



# POLICY BRIEF 8.20.18

## BACKGROUND

The city of Atlanta has taken important steps toward public safety and community wellness over the last 4 years. The reforms of Pre-Arrest Diversion, Marijuana Reclassification, and Bail Reform evidence an increasing understanding that jailing people for behaviors stemming from extreme poverty, addiction, or mental health challenges has done more harm than good. Divesting from these long standing but unsuccessful institutions and policing methods and investing in the services and supports that our communities need to be safe and thrive is the right way forward.

Now is the time to remedy the harm caused by policies that criminalized instead of supported our most vulnerable residents. Together, we can strive toward an Atlanta whose public safety initiatives are aligned with what we believe as a city: that stable and healthy families and communities are the cornerstone to community safety and wellness.

Closing the extra jail, repurposing the facility to benefit the community, and utilizing the millions of dollars spent annually on its operation to strengthen our communities is the next step toward this vision.

## THE WAY FORWARD

In closing the Atlanta City Detention Center, we must begin with the end in mind. *What is the best use of the property? How can the facility and the reallocated funds be used toward ending the city's racial and income disparities? How can tax dollars made available by this closure be best used to provide mental health, addiction, housing and job supports to Atlanta's residents? What are the most effective, evidence-based practices and programs Atlanta can implement as we make this shift from detention to community-based supports?*

**The following steps should be taken through appropriate legislation and administrative policy:**



**A transparent,  
community-driven  
Design Team to  
determine the  
repurposing of the  
facility and the  
reallocation of the  
funds**

A Design Team approach will produce better results than a back room, closed door, political deal. Done well, a Design Team allows various constituencies to work - together - through the question of how to repurpose and reallocate. This includes the communities that have been most harmed by the jail and the old ways of policing. Neither the Mayor nor the Council should unilaterally decide about the facility or the funding.

The Pre-Arrest Diversion Initiative's 62-person Design Team was a model for a transparent, collaborative process that the city should utilize again with the right stakeholders for this project.

A Design Team would engage families and community members most impacted, residents, social service providers, labor, community organizations, the business community, the faith community, public safety and elected officials to undertake steps such as:

- Researching innovative potential uses of the building and/or land;
- Researching other jurisdictions who have repurposed similar facilities and their lessons learned in so doing;
- Interviewing current and former detainees and their families to assess service needs;
- A thorough and engaged participatory budgeting and visioning process to develop proposals for the facility and funding that most benefits the communities impacted.

The Design Team would develop a set of detailed recommendations to provide to the city for action.

Importantly, legislation must provide that **no** RFPs, negotiations, sales, or even discussion of the building or property should take place with any potential buyer or developer until the Design Team has completed their process and issued formal recommendations.



**A worker-centered process to ensure a just transition for the 360 employees**

A Working Group, as a subset of the Design Team, would focus on developing a just transition for the 360 employees. Such a working group would hold town hall meetings and engage in interviews with workers to collaboratively develop a plan to support each and every worker on their career path. This transition will be a “lay-up” not a “lay-off.”



**Justice System Alternatives**

In order to ensure that the closure of ACDC does not have unforeseen negative impacts on other justice system institutions and that our police department priorities are in line with the reforms involved in closing the jail, several immediate reforms should be made. These reforms also pave the way for “depopulation” of the jail so that closure can occur in a timely fashion and the no tax dollars will be used needlessly moving detainees to other locations.

- The repeal of 15-20 City Ordinances which currently cause people to be booked into the city jail;
- The City Code should be amended to provide for the issuing of citations and not arrests for most or all of its violations;
- A formal change in policy for APD officers to issue copy of charges in lieu of arrests for state traffic violations

In addition, a Justice Systems Alternatives working group should be formed to further many promising initiatives already underway including:

- Partnership with Fulton County Superior Court Justice & Mental Health Taskforce on the creation of a peer-run 23-hour resource center that accepts drop-offs from law enforcement and has co-located service
- Municipal court initiatives such as Homeless Court and Pre-Booking Diversion
- Partnership with Fulton County criminal justice stakeholders and elected officials to implement county-wide bail reform

These recommendations along with the city’s immediate move to permanently end the contract with the U.S. Marshals Service and the Immigration Customs Enforcement Agency will allow for the jail to be closed to any correctional purpose by July 1, 2019.