St. Clair County’s Criminal Justice System: Trends and Issues Report

Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy and Practice

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Introduction

In December 2016, the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform recommended that the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA), the State’s criminal justice research and grant-making agency, provide technical assistance to local jurisdictions to form county level Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils (CJCCs). Loyola University Chicago’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy and Practice has collaborated with ICJIA to support the development of these CJCCs. CJCCs convene elected and appointed executive-level policymakers, victim and other non-profit organizations, and members of the public to collaboratively address issues facing the justice system and its constituent agencies. CJCCs use data-guided and structured planning processes to identify, analyze, solve, and manage justice system issues.
Through a competitive process, St. Clair County was selected to participate in a pilot project whereby technical assistance in the form of research, analysis and facilitated strategic planning would be provided by the ICJIA and Loyola University. This report is one of the first stages of this process and is designed to provide criminal justice practitioners, policy makers, community organizers, and members of the general public with an understanding of how the adult criminal justice system is organized, how it functions, and how each component of the system is interrelated to the others. The data utilized in this report come exclusively from data and information available through state-level reporting mechanisms in Illinois, and thus allow for some comparisons to other jurisdictions in Illinois.\(^1\) While more current, and more detailed data are available locally, part of the current effort is to better understand the utility of these state-level data for planning purposes.

**St. Clair County’s Criminal Justice System**

St. Clair County, located in southwestern Illinois on the Missouri border, is the 9th largest county in Illinois with an estimated population of 262,479 residents in 2017. Between 2010 and 2017, St. Clair County’s population decreased slightly (2.8%). St. Clair County has 31 cities and towns. The three largest cities, Belleville (42,150 residents), O’Fallon (29,159 residents), and East St. Louis (26,616 residents), account for approximately 37% of the entire population of St. Clair County in 2016. The criminal justice system in St. Clair County can be broadly divided into three major components: law enforcement and policing, courts, and corrections. Within each of these general components are a number of different agencies operating with specific goals and purposes, and also operating across different branches and levels of government.

**Law Enforcement & Policing**

When crimes are reported to the police, or when police observe criminal behavior during the course of patrol or investigations, the arrest of an individual is the starting point for the rest of the justice system. As such, arrests impact the workload and activities of all of the other justice system agencies in St. Clair County. The majority of policing services are provided by municipal police departments. The St. Clair County Sheriff’s Office provides policing services to unincorporated areas of the county as well as to specific towns in St. Clair County. The County Sheriff also provides security for the courts and operates the county jail. Of the 31\(^2\) incorporated cities and towns in St. Clair County, 30 operate their own police departments, with the City of Belleville being the largest of these.\(^3\) Each municipal

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1 Comparisons in this report are made to Illinois outside of Cook County because Cook County trends tend to dramatically influence statewide patterns in crime and justice system activities.

2 The following incorporated cities and towns are in St. Clair County: Alorton, Belleville, Brooklyn, Cahokia, Caseyville, Centreville, Collinsville, Colombia, Dupe, East Carondelet, East St. Louis, Fairmont City, Fairview Heights, Fayetteville, Freeburg, Lebanon, Lenzburg, Madison, Marissa, Mascoutah, Millstadt, New Athens, New Baden, O’Fallon, Sauget, Shiloh, Smithton, St. Libory, Summerfield, Swansea, and Washington Park. The Cities of Madison, New Baden, Columbia, Collinsville are all partially in St. Clair County, but the majority of the jurisdiction lies in a neighboring county.

3 St. Libory is the only town in St. Clair County that does not operate its own police department.
police department has a chief of police, appointed by the mayor of each city. The St. Clair County Sheriff’s Office is led by an elected Sheriff. In addition to these municipal and county police agencies, there are a number of other police departments with very specific jurisdictions, such as the State Community College Police Department and Southwestern Illinois College Belleville. There are also a number of multi-jurisdictional task forces that operate in the St. Clair County area. The Metropolitan Enforcement Group of Southwestern Illinois (MEGSI) is a multi-jurisdictional drug task force that involves the cooperation and resource sharing among state, county, and municipal law enforcement agencies in St. Clair County as well as a number of neighboring counties. These law enforcement agencies are responsible for responding to reported incidents of criminal activity as well as engaging in patrol and investigations to prevent, detect, and uncover criminal activity.

Courts
When an individual is arrested in St. Clair County, their case is referred to the St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office, which is led by an elected State’s Attorney. Each county in Illinois has a separately elected State’s Attorney. The St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office reviews arrest reports by the law enforcement agencies in St. Clair County to determine if criminal charges should be filed in court, and if so, they initiate a criminal case by filing a case with the Office of the St. Clair County Clerk of the Circuit Court. The case is then adjudicated within the circuit court. St. Clair County is part of Illinois’ 20th Judicial Circuit, which includes St. Clair County and Monroe County, Perry County, Randolph County, and Washington County. Illinois has 23 separate judicial circuits, some of which include single counties, while others, like the 20th Circuit, include multiple counties. Within each judicial circuit are elected Circuit Court Judges and appointed Associate Judges. Each judicial circuit is led by a Chief Judge selected by and from the Circuit Court Judges within the judicial circuit. The Chief Judge of the circuit also appoints a Public Defender who oversees the St. Clair County Public Defender’s Office, an agency responsible for providing legal services to indigent persons arrested and charged with crimes in St. Clair County. The 20th Judicial Circuit, along with four other circuits in Southern Illinois, make up Illinois’ Fifth Appellate District, which hears cases on appeal from the circuit courts within the district. The St. Clair County Sheriff’s Office provides security to the St. Clair County courts, both in the courthouse as well as in the individual courtrooms.

Corrections
The corrections component of the criminal justice system includes both institutional and community-based correctional agencies responsible for supervising and detaining those charged with crimes as well as those convicted of offenses. These agencies have varying functions and operate at different levels and branches of government. For example, the St. Clair County Sheriff’s Office operates the St. Clair County Jail, which serves multiple functions. First, the jail serves as a booking facility for

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4 Source: Assessing Illinois’ Metropolitan Enforcement Groups and Task Forces: A Profile of the Metropolitan Enforcement Group of Southwestern Illinois Published By ICJIA, December 2012.
individuals arrested in some of the smaller communities in St. Clair County that lack municipal lock-up facilities for the processing of arrestees. In addition, for those individuals who cannot post or who are denied bail, the St. Clair County Jail serves as a pre-trial detention facility. Individuals can also be sentenced to serve time (less than a year) in the St. Clair County Jail upon conviction. Individuals convicted of a felony-level offense can be sentenced either to supervision in the community (probation) or to prison (for a year or more), depending on the nature of their offense.

Individuals sentenced to probation in St. Clair County are supervised and referred to services by the St. Clair County Probation and Court Services Department. The Probation and Court Services Department is funded through a mix of county and state resources and is under the judicial branch of government. When a sentence to probation is imposed, the individual is supervised in the community by probation officers. In addition to supervision, the conditions of probation often include payment of fines, restitution, and probation supervision fees, as well as participation in rehabilitative programs.

If someone convicted of a felony in St. Clair County is sentenced to prison, upon the imposition of that sentence the individual (if male) is transferred by the St. Clair County Sheriff’s Office to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) Reception and Classification (R&C) Center at the Menard Correctional Center in Menard, Illinois. Adult females are transferred to the Logan Correctional Center R&C in Lincoln, Illinois. After inmates have been processed through the R&C, they are then transferred to one of Illinois’ 27 prisons based on their security classification and needs.

Inmates then serve their prison sentence and, upon release, are supervised in the community under Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR, “parole”) by parole officers that work for IDOC. Under Illinois’ sentencing structure, inmates are released from prison after they have completed serving their court-imposed prison sentence, minus any sentence credits they may receive for time served in pre-trial detention, good conduct credits, or credits to their sentence for completing rehabilitative programming while in prison. Thus, while Illinois’ Prisoner Review Board (PRB) sets the conditions of MSR (i.e., requirements to participate in programming in the community), under Illinois law they do not have the authority to determine whether someone should be released from prison. Individuals released from prison must have an approved host site where they will live, and most return back to the community where they lived before going to prison. The length of time individuals are supervised on MSR is set by state statute and corresponds to the felony class of the crime for which they were sentenced to prison, generally ranging from 1 year (for Class 3 and 4 felonies) to 3 years (for Murder and Class X felonies). For sex offenders, their MSR period is indeterminate, with a minimum of 3 years and up to lifetime supervision. Those sentenced to prison for domestic violence offenses are supervised on MSR for 4 years. If during the period of MSR an individual violates the conditions of their supervision set by the PRB, or is rearrested for a crime, their MSR can be revoked and they can be returned to prison to serve out a portion of, or the remainder of, their MSR period.
Reported Crime and Arrests in St. Clair County

To understand how the justice system responds to crime in St. Clair County, it is first important to understand how much crime occurs and the number of individuals subsequently arrested. Importantly, research conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice reveals that not all crime occurrences in the United States are reported to the police. For example, the 2015 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) estimates that 45% of serious violent crime and 65% of property crime was not reported to the police. Reporting variations also exist within large crime categories (e.g., violent and property). Nationally, the majority of thefts (property) and sexual assaults (violent) are not reported to the police while the majority of motor vehicle thefts (property) and robberies (violent) are reported. Thus, when considering how much crime is reported to the police it is important to keep in mind that this represents only a portion of the crime that actually occurs.

One of the primary ways crime in communities is measured is through a reporting system called the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program, whereby individual law enforcement agencies report specific data to the Illinois State Police. These data include information about the number and type of crimes reported to the law enforcement agency as well as the number and type of arrests made by the agency. Although not exhaustive of all crimes, a Crime Index, consisting of eight crimes that are considered to be the most serious and consistently defined across jurisdictions in the United States, has been used since the 1930s. Specifically, there are four crimes used to calculate a Violent Crime Index: murder, rape (termed in Illinois as criminal sexual assault), robbery and aggravated assault/battery. In addition, there are four crimes used to calculate a Property Crime Index: burglary, larceny/theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Combined, these violent and property Index offenses are used to compute the total Crime Index. While violent and property Index offenses usually come to the attention of the police through reports by crime victims and are consistently defined across the country, there are a number of other crimes that are often only detected by the police or legally defined differently across the country, such as drunk driving, drug sales and possession, and illegal possession of firearms. Thus, there are many common offenses that are not part of the crime Index because they go unreported to the police or because their legal definition varies significantly across states rendering meaningful comparison impossible.

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5 See https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv15.pdf for a detailed description of the national crime victimization survey.
6 In 2014 the crimes of Human Trafficking-Commercial Sex Acts and Human Trafficking-Involuntary Servitude were added to the Crime Index. In 2014, there was 1 reported offense for Human Trafficking-Involuntary Servitude, and 4 offenses reported for Human Trafficking-Commercial Sex Act. Of these reported offenses there were 3 reported arrests for Human Trafficking-Commercial Sex Acts. In 2015 and 2016, no offenses or arrests under these two categories were reported in St. Clair County through the UCR program.
**Crimes Reported in St. Clair County**

In St. Clair County, the majority (77% between 2005 and 2016) of all Index crime reported to the police involved property Index crimes (Figure 1), a pattern similar to Illinois jurisdictions outside of St. Clair County, excluding Cook County. Because these property crimes account for such a large portion of all Index crimes reported to the police, trends in Property Index Crime tend to influence the total Index crime rate in St. Clair County. Between 2010 and 2016, the number of property Index crimes reported to the police in St. Clair County decreased 38% (Figure 2), a trend similar to Illinois jurisdictions outside of St. Clair County, excluding Cook County. In 2016, the property Index offense rate in St. Clair County was 2,395 per 100,000 residents, roughly 50% higher than the rate of 1,580 per 100,000 residents in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties that year. Combined, the three largest cities, Belleville, O’Fallon, and East St. Louis accounted for nearly half (45%) of all property Index crimes reported to the police in St. Clair County in 2016. The largest city, Belleville, accounted for 27% of all property Index crimes reported to the police in St. Clair County.

**Figure 1. Crime Reported to the Police in St. Clair County, 2005-2016**

![Crime Reported to the Police in St. Clair County, 2005-2016](image)

Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of aggregate, published I-UCR data.

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7 Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of aggregate, published I-UCR data.
8 Excluding Cook and St. Clair counties, property crime accounted for 88% of all reported Index crime from 2005 to 2016.
9 Between 2010 and 2016, in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties, the number of property Index crimes decreased by 24%.
Although violent Index crimes account for a relatively small proportion (23% between 2005 and 2016 [Figure 1]) of all Index crimes reported to the police in St. Clair County, these involve the most serious offenses the justice system handles, including murder, battery with a firearm, and criminal sexual assault. Between 2010 and 2016, the total number of violent Index crimes reported to the police in St. Clair County decreased 45 percent (Figure 3). By comparison, during this same time period the total number of violent Index crimes reported to the police in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties decreased 25 percent. In 2016, the violent Index offense rate in St. Clair County was 585 per 100,000 residents, more than double the rate of 247 per 100,000 residents in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties that year. Combined, the three largest cities, Belleville, O’Fallon, and East St. Louis account for 70% of all violent Index crimes reported to the police in St. Clair County in 2016. The city of East St. Louis accounted for 49% of all violent Index crimes reported to the police in St. Clair County.\(^{10}\)

\(^{10}\) Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of aggregate, published I-UCR data.
When crimes are reported to the police, or when police observe criminal behavior during the course of patrol or investigations, the arrest of an individual is the starting point for the rest of the justice system and impacts the workload and activities of all of the other justice system agencies in St. Clair County. There are a number of factors that can influence the number and rate of arrests, including the amount of crime, the nature of crime and victimization, and what police departments and officers focus their resources and attention towards. For example, there will likely be fewer arrests if crime decreases. However, if more crimes are reported, but police have little evidence to work with or victims are unable to provide the police with information regarding the perpetrators, making arrests will be more difficult and the arrest rate may not significantly increase. Finally, if there are specific criminal behaviors that the public demands the police “do something about,” such as visible signs of drug activity, prostitution, or drunk driving, the police may increase their attention towards these offenses in response to these expectations from the public, resulting in dramatic increases in arrests for some crimes though the amount of crime has not increased.

**Arrests in St. Clair County**

When crimes are reported to the police, or when police observe criminal behavior during the course of patrol or investigations, the arrest of an individual is the starting point for the rest of the justice system and impacts the workload and activities of all of the other justice system agencies in St. Clair County. There are a number of factors that can influence the number and rate of arrests, including the amount of crime, the nature of crime and victimization, and what police departments and officers focus their resources and attention towards. For example, there will likely be fewer arrests if crime decreases. However, if more crimes are reported, but police have little evidence to work with or victims are unable to provide the police with information regarding the perpetrators, making arrests will be more difficult and the arrest rate may not significantly increase. Finally, if there are specific criminal behaviors that the public demands the police “do something about,” such as visible signs of drug activity, prostitution, or drunk driving, the police may increase their attention towards these offenses in response to these expectations from the public, resulting in dramatic increases in arrests for some crimes though the amount of crime has not increased.
In general, between 2010 and 2016, the trends in arrests in St. Clair County for property Index crimes mirrored the number of these offenses reported to the police; reported property Index offenses decreased 38% and arrests for property Index offenses fell 53% (Figure 2). Additionally, reported violent Index offenses decreased 45% between 2010 and 2016 while arrests for these offenses fell 31% (Figure 3). This suggests that while the number of violent Index offense reports and arrests are dropping, the proportion of violent Index offense reports that result in an arrest is growing.

Measuring crime clearance rates with just aggregate offense and arrest data has a number of limitations. However, comparing the number of reported offenses that result in an arrest to those that do not can provide a rough measure of how effective police are at solving crimes. Roughly 22% of property Index offenses and 36% of violent Index offenses reported to the police in the past few years (2013-2016) in St. Clair County resulted in an arrest. By comparison, in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair Counties the property crime “clearance rate” was 23%, while the “clearance rate” for violent crime was 44% during that time period. Thus, while the “clearance rate” for property crimes is similar, the “clearance rate” for violent crimes is substantially lower in St. Clair County than in the comparison area. This difference may be due to differences in the nature of the violent Index crime (i.e., degree to which victim and offender know each other) or resources available to investigate these crimes, which impacts the ability to arrest offenders.

In addition to utilizing aggregate data reported through the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) program, it is possible to examine trends in arrest and characteristics of arrestees in more detail by using information collected during the processing of an individual through the justice system. In Illinois, when law enforcement agencies carry out a custodial arrest (an arrest that involves the fingerprinting of an individual), specific information about that arrest is reported to the Illinois Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) system, which comprises the criminal history record for each individual arrested in Illinois and is maintained by the Illinois State Police. The advantage of this information is that it contains information on arrests for all crimes, and is not restricted to only the Index offenses. Further, unlike the aggregate UCR data, the CHRI data contains information regarding the age, race and gender of the arrestee, allowing for a better understanding of the characteristics of those arrested in Illinois.

The CHRI data reported to the Illinois State Police by law enforcement agencies in St. Clair County reveal similar trends to Index crime arrest data. Between 2010 and 2016, arrests for all violent crimes decreased 34%, while arrests for all property crimes fell 29% and arrests for drug-law violations

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11 The violent crime “clearance rates” in the three largest cities in St. Clair County—Bellville, East St. Louis, and O’Fallon were all around 30%, however, the murder clearance rate in East St. Louis was 20%. Based on I-UCR data, from 2013 to 2016 there were 96 murders reported/known to the police in East St. Louis but only 19 arrests for murder.
12 State regulations require that police agencies submit arrest fingerprint cards to ISP within 24 hours of an arrest for all felony and Class A and B misdemeanor offenses. These contain not only the fingerprints of arrestees, but also arrestee demographic and arrest charge information.
decreased 18%. Although arrests for drug-law violations decreased across all categories of offenses—including both the Cannabis Control Act and Controlled Substances Act, and for possession and sale/delivery offenses, the decrease was slightly larger for cannabis offenses than for Controlled Substance Act offenses.

Under Illinois law, crimes are classified as either misdemeanors or felonies. For some crimes, whether the offense is a felony or a misdemeanor depends on specific characteristics of the arrestee, the victim or the crime that may not be known at the time of the arrest (e.g., prior convictions for similar offenses), and thus are classified at the point of arrest as “other” or “unknown.” From a legal standpoint, felony offenses are more serious since conviction for these offenses can result in a prison sentence, and a felony conviction has potentially significant implications for employment, housing, and eligibility for various government services. When arrest trends were examined specifically to differentiate between misdemeanors versus felony offenses, different patterns were evident. Arrests for misdemeanors decreased 48% between 2010 and 2017. However, arrests for felony offenses increased 12% between 2010 and 2017 (Figure 4).
The increase in arrests for the least serious felony classes (Class 3 or 4 felonies) was much larger than the change in arrests for the more serious felony classes (Class 2 or higher felonies). Specifically, between 2010 and 2017, arrests for Class 3 and 4 felonies increased 19%, while arrests for Class 2 or higher felonies decreased by less than 1%. However, since misdemeanor arrests largely outnumbered felony arrests for most of this time period, the total number of arrests in St. Clair County decreased despite the increase in felony offense arrests. Thus, while an increasing proportion of arrests in St. Clair County are for felony level offense, a larger share of those arrests appear to involve less serious felony offenses.

Another apparent trend in the characteristics of arrests in St. Clair County is that a substantial portion of the decrease in arrests between 2010 and 2017 was the result of fewer arrests of younger adults, specifically those between the ages of 18 and 24. This population is often referred to as “emerging adults” because, despite having reached social and legal adulthood, research has shown that cognitively this age group still tends to exhibit immaturity when it comes to impulsivity and decision making. The 2017 arrest rate of 18 to 24 year olds in St. Clair County was 601 arrests for every 10,000 residents in that age group, 39% lower than in 2010. By comparison, the 2017 arrest rate of 25 to 44 year olds in St. Clair County was 384 per 10,000 residents in that age group (or almost 37% lower than the arrest rate of the emerging adults). Between 2010 and 2017, the arrest rate of 25 to 44 year olds in St. Clair County fell by 19%. Finally, the arrest rate in St. Clair County of those over the age of 44 was relatively low by comparison (75 per 10,000 residents in that age group) and was down 23% between 2010 and 2017.

Over the period examined there has been little change in the distribution of arrestee characteristics in terms of gender. From 2010-2017, arrests decreased for both males (down 31%) and females (down 26%), and the proportion of arrestees in St. Clair County accounted for by males remained constant at around 72%. Arrests in St. Clair County were also analyzed by race. However, during the time period examined changes were made to how race was reported through CHRI. Specifically, since 2015, agencies have had the option of reporting Hispanic as a unique category within the race field in CHRI. Prior to 2015, there was no ability in CHRI to indicate that the arrestee was Hispanic, and these arrests were primarily recorded as “white.” Thus, the ability to examine trends over time in the racial composition of arrestees is limited to just the 2015 to 2017 period. Overall, from 2015-2017, the total number of arrests reported through CHRI in St. Clair County decreased by 17%, and the percent decrease in arrests for whites was smaller (down 11%) than the percent decrease for non-whites (down 21%). As a result, the percentage of arrests accounted for by non-whites has declined slightly, from 56% in 2015 to 54% in 2017.

It is also possible to examine the long-term trends in arrests for drug-law violations with data reported to the UCR program in Illinois. These analyses are useful to illustrate how public expectations for police to address specific issues can result in large increases in arrests for specific crimes. During the 1980s concern was raised at the national level about the dangers of drug use and the illicit drug market, and the prevailing view was that an appropriate response to this behavior and market would be to increase enforcement efforts and focus on this behavior. The response at the local level across most cities in the United States was to increase the enforcement of drug-laws, particularly those involving substances other than marijuana, such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine. In Illinois, the illegal possession and sale of these substances are articulated in Illinois’ Controlled Substances Act, while offenses involving marijuana are classified under the Cannabis Control Act. Importantly, almost every offense under Illinois’ Controlled Substances Act is a felony-level offense, and thus is subject to a possible prison sentence upon conviction. Arrests for violations of Illinois’ Cannabis Control Act, on the other hand, are primarily classified as misdemeanor offenses.¹⁶

In St. Clair County, arrests for violations of the Controlled Substances Act increased dramatically during the early 1990s (Figure 5) and fueled a significant amount of the increases in the workload and activities of other criminal justice agencies in the county during that period. For example, prior to 1990 there were fewer than 100 arrests in St. Clair County annually for violations of the Controlled Substances Act. However, by 1993, nearly 400 arrests (399) were made in St. Clair County for offenses under this Act—a 470% increase from the 70 arrests made in 1989. Following a gradual increase in arrests for the Controlled Substances Act through the 2000s until a peak in 2011 (774), arrests for these offenses decreased, falling 36% between 2011 and 2016, totaling approximately 490 in 2016. The decrease in arrests for Controlled Substances Act offenses in St. Clair County was larger than that seen in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties, where arrests for these offenses increased by 5% between 2011 and 2016.¹⁷

¹⁶ In 2016, Illinois law changed, resulting in the possession of small amounts of cannabis no longer being subject to state criminal penalties. Thus, the drop in arrests for violations of the Cannabis Control Act between 2015 and 2016 reflects this change.
¹⁷ Based on analyses of data available through CHRI, arrests for violations of the Controlled Substances Act increased 29% between 2011 and 2015, but decreased 12% between 2015 and 2016. This difference in arrest trends between the UCR data and CHRI likely reflects a difference in how arrests are reported and counted in the UCR versus CHRI. In addition, arrests for cannabis possession fell 32% between 2015 and 2016, likely due to changes in state law the decriminalized possession of small amounts of the drug.
Criminal Court Filings and Dispositions in St. Clair County

When police arrest an individual in St. Clair County, the St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office reviews the arrest charges, determines if filing charges in the Circuit Court are warranted, and, if so, the appropriate charges to be filed. The State’s Attorney’s Office has a great deal of discretion in deciding whether to file a criminal charge and what type and severity of charge to file. Broadly, the circuit courts and Illinois’ criminal law distinguishes between misdemeanor and felony-level offenses, and this classification has implications both for the processes used to handle the cases in court and the potential sentences that can be imposed upon conviction.

The total number of cases filed—civil, domestic relations, criminal, quasi-criminal, and juvenile- in St. Clair County in 2016 was 65,644, of which 12.6% (8,270 cases) were criminal cases. These criminal cases included felony, misdemeanor, and driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI) cases. Thus, it is

Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of aggregate, published I-UCR data.

Cannabis Control Act
Controlled Substances Act

Figure 5. Trends in Arrests for Drug-law Violations in St. Clair County

Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of aggregate, published I-UCR data.
important to keep in mind that the proportion of criminal cases handled by the circuit court in St. Clair County is a relatively small percent of the overall cases filed and disposed of in the courts. Misdemeanor court filings in St. Clair County have historically outnumbered felony filings by a 5 to 1 ratio. However, between 2010 and 2016 misdemeanor filings decreased while felony filings increased. As a result, the gap between felony and misdemeanor filings has narrowed with misdemeanor filings outnumbering felony filings 3 to 1. This shift can be partly explained by changing arrest trends. As described earlier, arrests for misdemeanor-level offenses have decreased and arrests for felony-level offenses have increased. Between 2010 and 2016, misdemeanor case filings in St. Clair County fell 29%, which was, again, consistent with the decrease in misdemeanor arrests (down 41%) during that period. This decrease in misdemeanor filings in St. Clair County is also consistent with the trends seen in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties, where misdemeanor filings decreased by 25% between 2010 and 2016.

The long-term trend in the number of felony cases filed in St. Clair County reveals a large and steady increase in felony filings during the 1980s, 1990s and into the 2000s, consistent with increases in crime and arrests in the 1980s and 1990s and increases in arrests for felony drug-law violations (Figure 6). Between 1987 and 1998, felony filings in St. Clair County increased 72%—from 980 to 1,691—and increased another 25% between 1998 and 2005. The number of felony filings peaked at 2,131 in 2005 before beginning to decline ultimately reaching 1,212 felony cases filed in 2010 (or 43% decrease). Between 2010 and 2016, felony filings then increased in St. Clair County 35% (from 1,212 to 1,639), somewhat higher than the 14% increase in felony arrests during that period. Further, this trend in felony filings in St. Clair County is also different than the trend experienced in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties, where they decreased 6% between 2010 and 2016.

Of the felony cases filed in St. Clair County each year, the majority result in the defendant being convicted. During 2016, 63% of the felony defendants in St. Clair County who had their cases disposed of were convicted of a felony offense, a rate similar to Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair County.21 Most of the felony cases that did not result in a conviction were dismissed by the State’s Attorney’s Office, usually because it was determined there was not sufficient evidence to obtain a conviction, witnesses were not willing to testify, or it was determined that pursuing a conviction was not in the interests of justice. Most of those who were convicted pled guilty to the crime, and very rarely were defendants charged with a felony found not guilty as a result of a trial. Over the past 15 years, 99% of all felony convictions in St. Clair County were the result of a guilty plea, and about 5% of all felony defendants processed through the St. Clair County court for a felony between 2010 and 2016 went to trial. Of that small percent of felony defendants who opted for a trial—either a jury trial or a bench trial—roughly 36% were not convicted at trial.

Sentencing of Those Convicted of a Felony in St. Clair County

In Illinois, the possible sentences that can be imposed on those convicted of a felony-level offense are dictated by state statute, with the minimum and maximum allowable sentences to either prison or probation set by state law. In St. Clair County, as in most Illinois counties, the majority of people convicted of a felony offense are sentenced to probation rather than prison. Illinois’ felony crimes are grouped into specific felony classes by the Illinois General Assembly, ranging from First Degree Murder, Class X felonies, and then Class 1 through 4 felonies. Class 4 felonies are the least serious felony-level offense in Illinois and allow a sentence of up to 30 months of probation or between 1 and 3 years in prison (Figure 7). As the seriousness of the felony conviction offense class increases (i.e., goes from 4 to 1, to X and Murder), the statutorily allowable sentence also increases. All Class X felonies require the imposition of a prison sentence of 6 to 30 years, and all Murder convictions carry a mandatory prison sentence of 20 to 60 years (or longer, up to natural life, depending on specific elements of the crime being present).
When examining the characteristics and trends of those convicted and sentenced for felony-level offenses there are a couple of different methods to examining and understanding sentencing patterns. First is to consider the sheer number of individuals convicted of a felony and sentenced in St. Clair County. These analyses reveal that, as a result of felony arrests and case filings increasing between 2010 and 2016, the number of sentences imposed on those convicted of a felony also increased 16% during that period, a trend different than that seen in the rest of Illinois. However, when the types of sentences were disaggregated, some different patterns emerged. For example, the number of sentences to probation increased almost 31% between 2010 and 2016, while the number of sentences to prison decreased 5% during that period. By comparison, in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties, sentences to probation decreased 4%, and prison sentences fell by 27%. More current data from the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) confirms this trend: between state fiscal years (SFY) 2010 and 2017, IDOC received 25% fewer inmates sentenced from St. Clair County, falling from 442 to 332, proportionately similar to the decrease seen in the rest of Illinois (Figure 8).

Also evident in Figure 8 is the dramatic increase in prison admissions from St. Clair County that occurred between SFY 2000 and 2005, which coincided with a dramatic increase in arrests for violations of the Controlled Substances Act (Figure 6). Indeed, almost one-half (47%) of the increase in sentences to IDOC from St. Clair County between 2000 and 2005 was due to admissions for drug-law violations. Similarly, 33% of the drop in prison sentences between SFY 2010 and 2017 was due to fewer felony drug-law violations resulting in a prison sentence.


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**Figure 7. Penalties for Felony Crimes in Illinois**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Crime</th>
<th>Usual Prison Term</th>
<th>Probation Term</th>
<th>Length of MSR (Post-prison supervision)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Degree Murder</td>
<td>20-60 years</td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class X</td>
<td>6-30 years</td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 1</td>
<td>4-15 years</td>
<td>Up to 4 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>3-7 years</td>
<td>Up to 4 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 3</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>Up to 2 ½ years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 4</td>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>Up to 2 ½ years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another way to examine the sentencing patterns for those convicted of a felony offense is to examine the percent of those convicted of a felony (i.e., eligible to be sentenced to prison) that receive a prison sentence. Doing so reveals that, as a result of the number of prison sentences decreasing, while probation sentences increased slightly, in St. Clair County the proportion of those convicted of a felony sentenced to prison has also decreased. For example, between 2010 and 2016, the percent of those convicted of a felony sentenced to prison in St. Clair County decreased from 40% to 33% (Figure 9). In Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties, the percent of those convicted of a felony sentenced to prison decreased from 39% in 2010 to 32% in 2016. During this period of a lower rate of prison utilization, the overall Index crime rate in St. Clair County also decreased consistently. Some of the differences across jurisdictions in the likelihood of those convicted of a felony being sentenced to prison can be explained by differences in the types of conviction offenses (i.e., more serious felony classes) or differences in the seriousness of the offender (i.e., more extensive criminal history). However, even after statistically controlling for the influence of the conviction offense and offender characteristics, the odds of being sentenced to prison in St. Clair County are lower than when compared to Illinois as a whole.
Detailed analyses of the characteristics that influenced the imposition of prison sentences on those convicted of a felony in St. Clair County revealed that the three most influential factors were the felony class of the conviction offense, whether or not the convicted felon had been previously sentenced to prison, and if the individual had a prior felony conviction. Those convicted of a felony were more likely to be sentenced to prison if they were convicted of a serious felony, if they had previously been sentenced to prison and if they had a prior felony conviction. Within the sample examined of those arrested, and ultimately convicted for of a felony-level offense during the 2012 to 2014 period, 30% were sentenced to prison overall. However, of those who had previously been sentenced to prison, 59% received a prison sentence for the current conviction, compared to 24% of those who had never previously been sentenced to prison. As would be expected, 100% of those convicted of Murder a Class X felony were sentenced to prison (as is required under Illinois law), while among those convicted of a Class 4 felony, 24% were sentenced to prison. The age and race of

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24 Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of data provided by the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Planning and Research Unit and CHRI data generated and provided by the Research and Analysis Unit, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.
the convicted felon did not appear to have any relationship with whether a prison sentence was imposed or not once the influence of other offender characteristics (i.e., criminal history, current offense class and type) were taken into account.

The decreases in the proportion of those convicted of a felony sentenced to prisons in St. Clair County is likely due to multiple factors occurring simultaneously. First, St. Clair County started participating in Adult Redeploy Illinois (ARI) in January 2011.\textsuperscript{25} ARI is a program that reduces caseloads, therapy and counseling and a community restorative element to corrections. This program aims to treat participants with serious mental illnesses underlying their criminal behavior. Second, it is possible that as a result of the newly elected State’s Attorney in 2010, there was a change in the practices and policies within the State’s Attorney’s Office. It is also possible that that characteristics of the cases moving through the system have changed, such as a smaller proportion of the cases involving more serious felony classes (a characteristic found to increase the imposition of a prison sentence, and analyses of arrest data suggest that a smaller proportion of felony arrests are involving more serious felony classes). Collectively, enhancements to diversionary practices like ARI, changes in sentencing policies and practices, and some changes in the characteristics of those moving through the felony courts all likely played a part in explaining this decreased use of prison from St. Clair County. More detailed and more current analyses of the factors influencing sentencing practices and patterns in St. Clair County will be conducted in the future as part of the CJCC strategic planning efforts to better understand what has led to these changes.

**Changing Correctional Populations**

There are three possible jurisdictions under which individuals convicted of a felony in St. Clair County can be supervised: in prison, on probation or on Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR or “parole”). Increases in crime and arrests during the 1980s and 1990s, coupled with the changing sentencing practices for those convicted of a felony in St. Clair County in the past decade described above, have led to changes in the number of those convicted of a felony under the custody of the criminal justice system in/from St. Clair County.

As described above, the majority of those convicted of a felony in St. Clair County (and in most Illinois counties) are sentenced to probation. As a result, probation is where the largest category of those convicted of a felony under the custody of the justice system are supervised. Between the mid-1980s and the late 1990’s, the number of those convicted of a felony on probation in St. Clair County increased from just under 700 in 1986 to more than 1,000 by 1999 (Figure 10).\textsuperscript{26} The use of probation

\textsuperscript{25} Adult Redeploy Illinois, Report SFY 2017.

\textsuperscript{26} Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of aggregate, published data from the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts’ Annual reports.
as a sentence decreased during the late 1990s and early 2000s. As a result of an increased use of probation in sentencing those convicted of a felony in St. Clair County over the past 6 years, the number of those convicted of a felony on probation at year-end increased, climbing from 1,224 on December 31, 2010 to 1,566 on that same date in 2016, a 28% increase. By comparison, the number of those convicted of a felony on probation at year-end in Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties decreased 5% during that same time period. At the end of 2016, there were a total of 3,026 people convicted of a felony under the custody of the justice system (including probation, prison and MSR) from St. Clair County, with 52% of them supervised on probation.

**Figure 10. Prison, Felony Probation, and “Parole” (MSR) Population in St. Clair County**

![Graph showing population trends](image)

Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of IDOC data provided by IDOC’s Planning and Research Unit, aggregate published data by IDOC, and aggregate published AOIC data.

The long-term trends in the number of individuals in prison from St. Clair County, as a result of either being sentenced to prison or being returned to prison as a technical MSR violator, increased dramatically during the 1990s through 2010 as a result of increases in crime, arrests, and the proportion of those convicted of a felony being sentenced to prison during much of that time period. For example, at the end of the state fiscal year (SFY) 1990 there were fewer than 500 adults in Illinois’
prisons from St. Clair County, but by the end of SFY 2010 there were 799 (Figure 10). More recently, the number of people in prison from St. Clair County at the end of SFY 2017 was 968, or 17% higher than on that same date in 2010. By comparison, the number of people in prison at the end of SFY 2017 from Illinois outside of Cook and St. Clair counties was 6% lower than at the end of SFY 2010.

This apparent contradiction—fewer admissions to prison (Figure 8) and a lower probability of going to prison (Figure 9), but more people in prison (Figure 10)—can be partly explained by shifts in the types of crimes that people were being sentenced to prison for during this time period. Since 2010, an increasing proportion of prison sentences have been for more serious types of crimes that are associated with longer sentences. For example, during SFY 2010, 30% of those sentenced to prison from St. Clair County were convicted of a violent offense; in SFY 2017, almost one-half (45%) of those sentenced to prison were convicted of a violent offense. As the proportion of prison sentences from St. Clair County that involved violent offenses increased, so did the average length of the prison sentence imposed. Among those sentenced to IDOC from St. Clair County in SFY 2010, the average prison sentence was 4.3 years, whereas the average sentence imposed in SFY 2017 was 5.4 years. Correspondingly, the proportion of people in prison from St. Clair County who were convicted and sentenced to prison for a violent crime also increased. On June 30, 2005, 60% of those in prison from St. Clair County had been convicted of a violent crime. On June 30, 2010, 68% of those in prison from St. Clair County had been convicted of a violent crime. Finally, by December 31, 2017, 75% of those in prison from St. Clair County had been convicted of a violent crime. Put plainly, the overall number of people in prison from St. Clair County grew despite a decrease in admissions from St. Clair because a larger proportion of people in prison from St. Clair were serving longer sentences for more serious crimes. Overall, of the 3,026 persons convicted of a felony under the custody of the justice system (including probation, prison and MSR) from St. Clair County at the end of 2016, 32% were incarcerated in an Illinois state prison.

Finally, as described previously, once inmates have served their sentence they are released from prison onto MSR. Of the 3,026 people convicted of a felony under the custody of the justice system (including probation, prison and MSR) from St. Clair County at the end of 2016, 16% of them were being supervised by IDOC parole agents in St. Clair County. Generally, the number of people on MSR in St. Clair County has followed the trends in releases from IDOC, which is influenced by the admissions in previous years. Thus, when the number of those in prison is combined with those on MSR in St. Clair County, more than one-half (68%) of those convicted of a felony from St. Clair County were incarcerated in an Illinois state prison.

27 Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of data provided by the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Planning and Research Unit.
28 Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of data provided by the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Planning and Research Unit and aggregate, published data from the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts’ Annual reports.
and under the jurisdiction of the justice system were under the custody/supervision of IDOC, with the remainder on probation.

Reentry and Recidivism of Those Released from Prison Who Return to St. Clair County

An important tenet within the area of sentencing and prison populations is that almost everybody sentenced to prison will eventually be released from prison. Although individuals convicted of murder serve extremely long sentences and a substantial portion are never released, these individuals account for a very small percent of all admissions to prison. In St. Clair County, for example, less than 3% of all the admissions to prison from St. Clair County between SFY 2010 and 2017 were for murder. Thus, most individuals sentenced to prison are released, and for the most part, those individuals who are sentenced to prison from St. Clair County return back to St. Clair County upon their release. Among those returning from prison to St. Clair County between SFY 2011 and 2015, 62% were originally sentenced to prison in St. Clair County. Further, of those released from prison and returning to St. Clair County, the majority return to East St. Louis. Specifically, 62% of all prison releasees coming back to St. Clair County returned to East St. Louis, and nearly a quarter (23%) of all releasees coming back St. Clair County returned to one specific zip-code in East St. Louis (62205). Again, most inmates released from prison return back to where they lived prior to prison, usually living with family members or friends.

However, it is important to keep in mind that most individuals sentenced to prison from, and returning to, St. Clair County were not incarcerated in prisons in close proximity to St. Clair County. In fact, only 37% of the inmates who returned to St. Clair County from prison were housed in correctional centers in IDOC’s Southern District of Illinois, limiting the ability of family members and community organizations to maintain or establish contact and positive relationships that could support reentry and reintegration.

Of particular concern for many, and one of the measures used to gauge the effectiveness of correctional interventions, is the degree to which those processed through the criminal justice system recidivate, or continue to engage in criminal behaviors. Although measuring someone’s involvement in criminal behavior is difficult, given that such a large portion of crimes are not reported or known to the police, one way that recidivism has been measured is whether or not someone is rearrested for a new crime following the imposition or completion of their sentence. To examine recidivism among those released from prison who returned to St. Clair County, data were collected and analyses

29 Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center of Research, Policy and Practice of data provided by the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Planning and Research Unit and CHRI data generated and provided by the Research and Analysis Unit, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
performed to determine the rate and patterns of rearrest among those released from IDOC between SFY 2011 to 2014 who returned to St. Clair County. These analyses revealed that, overall, 47% of those released from prison were rearrested for any type of crime within three years of their release, a rate statistically similar to that seen in Illinois as a whole.\(^\text{30}\) Consistent with prior research on the topic, the releasee’s age and criminal history were the two strongest predictors of whether or not they were rearrested: younger individuals and those with more extensive criminal histories had the highest recidivism rates. In addition, it also appears that the rate of recidivism for those released back to St. Clair County varied depending on the community where they returned. For example, those released back to zip codes in East St. Louis had a lower overall recidivism rate (36% arrested within three years) compared to other cities in St. Clair County, while those released back to zip codes in Belleville had a higher recidivism rate (53% arrested within three years) than those released elsewhere in the county.\(^\text{31}\)

**Figure 11. Examining Recidivism of Adult IDOC Releasees Returned to St. Clair County, Crimes of Violence**

![Pie chart showing crime categories](image)

Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice of data provided by the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Planning and Research Unit and CHRI data generated and provided by the Research and Analysis Unit, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

\(^\text{30}\) Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center of Research, Policy and Practice of data provided by the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Planning and Research Unit and CHRI data generated and provided by the Research and Analysis Unit, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

\(^\text{31}\) Comparisons here were limited to those released back to East St. Louis and Belleville since these two cities had a relatively large number of releasees and therefore allowed for some detailed statistical analyses. These differences in the recidivism rates for those released to East St. Louis and Belleville were evident after statistical controls were used to account for the characteristics of releasees, such as demographic, criminal history, and current offense characteristics.
Oftentimes when the public hears or thinks about prison releasees committing new crimes, offenses such as murder or shootings come to mind. However, it is important to note that most of those that were arrested following their release from prison were arrested for non-violent crimes. Overall, 16% of those released from prison and returned to St. Clair County were arrested for a violent crime within three years of their release,\(^{32}\) and the majority of these arrests involved crimes of domestic violence.\(^{33}\) Specifically, 9% of St. Clair releasees from IDOC were arrested for a domestic violence offense, while 7% were arrested for some other type of violent crime (Figure 11). Further, this 9% domestic violence recidivism rate among those released to St. Clair County was slightly lower than the 11% rate seen in the rest of Illinois. Domestic violence is clearly a serious offense. Arrests for domestic violence have significant implications for MSR supervision and revocation, since under Illinois law anyone on MSR who is rearrested for a domestic violence offense must have a warrant issued to revoke their MSR and be returned to prison as an MSR violator. Finally, a small percent of those released from prison and returned to St. Clair County were arrested for offenses involving the illegal possession of a firearm (2%) or the use of a firearm in the commission of a crime (2%).

**Conclusions and Future Research**

The analyses presented in this report highlight some of the major trends and issues within the St. Clair County criminal justice system. Similar to what has been seen across the country, and in Illinois, the overall crime rate in St. Clair County has decreased consistently over the past 15 years, driven primarily by a decrease in property crime. During the more recent period of time focused on in this report (2010 to 2015/2016), the property and violent Index crime rate decreased, but increases were seen in both arrests reported through CHRI and felony court filings. Despite this increase in arrests and felony filings, a clear shift in sentencing practices in St. Clair County has resulted in a decrease in the number and proportion of those convicted of a felony sentenced to prison in St. Clair County, and an increase in the proportion and number of those convicted of a felony sentenced to probation in the county. During this period of time when the reliance on prison as a response to crime has decreased, the crime rate in St. Clair County has continued to decrease.

> The following staff from Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy, and Practice were involved in the analyses, writing and formatting of this report (in alphabetical order): Claire Fischer, Carly McCabe, David Olson, Ph.D., Henry Otto, John Specker, M.A., Joseph Schasane, Donald Stemen, Ph.D., Amanda Ward, Ph.D., and Lauren Weisner

\(^{32}\) Unlike overall rates of recidivism, differences in the recidivism rate for violent crime among those released to East St. Louis and Belleville were not evident after statistical controls were used to account for the characteristics of releasees, such as demographic, criminal history, and current offense characteristics.

\(^{33}\) Source: Analyses by Loyola’s Center of Research, Policy and Practice of data provided by the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Planning and Research Unit and CHRI data generated and provided by the Research and Analysis Unit, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority