesex Sheriff's Office

Peter J. Koutoujian
Sheriff

400 Mystic Avenue
Medford, Massachusetts 02155

Phone (781) 960 2800
Fax (781) 960 2902

For Immediate Release
May 14, 2015

For more information:
Kevin Maccioli
Public Information Officer
781-960-2805/ 978-726-7825

Middlesex Sheriff's Office Releases Study of Pretrial Population *Report reviews pretrial detention & yields criminal justice reform recommendations*

BILLERICA, Mass. – Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian in conjunction with members of the Massachusetts State Senate today released a National Institute of Corrections (NIC) study focused on the pretrial population at the Middlesex House of Correction & Jail.

“As Sheriff I have witnessed a steady increase in our pretrial population over the last few years, and I felt the issue warranted a more in-depth analysis,” said Sheriff Koutoujian.

At the request of Senators Patricia Jehlen (D–Somerville) and Jamie Eldridge (D–Acton) who shared Sheriff Koutoujian’s concerns regarding the increase in population, the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office (MSO) requested technical assistance from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) in order to conduct a trend analysis of its pretrial population.

The study confirmed that over a six-year period (2008-2013) the average length of stay for pretrial defendants at the Middlesex Jail increased by nearly 24 percent, while the average daily population increased by 30 percent during that same period, from 593 detainees to 772.

The report also provided key recommendations to stakeholders. These include:

- Convening a criminal justice coordinating committee to implement recommendations and assess their effectiveness;
- Tracking data to measure outcomes to identify criminal justice trends; and
- Adopting a risk assessment tool to assist in determining high and low risk defendants.

“I’m grateful for Sheriff Koutoujian’s strong support for a comprehensive study of the pre-trial prison population in the Middlesex County House of Correction and Jail by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), and his commitment to reforming the pre-trial system as it currently exists,” said Sen. Eldridge. “As the Senate Chair of the Harm Reduction and Drug Law Reform Caucus in the Legislature, I am deeply committed to passing criminal justice reform that will reduce our state’s prison population, and reduce the disparate impact that system has on low-income people, especially in communities of color. The NIC study will help move this discussion forward.”

In response to the analysis conducted by the Middlesex Sheriff's Office and the NIC, the Massachusetts Trial Court has appointed Sheriff Koutoujian to the Probation Pretrial Services Task Force, a panel comprised of members from across the criminal justice community, focused on pretrial practice and assessment of the effectiveness of best practices. Originally formed in 2014 to examine pretrial practices across the Commonwealth, the task force has now undertaken the development of a pretrial risk assessment tool for use on a pilot basis in Middlesex County.

“Utilizing a validated risk assessment would provide objectivity, consistency, and reliability to this process, while making valid distinctions between high and low risk defendants,” according to the report.

“The Trial Court looks forward to collaborating with the Middlesex Sheriff and other stakeholders on the development and implementation of a pretrial risk assessment pilot program in Middlesex County,” said Trial Court Chief Justice Paula Carey.

“This report shows a troubling increase in the pretrial population and average length of stay,” said Sen. Jehlen. “The Sheriff and the Trial Court are great partners and the risk assessment pilot program is an important first step, but it is time for the legislature to pass a comprehensive pretrial reform package.”

“I applaud Sheriff Koutoujian and my Senate colleagues for requesting the NIC study. I have had serious concerns about the growth of the population at the Billerica Jail, and I appreciate that we now have the data to show how quickly it has been growing,” said Sen. Donnelly, who represents Billerica. “I look forward to bringing this issue before the legislature and working with the Sheriff and the Trial Court to implement meaningful reforms that ensure our pretrial process is fair and efficient.”

“With so much attention being focused on the issue of criminal justice reform, my hope is that these findings and recommendations can help guide policy discussions moving forward,” said Sheriff Koutoujian. “While the analysis was specific to Middlesex County, much of what we learned is applicable statewide. I look forward to working with the members of the Judiciary, the Legislature and my law enforcement colleagues to implement key reforms to make the system stronger and more equitable.”

The complete NIC study can be found on the Media Room page of the Middlesex Sheriff's Office website (www.middlesexsheriff.org).

###