



INLAND EMPIRE

LIVES

LOST

**A REPORT OF IN-CUSTODY DEATHS IN RIVERSIDE
AND SAN BERNARDINO BETWEEN 2011-2023**

10/01/2024
Public Comment
Luis Nolasco

THE INLAND EMPIRE

REPORT STATEMENT

"WHAT DO YOU EXPECT WHEN YOU GO TO JAIL? WELL, THE EXPECTATIONS WHEN GOING TO JAIL SHOULDN'T BE THAT YOU DIE."

— *Lisa Matus, mother of Richard Matus, Jr. who passed away on August 11th, 2022*

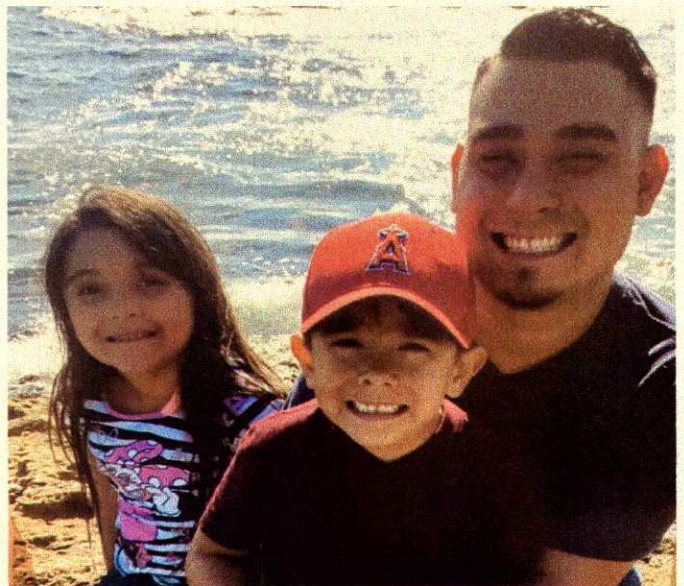
The Inland Region (composed of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties), also referred to as the "Inland Empire," is the second largest metropolitan area in California with a population of 4.6 million¹ residents. The region has experienced a rapid population growth in the past two decades, primarily due to rising housing costs in other areas and an increase in logistics jobs. This growth has outpaced the development of essential resources and support systems necessary for the well-being of residents. This imbalanced lack of resources has fostered a greater reliance on incarceration to address social issues such as homelessness, substance use, and mental health crises.

The reliance on incarceration and over-policing to resolve social issues has led to a system that has the capacity to jail around 11,000² people daily and is rife with problems, including an alarming rate of in-custody deaths.

This report covers the devastating toll that these deaths have had on communities in the region and the resulting crisis that can no longer be ignored.

We hope that the data and analysis in this report helps the Inland Region work toward a new vision of justice grounded in collective care, not retribution. A vision that focuses on investing in community-based alternatives, expanding care-first programs, and instituting robust oversight. This change will require courageous leadership, deep partnership with impacted communities, and unwavering commitment to the inherent worth of every human life. Together we can work toward creating a region that centers healing, care, and the well-being of its residents over handcuffs and cages.

We also want to acknowledge that when someone loses their life while interacting with law enforcement, their death is not isolated to that moment, cell, station, or jail. Their death impacts every person who knew and cared about them. We recognize that no data can fully express the harms of mass incarceration.



Richard Matus, Jr. (1993-2022) with his two children at the beach

THE INLAND EMPIRE

REPORT CONTEXT

Advocates across the state and locally are demanding law enforcement accountability for in-custody deaths. There is a tendency by law enforcement to downplay or outright deny their role when community members die in custody.

Absent accountability, we strive to educate our communities about the extent of in-custody deaths. We requested data about in-custody deaths from the State Attorney General's Office for the last 11 years (January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2023.) This report shares high-level findings from that data request, alongside additional data analysis from the Board of State and Community Corrections.

When it comes to analyzing in-custody deaths reported by the state, there are many limitations to the data collection, including, but not limited to, problematic grouping of race and gender, and inconsistencies in categories across facilities and stations.

DEFINITIONS

In-Custody Death

When someone is killed, or dies, at any point during contact with law enforcement. This includes during arrest, booking, pretrial detention, and incarceration post sentencing.

Pretrial Detention

When someone who is accused of a criminal offense is held in custody, while awaiting the outcome of their case. They are often detained simply because they cannot afford to pay bail.

ADP (Average Daily Population)

Daily population is the number of inmates housed in a facility in a day. Average daily population is the daily population divided by the number of days in the period of measurement.

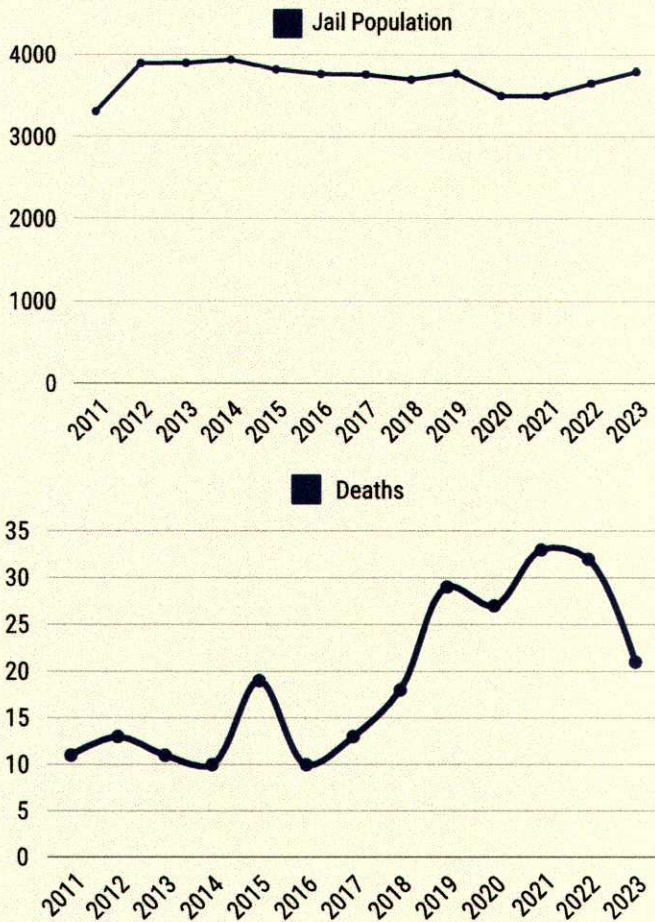
PREVIOUS WORK IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY

BRIEF HISTORY OF LOCAL JUSTICE WORK

- **DECEMBER 28, 1998** - On the evening of Dec. 28t, Riverside Police Department officers shot Tyisha Miller 23 times, while she lay in her vehicle. She was killed instantly. Her death sparked the rise of local movements for law enforcement accountability in the region.
- **MARCH 2020**: California began to implement shutdowns to reduce the spread of COVID-19. As a result, Riverside advocates sent a letter to Riverside Sheriff Bianco urging the release of medically vulnerable people from jail. Protests began in Riverside and San Bernardino demanding that people be released.
- **APRIL 2020**: Prison Law Office filed an emergency motion³ to protect people detained in Riverside County in response to Sheriff Bianco's failure to release people from custody.
- **SEPTEMBER 2021**: ACLU SoCal, Starting Over Inc. and Riverside All of Us or None sent a letter to the Attorney General of California urging an investigation into the Riverside Sheriff's Department.
- **APRIL 28, 2022**: Death of Alicia Upton⁴ - the first person to die in-custody in 2022, marking the beginning of the deadliest year for in-custody deaths in Riverside County in 15 years.⁵
- **SEPTEMBER 2022**: First rally held outside of the Robert Presley Detention Center in Downtown Riverside with families of those who died in jail.⁶
- **FEBRUARY 7, 2023**: Advocates sent a letter to the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) urging increased oversight of the Sheriff's Department with a focus on custody issues, including deaths.⁷
- **FEBRUARY 23, 2023**: California Attorney General Bonta announced pattern or practice investigation into the Riverside Sheriff's Department.
- **OCTOBER 31, 2023**: Rally and launch of the Riverside Sheriff Accountability Coalition (RSAC). Also on this date, RSAC delivered a letter signed by over 30 organizations to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors urging for the establishment of Sheriff oversight, funding of alternatives to incarceration, and separation of the Coroner from the Sheriff's Department.⁸
- **NOVEMBER 2023**: Riverside County Board of Supervisors agreed to perform a study on whether Riverside County should separate the Coroner's Office from the Sheriff's Department.
- **MARCH 12, 2024**: Sheriff-Coroner separation report was published.⁹ The Riverside County Board of Supervisors did not recommend separating the Coroner and the Sheriff's Department. The Board agreed to contract out autopsies where conflicts of interest may be implied and to create a family liaison within the Sheriff's Department to address in-custody deaths.
- **OCTOBER 1, 2024**: Release of Inland Region In-Custody Deaths Report.

RIVERSIDE TOTAL DEATHS

OVER TIME



While the average jail population remained the same since 2011, the number of deaths have increased **133%**.

Between 2011- 2023 an **average of 19 lives** were lost each year.

AT WHAT CUSTODIAL STAGE ARE DEATHS OCCURRING

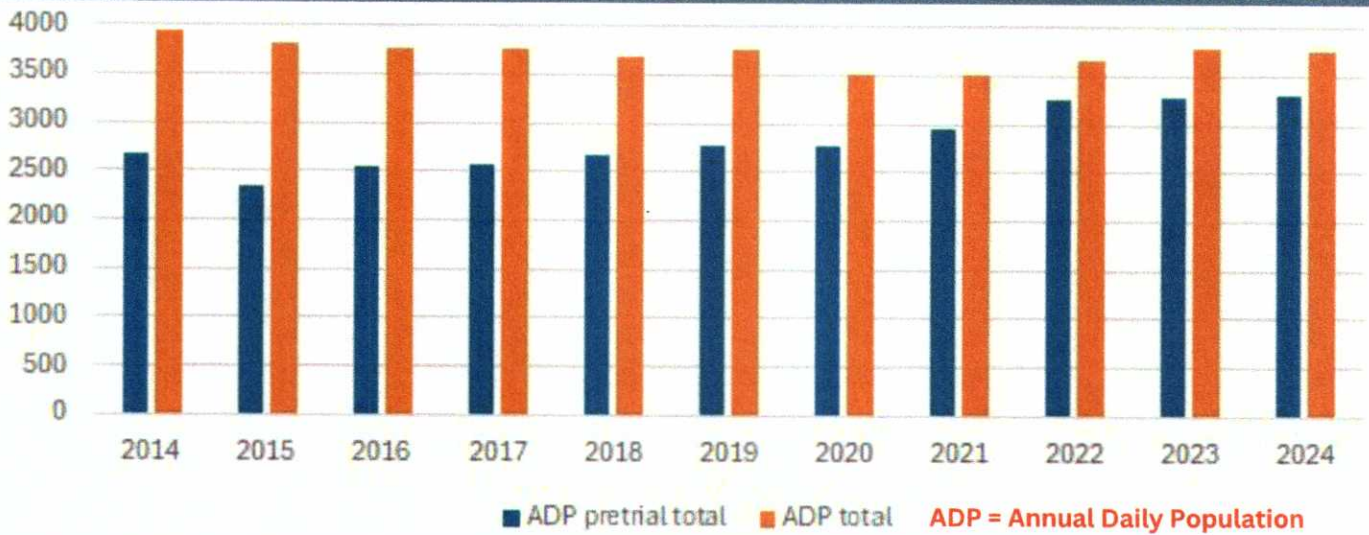
CUSTODY STATUS	# OF DEATHS
Process of Arrest	116
In Transit	2
Awaiting Booking	3
Booked - No Charges Filed	7
Booked - Awaiting Trial	89
Sentenced	17
Other	13

93%

OF DEATHS OCCUR BEFORE THE INCARCERATED PERSON'S CASE IS RESOLVED.

PRETRIAL DETENTION IN RIVERSIDE

RIVERSIDE AVERAGE PRETRIAL POPULATION VS TOTAL JAIL POPULATION



Riverside County jail system, on average, holds 3,725 people. According to data obtained from the BSCC, about 76% of those people are detained in Riverside County pretrial. This means that a majority of those currently incarcerated in county jails are waiting their day in court and are legally presumed innocent.

The pretrial population has only grown since 2014, hitting an all time high of 89% in 2022. This was also the deadliest year in terms of in-custody deaths for Riverside, with 19 reported deaths¹⁰ - the majority of whom were pretrial.

LOST WHILE AWAITING HIS DAY IN COURT



Cristian Miguel Viramontes was in-custody pretrial, awaiting his next court hearing, when he was found unresponsive in his cell at the Robert Presley Detention Center in Riverside, CA on February 5th 2023.

CRISTIAN WAS A WONDERFUL SON, BROTHER, DADDY, UNCLE, COUSIN, GRANDSON, NEPHEW, AND FRIEND WHO IN HIS OWN WAY TOUCHED THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND HIM.

— Noemi Bravo, Cristian's mother.

Cristian's family has filed a lawsuit against the Riverside Sheriff's Department for wrongful death.

RIVERSIDE DEMOGRAPHICS

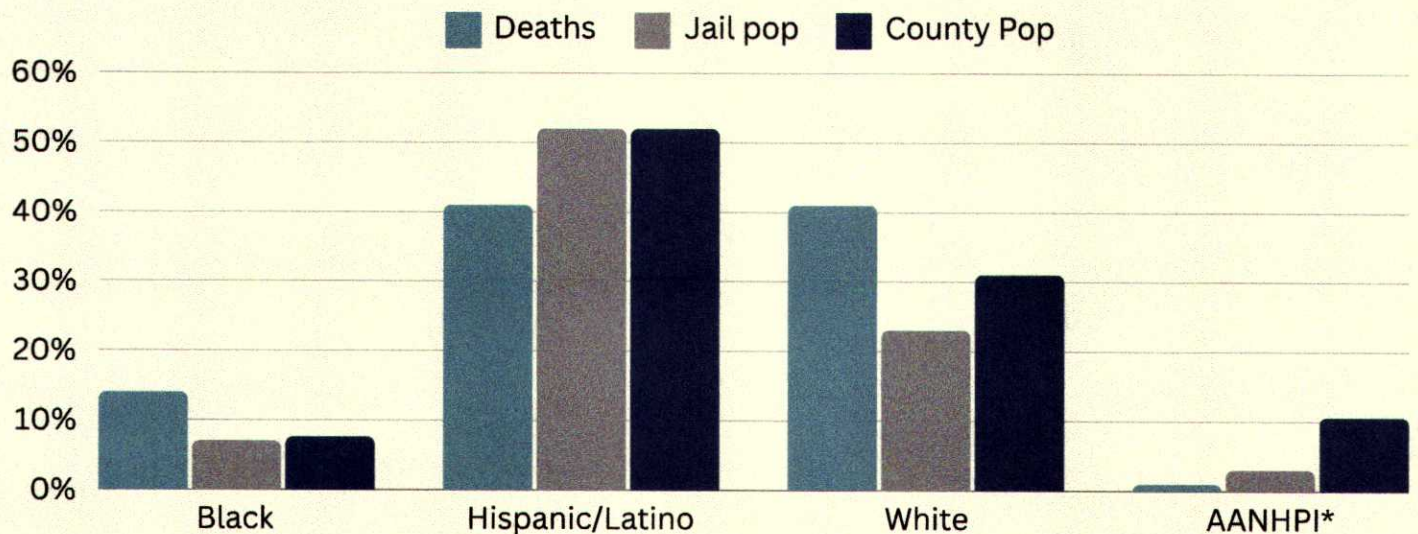
AGE

24 and under	19 people
25-34	65 people
35-44	68 people
45-54	42 people
55-64	31 people
65+	22 people

The youngest person who died while in Sheriff's custody was **18** and the oldest was **83**.

RACE/ ETHNICITY

Total In-Custody Deaths vs. Population Averages



Though only **8%** of Riverside residents identify as Black, **yet 14% of those that die in the Sheriff Department's custody are Black.** ¹¹

Note: The data displayed does not accurately reflect people who identify with multiple races/ethnicities, and [research shows that Latinx people are routinely misidentified ethnically and racially](#), likely skewing the results and any conclusions we might draw.

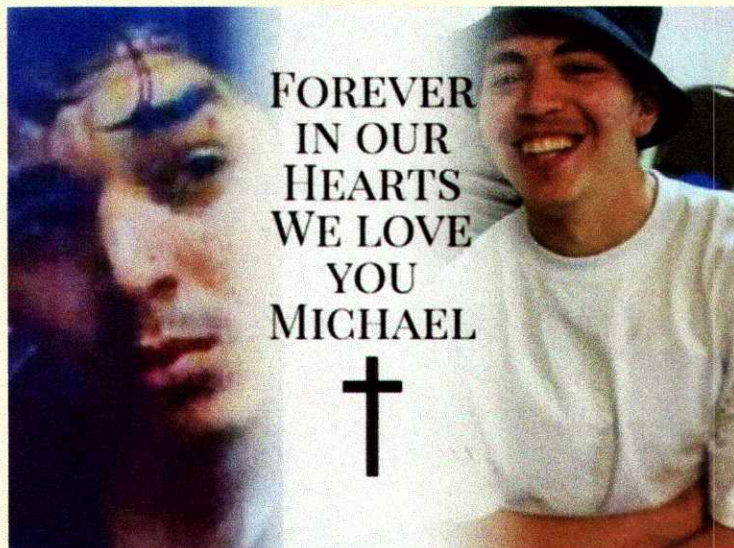
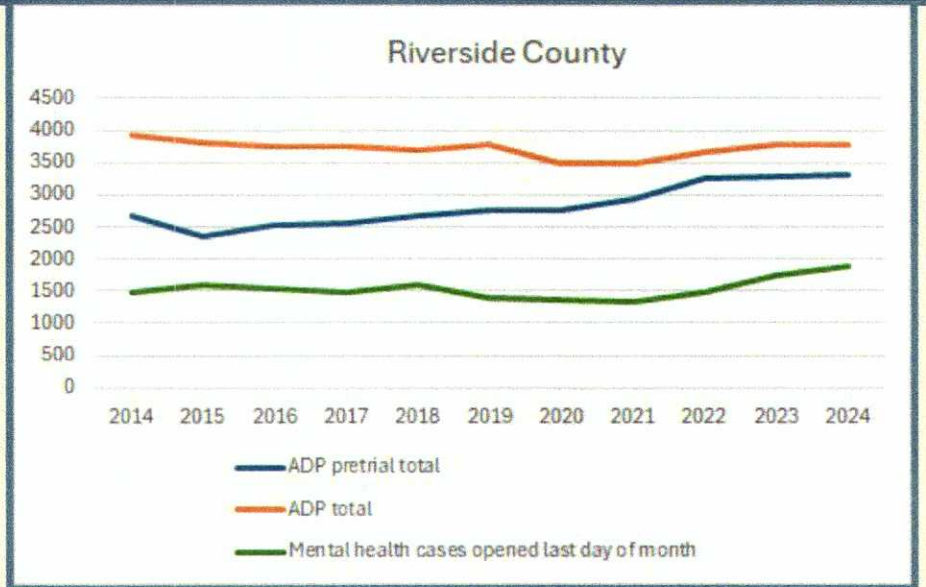
* AANHPI stands for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders

MENTAL HEALTH IN RIVERSIDE

MENTAL HEALTH INSIDE RIVERSIDE JAILS

Since 2014, the Riverside Sheriff's Department has been under a consent decree due to the inefficient medical and mental health care being administered inside the jails. ¹²

Approximately 41% of all people detained in Riverside jails have an open mental health case. An open mental health case indicates that an individual received an assessment upon booking and was deemed to need mental health care while in custody.



THE CONSENT DECREE WASN'T ENOUGH TO SAVE MICHAEL VASQUEZ, WHO DIED IN-CUSTODY ON MAY 26, 2022 AFTER NOT RECEIVING NECESSARY MEDICAL CARE. HE WAS JUST 20 YEARS OLD.

AT THE TIME OF MICHAEL VASQUEZ'S DEATH, HE HAD ONLY BEEN INCARCERATED PRETRIAL FOR SIX DAYS.

MY SON LAID THERE FOR OVER 2 HOURS BEFORE SOMEONE CAME TO HIS AID [...] THEY WERE TOO LATE TO SAVE MY SON. WHY OH WHY? WHY OH WHY DIDN'T SOMEONE SAVE MY SON."

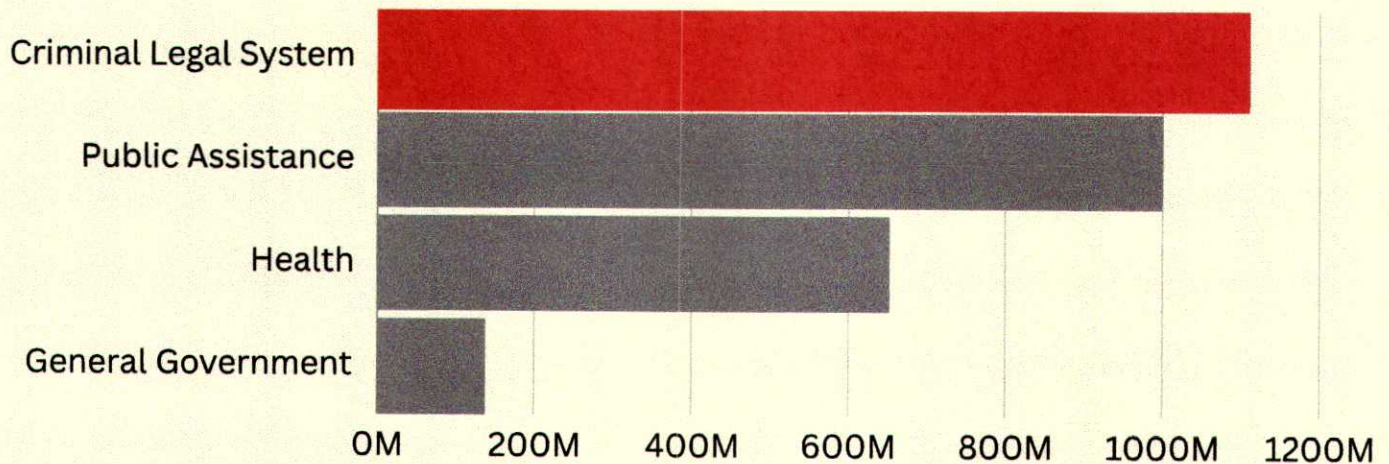
— Kathy Nigro, mother of Michael Vasquez

Studies have shown over and over that a person's mental health only worsens when they are incarcerated.¹³ This high rate of mental health cases should propel the County to implement more community-based treatment and diversion programs to better support these individuals rather than locking them up.

Michael's family has filed a lawsuit against the Riverside Sheriff's Department for wrongful death. The cause of death was listed on the death report as an "accidental fentanyl overdose."

RIVERSIDE BUDGET

2021 GENERAL FUND SPENDING BREAKDOWN



33%

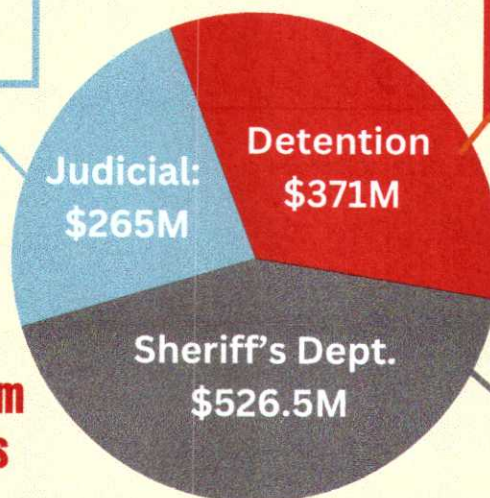
of the 2021 county budget went towards the criminal legal system, the equivalent of **\$1.1 Billion**

8% of county budget
\$127.6M for District Attorney
\$43M for Public Defender

10.9% of county budget
\$254.6M for Adult Detention
\$79M for Probation
\$37M for Juvenile Detention

From 2014-2024 the Sheriff Department's lawsuit settlement payouts were **nearly \$100 million.**

These settlements are paid from citizens' taxes, not the Sheriff's Departments budget.



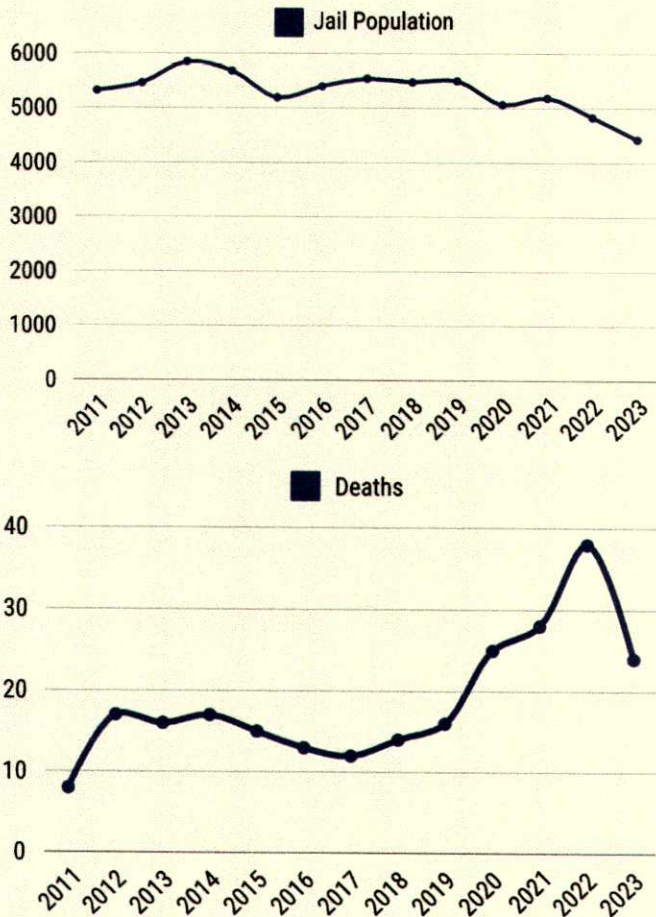
14% of county budget

In Riverside, the criminal legal system receives more funding than...

...Education, Mental Health, Public Health, and Substance Use Services combined.

SAN BERNARDINO TOTAL DEATHS

OVER TIME



Despite the fact that the average jail population **has decreased 17%** since 2011, the number of deaths have **increased 130%**.

Between 2011-2023 an **average of 19 lives** were lost each year.

AT WHAT CUSTODIAL STAGE ARE DEATHS OCCURRING

CUSTODY STATUS	# OF DEATHS
Process of Arrest	93
In Transit	1
Awaiting Booking	6
Booked - No Charges Filed	22
Booked - Awaiting Trial	95
Sentenced	16
Other	9

93%

OF DEATHS OCCUR BEFORE THE INCARCERATED PERSON'S CASE IS RESOLVED.

SAN BERNARDINO DEMOGRAPHICS

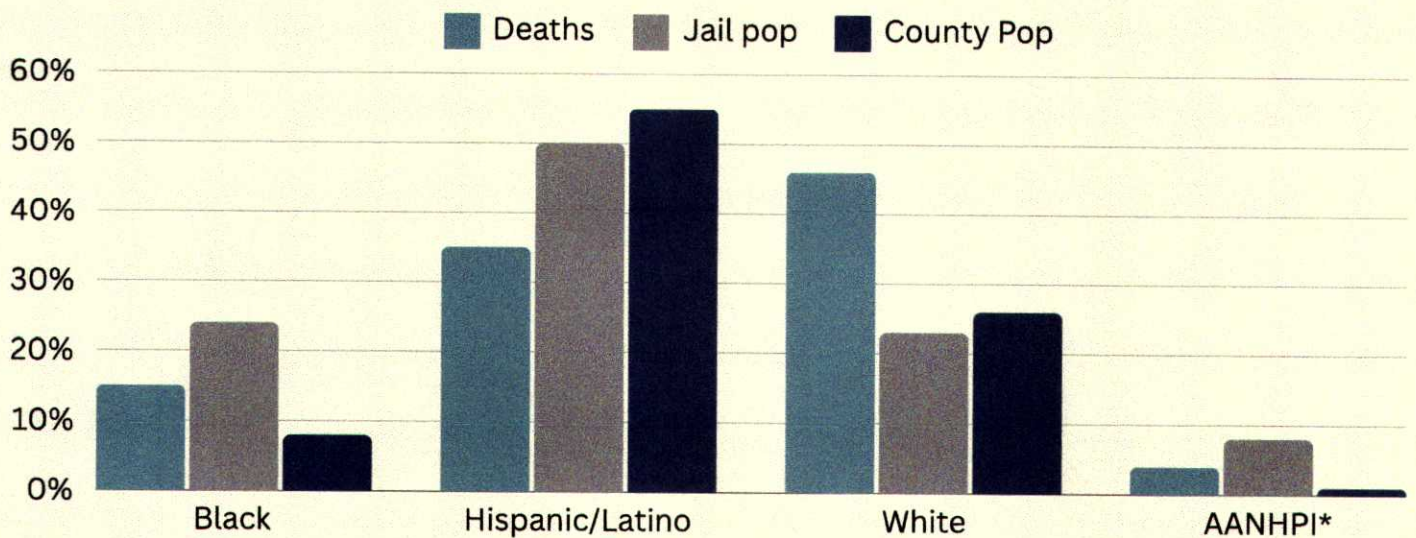
AGE

Under 18	1 person
18-24	16 people
25-34	57 people
35-44	55 people
45-54	47 people
55-64	43 people
65+	23 people

The youngest person who died while in Sheriff's custody was **16** and the oldest was **92**.

RACE

Total In-Custody Deaths vs. Population Averages



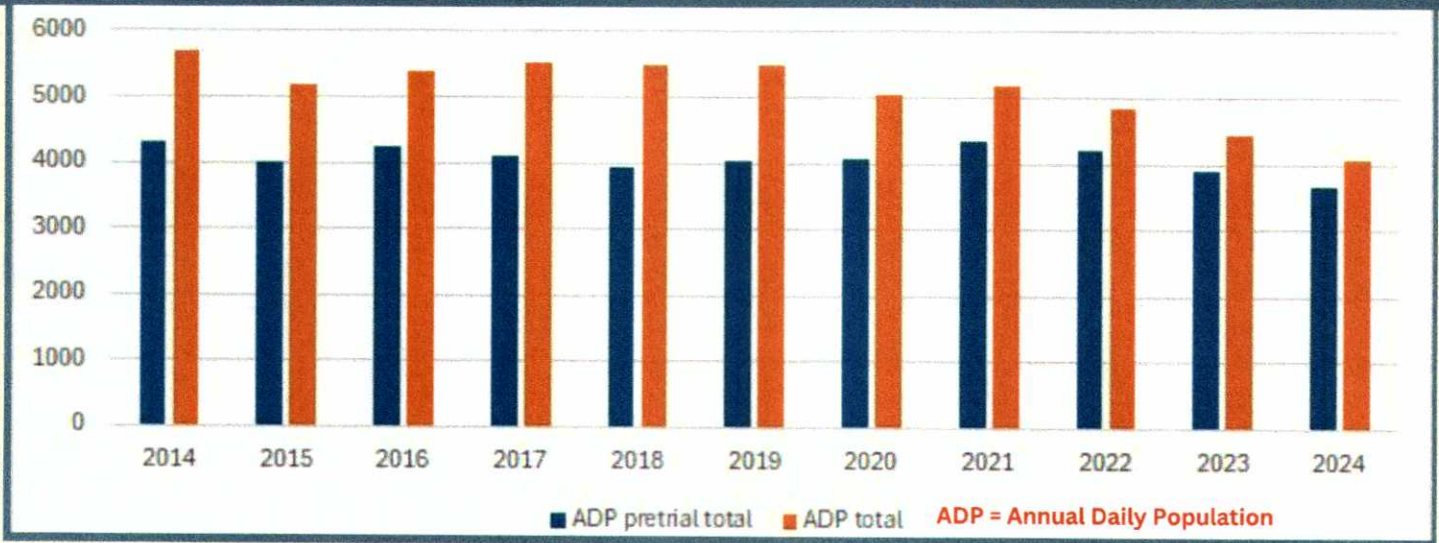
Though only **8%** of San Bernardino residents identify as Black, **yet 24%** of the local jail population and **15%** of those that die in the San Bernardino Sheriff Department's custody are Black.¹¹

Note: The data displayed does not accurately reflect people who identify with multiple races/ethnicities, and [research shows](#) that [Latinx people are routinely misidentified ethnically and racially](#), likely skewing the results and any conclusions we might draw.

* AANHPI stands for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders

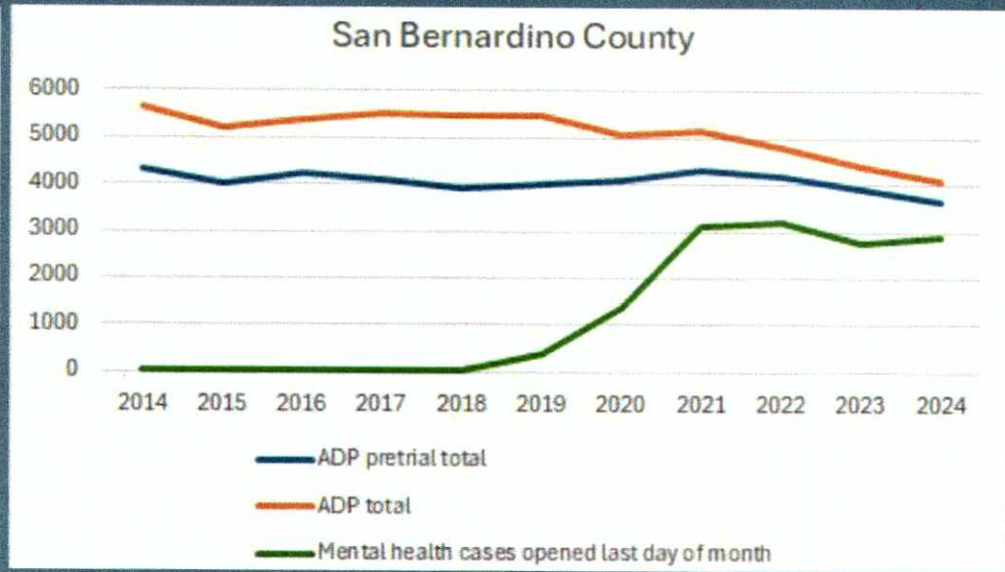
INSIDE SAN BERNARDINO'S JAILS

SAN BERNARDINO AVERAGE PRETRIAL POPULATION VS TOTAL JAIL POP.



The San Bernardino County jail system, on average, holds 5,126 people. About 80% of those people are detained in San Bernardino County pretrial. This means that a majority of those currently incarcerated in county jails are waiting for their day court and are legally presumed innocent. The pretrial population has only grown since 2014, hitting an all time high of 88% in 2023.

MENTAL HEALTH IN SAN BERNARDINO JAILS



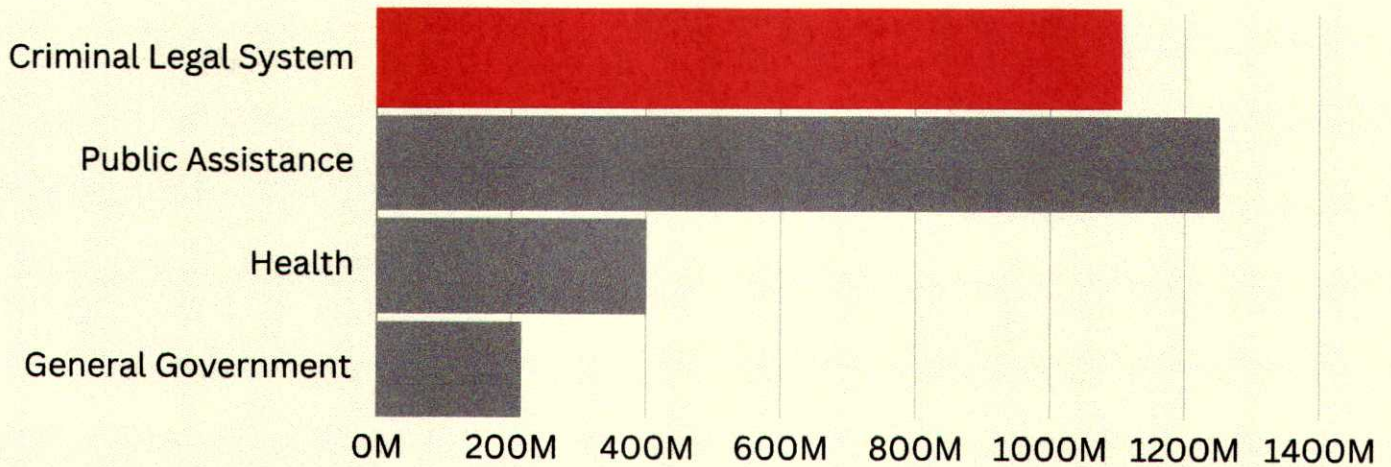
According to data from the BSCC, about 27% of all people detained in San Bernardino County jails have an open mental health case. An open mental health case indicates that an individual received an assessment upon booking and was deemed to need mental health care while in-custody.

The data above is skewed as San Bernardino County likely underreported mental health cases between 2014 to 2018 (only reporting between 13-20 mental health cases annually)

Since 2018, the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department has had a consent decree over its inefficient medical and mental health care being administered inside the jails. Studies have shown over and over that a person's mental health only worsens when they are incarcerated.¹³ This high rate of mental health cases should propel the County to implement more community-based treatment and diversion programs to better support these individuals rather than locking them up.

SAN BERNARDINO BUDGET

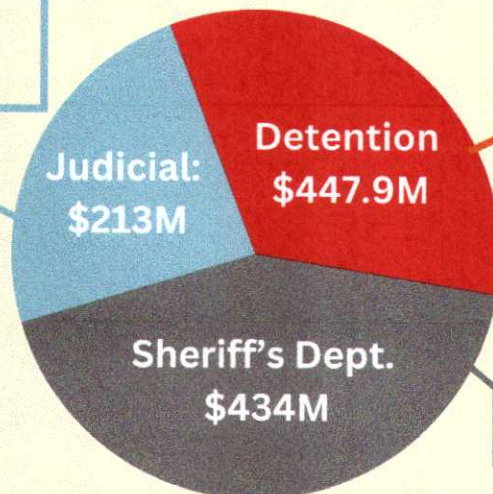
2021 GENERAL FUND SPENDING BREAKDOWN



35%

of the 2021 county budget went towards the criminal legal system, the equivalent of **\$1 Billion**

6.8% of county budget
\$86.7M for District Attorney
\$42M for Public Defender



14.3% of county budget
\$285M for Adult Detention
\$136.6M for Probation
\$25M for Juvenile Detention

13.8% of county budget

In San Bernardino, the criminal legal system receives more funding... **... than Education, Mental Health, Public Health, and Substance Use Services combined.**

THE INLAND EMPIRE

CALIFORNIA'S MOST VIOLENT REGION

Of all 58 counties, Riverside had the 2nd highest number of in-custody deaths, followed by San Bernardino.

Despite having only 4 million residents, the Inland region experienced almost as many deaths as Los Angeles County, which has a population of close to 11 million residents.

Between 2011 and 2023, the Inland Empire had the highest deaths per capita of anywhere in California.



211
lives lost

SAN DIEGO

247
lives lost

RIVERSIDE

240
lives lost

SAN BERNARDINO

573
lives lost

LOS ANGELES

120
lives lost

KERN

203
lives lost

SACRAMENTO

GET INVOLVED

HOW YOU CAN HELP/ LOCAL WORK

Join the fight for Riverside County Sheriff Oversight

SIGN UP TO STAY
INFORMED!



Follow and support our impacted families in their fight for justice:



@matus_brothers

@justice_for_minor

@justiceforernieserrano

View the entire report digitally at carefirstca.org/inlandempireliveslost

CITATIONS

1. Census Reporter. (n.d.). Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA Metro Area. Census Reporter. Retrieved from <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US40140-riverside-san-bernardino-ontario-ca-metro-area/>
2. This figure includes the San Bernardino County jails which hosts an annual daily population of 5,500 people (with a capacity of 7,627 beds) and Riverside's which hosts around a 3,500 annual daily population (with a capacity of 3953 beds) available at: https://www.calsheriffs.org/userfiles/uploads/2024-02_CSSA_Magazine_SE_Updated_3.6.24.pdf
3. Quinton Gray, et al. v. County of Riverside, case number 13-0444 VAP (OPx) (C.D. Cal.) available at: <https://prisonlaw.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Gray-v-County-of-Riverside-Consent-Decree.pdf>
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