



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

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PROPOSED GRANT AWARD

Department: The Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender

Grantee: Public Defender Office

Grantor: MacArthur Foundation

Request: Authorization to accept grant

Purpose: This award supports the Cook County Public Defender's Data Analytics Enhancement Program, a collaborative partnership between the Public Defender's Office and the Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy, and Practice at Loyola University Chicago to build and expand the office's data analytics and research and evaluation capacity by funding two new FTEs: a Chief Data Officer and a Data Entry Clerk. This award furthers the office's goals of implementing evidence-based operational decision making, reducing racial and ethnic inequities in the criminal system, and enhancing transparency and empowering communities with accessible defender data. .

Grant Amount: \$500,000.00

Grant Period: 1/1/2020 - 12/31/2021

Fiscal Impact: None

Accounts: None

Concurrences:

The Budget Department has received all requisite documents and determined the fiscal impact on Cook County, if any.

Summary: As a field, public defense has been relatively late to the practice of employing data to inform and improve legal representation, policy making and accountability. Too often, the critical work of defending individual clients has taken precedence over strategic efforts to understand the work at organizational and systems levels. As the voice for people most affected by the criminal system, public defenders - and their data - have an essential role to play in telling the larger story of the criminal justice system and shaping reform. Defender data is critical not only to efficient operations and informed policymaking within public defense agencies, but when shared, provides unique insights into the public's understanding of the criminal system. Unfortunately, most public defender offices lack the capacity to collect and present mission-critical data, let alone to draw insights from that data which can be translated into organizational or systemic action.

In 2019, the MacArthur Foundation made a Planning Grant to Loyola University Chicago's Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy and Practice (the Center) to assist CCPD with its data analytics capacity by first assessing gaps in data collection and developing recommendations for building the critical infrastructure necessary to collect and manage mission-critical data. Specifically, the partnership leverages Cook County's 2017 investment in a multi-million-dollar case management system called eDefender, harnessing the web-based software's sophisticated data management capabilities to better understand CCPD's work and its impact. Loyola is helping CCPD understand what additional information should be captured in eDefender to better understand complex factors in clients' experiences (i.e., both legal

and non-legal fields which capture the underlying causes of the behavior that may lead to involvement in the criminal justice system). With this essential foundation in place, the Office is well-positioned to move to the next step in creating lasting data analytics infrastructure which includes creating a new position whose sole function is to drive data collection and analysis within CCPD.

Advanced analytics capacity enables CCPD to draw meaning from mission-critical data, to translate insights into operational changes and to ask and answer larger and more complex research questions about criminal justice policy, practice and protocols. The data that CCPD will ultimately be able to capture and analyze will not only bolster CCPD's ability to contribute to the systemic reform initiatives of the MacArthur Foundation's Safety + Justice Challenge (SJC), but will enable CCPD to provide more effective legal representation, perform evidence-based management functions and identify and alleviate racial disparities that are reflected in the data. Further, having an in-house data scientist will allow CCPD to make certain data accessible to the community, enhancing transparency and accountability and positioning the CCPD to lead the conversation on criminal justice reform and serve as a model to encourage other defender offices throughout the country to take on a similar role.

CCPD and the Center will conduct the following activities over the 24-month Implementation Phase grant period:

- 1) Create internal research and evaluation capacity within the Cook County Public Defender's Office, including hiring a Chief Data Officer and a Data Clerk tasked with data collection in Misdemeanor court.
- 2) Build tools that facilitate the work of the CCPD to enhance database structure.
- 3) Conduct racial disparity analyses. In order to achieve the goal of reducing racial inequities in the criminal system, the CCPD and the Center will work collaboratively to evaluate the impact of policy and practice changes designed to address racial and ethnic disparities. Findings will be assembled into a data-driven racial equity policy roadmap, which can be shared with other defender offices to guide similar work in their local criminal justice systems.
- 4) Develop and implement ongoing performance measurement system. With the assistance of the Center, the CCPD will develop a series of office performance measures and a mechanism for routine monitoring of data that reflects office activities and outcomes.
- 5) Establish evidence-based decision-making protocols around key decision points. In the second year of the project, the CCPD and the Center will study current critical policies and practices within the office, addressing the complex relationship between case-level factors and case outcomes.
- 6) Create an open data strategy and share defender data. Employing data visualization tools, social media and partnership networks, the Chief Data Officer will establish a plan for enhancing CCPD's transparency by sharing critical defender data with the public.