

LEHIGH VALLEY JUSTICE INSTITUTE

OCTOBER, 2021

2021

ANNUAL REPORT

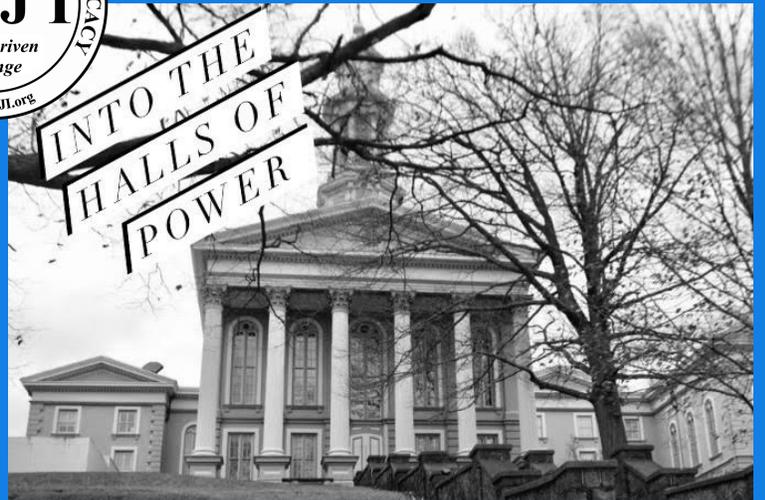




TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Board Members and Staff (3)
- A Message from the Executive Director (4)
- LVJI's Unique Approach (5)
- Establishing a Nonprofit in the Middle of a Pandemic (6)
- Long-Range Research Collaborative Interview Process / Transparency in Police Use of Force (7)
- Bail Data Report / People's Guide to the Criminal Justice Process (8)
- Recovery Court / Reentry (9)
- Summary Warrant Amnesty Pilot Program / Police Department Diversity & Anti-Bias Training (10)
- Youth Diversion from the Criminal Justice System / Reducing Racial Disparity in Juvenile Detention (11)
- LVJI Youth Division (12)
- Alternative 911 Co-Responder Models (13)
- LVJI Cash Bail Forum (14)
- LVJI as a Trusted Community Partner (15)

OFFICERS

- Marvin Boyer, Chair
- Wilberto Sicard, Vice Chair
- Robert Walden, Treasurer
- Antonia Grifo, Secretary

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Marvin Boyer, Chair
- Wilberto Sicard, Vice Chair
- Robert Walden, Treasurer
- Antonia Grifo, Secretary
- Ettore Angelo
- Dean Young
- Kate Richmond

STAFF

- Joseph E. Welsh, Executive Director
- Cecelia Khorrami, Administrative Coordinator
- Kamal Bookwala, Data Scientist

Board members who serve on our issue operating committees are assisted by dedicated volunteers.



DIRECTORS

- Ettore Angelo
- Hasshan Batts
- Angela Bell
- Marvin Boyer
- Reverend Phillip Davis
- Justan Parker Fields
- Hon. Robert Freeman
- Antonia Grifo
- Mohammed Khaku
- Charles Marcon
- Michael Laws
- Ross P. Marcus
- Richard Master
- Holona Ochs
- Luis Perez
- Kate Richmond
- Jose Rivera
- Lynnet Sanchez
- Wilberto Sicard
- Ebonie Cunningham-Stringer
- Jennifer Swann
- Julie Thomases
- Robert Walden
- Dean Young

VOLUNTEERS

BAIL COMMITTEE

- Robert Campbell

POLICE REFORM COMMITTEE

- Guillermo Lopez, Jr.
- Maureen Simonetta
- Dr. Harrison Bailey

REENTRY COMMITTEE

- Kellie Walenciak
- Jim Hauser
- Cathy Gumlock
- Toni Hoffman
- Amanda Notte
- Nancy Wyant
- Lorena Hacker



A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOSEPH E. WELSH

It has been an exciting year at Lehigh Valley Justice Institute. We have started our work with local governmental officials, and established our presence in the broader community. The LVJI philosophy of seeking to institutionalize the fine work of Lehigh Valley community organizations into the structure of government is being heard both in the communities and in the halls of government. It is by such institutionalization that we are able to produce truly sustainable structural change in the justice system. We are positioning LVJI as the trusted community partner which can reform the local criminal justice system into one which has much greater responsiveness to the community, while also focusing out from the criminal justice processes to a greater vision of justice for our communities. That greater vision involves issues such as creative opportunities for youth, especially in historically underserved communities. It also involves new approaches to public emergency response, where “service to the community” includes not only traditional security based policing, but also social services which support individuals, and defuse and avoid confrontations. A new day is dawning in our Valley, and LVJI is at the forefront of that rising sun.



LVJI'S UNIQUE APPROACH

LVJI's unique approach to research, policy development, and advocacy is made possible through the dedication of our team. Members of our board, staff, and volunteers bring together a special level of expertise, diversity, real world experience, and commitment to a re-imagined criminal justice system. The best way to identify deficiencies in the system is to listen to the lived experiences of those previously incarcerated. We are proud to have this perspective represented on our board and through our issue committee volunteers. Such individuals give us an "inside look" at the most pressing criminal justice issues harming our community.

Meanwhile, our Long Range Research Collaborative is broadening this perspective further by conducting interviews with incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals. The Research Team will also gain insight from lawyers, judges, law enforcement officials and community leaders to gather multiple perspectives of our carceral system and how it will be re-imagined. With the help of these seasoned scholars, we can analyze these varying perspectives from an academically informed framework.

Why the Lehigh Valley?

The Lehigh Valley area of Pennsylvania is often seen as a microcosm of the nation. Because of this, we believe the local solutions that we craft here will be portable in nature, in that they can be implemented in other communities. In national elections, the Lehigh Valley is often identified as the swing area of the swing state. As we follow the data to lay out the case for change, we believe our arguments will resonate with a wide cross-section of the public in the Lehigh Valley and around the nation.

Establishing a Nonprofit in the Middle of a Pandemic

2020 was the year of uncertainty. The traumas we endured over this year will be seared in our minds forever. February marked the first detection of COVID-19 in the U.S. By mid-march, all 50 states reported COVID cases. By April 1st, the entire state of Pennsylvania was on lockdown, isolated from their loved ones and anxiously navigating the realities of our "new normal." During our isolated lockdown, we feverishly glued our eyes to the T.V. as COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths surged across the nation. To date, the U.S. reports 42.3M COVID-19 cases and over 700,000 deaths. According to the United States Department of Labor, the unemployment rate peaked above levels seen even in the Great Recession.

Employment fell by 21.0 million from the fourth quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2020, while the unemployment rate more than tripled from 3.6% to 13%. Black Americans experienced higher unemployment rates during the height of the pandemic compared to their white counterparts. To date, Black and Latinx workers are still experiencing slower job recovery. According to the World Health Organization's report Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health, "poor and unequal living conditions are the consequences of deeper structural conditions that together fashion the way societies are organized—poor social policies and programs, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics." The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates these deep structural conditions that negatively impact minority communities. On May 25th, 2020 -- only a couple of months into the pandemic -- a Black man was murdered by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin. Chauvin lethally pressed his knee into George Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. This event sparked a well overdue social awakening for racial justice.

It became crystal clear that we needed an institute focused on criminal justice reform after the murder of George Floyd. An estimated 1500 protestors gathered in Easton alone. Rallies in Allentown and Bethlehem drew similar crowds. Our communities were clearly demanding change. Local activists feared that they too could be taken at the hands of police solely based on the color of their skin. And so, the Lehigh Valley Justice Institute was born in the months following to create a reimagined criminal justice system that is equitable and fair for all communities. The whole world was on pause during the pandemic, yet the urgency for a mass movement prevailed. Our community mobilized in numbers to take to the streets and ultimately speak our Institute into existence. Amid a global pandemic, we realized that the health and safety of our community members could be threatened in many forms, whether disease or deep structural systems.

In uncertain times, LVJI stuck to a vision of a reimagined criminal justice system. These events shaped us profoundly and harnessed the energy we needed to launch our Institute. With an initial pledge of multi-year support from the Unfinished Business Foundation, LVJI is building a solid community base for our mission. In less than one year, we were able to position ourselves as a credible and reliable community resource. Our board constructed issue operating committees focused on bail, reentry, and policing. Four of our board members have been engaged in a research collaborative which will take a comprehensive look at the criminal justice system in the Lehigh Valley. Our team of dedicated staff members, interns, and volunteers embarked on numerous data collection and research projects. In addition, we continue to grow our online presence and build the LVJI brand via our website and various social media platforms. Our first year in existence has been rewarding despite the many obstacles 2020-21 threw at us. In tough times we rise together!



Long-Range Research Collaborative

Four members of our Board have been engaged in a research collaborative which is taking a comprehensive look at the criminal justice systems in the Lehigh Valley. The Research Collaborative is a multi-year study being undertaken by Kate Richmond of Muhlenberg College, Angela Bell of Lafayette College, Holona Ochs of Lehigh University, and Ebonie Cunningham Stringer of Penn State University. The work of the Collaborative is being organized by the Institute's Vice-President Wilberto Sicard, who is starting his first year at Yale law school.

LVJI Research Team



KATE RICHMOND

PhD., Professor of Psychology, Muhlenberg College; former Member, SCI-Graterford Prison Think Tank; Licensed Psychologist, private practice



EBONIE C. STRINGER

PhD., Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, Penn State Berks, Sociologist



HOLONA OCHS

Associate Professor of Political Science, Lehigh University



ANGELA BELL

Assistant Professor of Psychology, Lafayette College

Transparency in Police Use of Force



**Pictured: Jillian Ferrera, Summer Intern
Researcher on Police Use of Force
Databases**

LVJI recently released a report detailing efforts taken by some local governments to release information regarding use of force by officers. The study examined three jurisdictions: Norfolk County, Virginia; the statewide system in New Jersey; and New York City. Although the three systems differ in the detail of information provided, they are all a good start at documenting police actions and the departments' response to those actions. This is an important step toward transparency and community involvement in policing. It is a necessary prerequisite to true community policing. Our report was recently on the agenda to be discussed at a county Chiefs of Police meeting, and we have discussed it with several local police chiefs.



BAIL DATA REPORT

We are finishing up a study of bail data from a two and a half year period in Lehigh and Northampton Counties. We are particularly interested in the bail amounts set by our local Magisterial District Justices, a breakdown of gender and race, as well as the relationship of bail amounts and the per capita income of an MDJ district. Our data team is analyzing data from many sources including comprehensive records from the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, as well as socio-economic data specific to the Lehigh Valley. Our areas of study included the community economic impact of the System of Mass Incarceration and the devastating effects of the antiquated cash bail system. This would be not just the costs to the taxpayers to confine people, it would also be an analysis of the costs to the local economies in total. Our chief researcher, Kamal Bookwala, is a graduate student studying Applied Economics at the University of California, Irvine. She has already conducted such an economic analysis in the context of climate change. Kamal started as a summer intern but has agreed to stay on a part time basis to be a part of this project.



Pictured: Kamal Bookwala, Summer Data Scientist Intern

PEOPLE'S GUIDE TO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESSES

An LVJI undergraduate research project for summer of 2021 was the creation of a "People's Guide to the Criminal Justice Processes." Guides will be created for both Northampton and Lehigh Counties and be presented as a booklets, an LVJI website resource, and infographics accessible to the public. The text of the Northampton County guide is complete, and final touches are being done by staff. We will be producing a similar guide for Lehigh County. These guides will function as a public resource for our community members and not only help them navigate justice processes in their community, but also provide a roadmap for local advocates for change.



Pictured: Nicholas Battisti Summer Research Intern



RECOVERY COURT & REENTRY

LVJI doesn't just criticize, we promote solutions that are working. We are producing a video documenting the work of the Northampton County Recovery Court. We were invited by Northampton County Judge Craig Dally to video a graduation ceremony in his courtroom. One of the graduates was a woman who we already interviewed about her journey. We are scheduling interviews with Judge Dally and the staff of Recovery Court, as well as other graduates. We hope that the release of the video will serve to motivate increased funding for "problem solving" courts, and the establishment of such courts in other counties. These courts, including mental health and veterans courts, focus on the underlying causes of criminal behavior. They are an important step on the road to Restorative Justice, where the emphasis is on restoration rather than retribution.

We have been meeting with many local officials and community leaders regarding reentry programs. The focus of these meetings is to develop a conceptual structure to plan for the integration of community resources with the governmental structure. In many fields "public-private partnerships" have long been touted as a way to maximize societal resources. This model can also be used as an approach to justice issues. We have also met with both county legislative bodies, individually and at public meetings, to discuss LVJI's role in solidifying change to our justice system. They are highly supportive of our efforts.



SUMMARY WARRANT AMNESTY PILOT PROGRAM

We promoted an innovative “summary warrant amnesty week” on our social media platforms. The pilot program was the brainchild of Magisterial District Judge Nancy Matos-Gonzales. It allowed people with outstanding warrants for traffic tickets or other minor, summary, offenses to resolve the warrant and, if unable to pay the underlying fine, set up a payment plan. This avoids a scenario where a person is driving down a street one night, is pulled over, and gets arrested for an outstanding warrant, with all the consequences which follow from an arrest – such as possibly losing your job if you are on your way to work at the time. 41 cases were resolved by the Amnesty Pilot Program. Participants had their warrants resolved by making a payment plan with the court for any outstanding fines. We will be obtaining the data on those cases for further analysis, and creating a video production on the benefits of such program on a larger scale.

POLICE DEPARTMENT DIVERSITY AND ANTI-BIAS TRAINING

LVJI has also been working with local police departments to increase the diversity of their staff. It is essential for a true community policing model that the department reflect the community which it is policing. Several local departments have been increasing efforts to recruit minority candidates, but there are institutional barriers which make such recruitment difficult and must be reformed. Additionally, LVJI Police Reform Committee member Guillermo Lopez, partnering with Northampton County, is offering anti-bias training, at the county’s expense, to all police departments in Northampton County. It is important to realize that such training is not once and done, but must continue on an ongoing basis.



YOUTH DIVERSION FROM THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

After discussion with Northampton County Court Administration, we are looking to set up a meeting among Court staff, Bethlehem Police Department, and the Bethlehem School District to discuss youth diversion and steps to reduce the “school to prison pipeline.” Dr. Harrison Bailey, Principal of Liberty High School is a member of LVJI’s Police Reform Committee. All three of these agencies have demonstrated a sincere commitment to this issue, and we are confident that LVJI can work with them to produce some dramatic results in the City of Bethlehem. We are also looking to establish a Youth Division of LVJI to empower youth to work with local officials to bring about change in their communities.

REDUCING RACIAL DISPARITY IN JUVENILE DETENTION

Two of our staff members had been chosen to be part of a 7 member Northampton County team to participate in a county project to reduce racial disparity in juvenile detentions. The team was originally constituted to apply to be part of a program sponsored by Georgetown University and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Although Northampton County ultimately was not selected to be part of that program, the County Courts have committed to conducting a similar project on their own. LVJI is following up with Northampton County Court Administration. Nationally, many programs have reduced detention rates overall, but the reduction of racial disparity has proven to be an elusive target. We look forward to developing an innovative plan to reduce that disparity in Northampton County, We have also been asked to assist Lehigh County with a similar project.



LVJI YOUTH DIVISION

We are currently fleshing out the concept of an LVJI Youth Division program. This program seeks to connect at-risk youth with the necessary resources to become agents for change in their local community. This division program would be offered as one of a series of options for youth diverted from the black hole of the juvenile justice system. It would provide opportunities for young people interested in working with local officials to transform the criminal justice system, as well as address the underlying community issues which feed a system of mass incarceration. Through this program, youth would (1) have a safe space to reflect on their personal experiences with the carceral system (2) identify areas of improvement in their community and the local justice system (3) develop and expand their knowledge of current social justice issues (4) identify the key players in achieving reform (5) collaborate with the community and local officials to initiate community reform and policy change. LVJI board member, Luis Perez has been working tirelessly in developing a youth diversion program which would offer this and numerous options in the arts and other activities. We are being advised by Cook County, Illinois Chief Juvenile prosecutor, Maryam Ahmad, who has successfully implemented youth diversion programs. Attorney Ahmad also has the distinction of being the first African-American female to lead the Chicago Bar Association. LVJI is looking to partner with the Easton Boys & Girls Club and other youth oriented organizations on this project.



ALTERNATIVE 911 CO- RESPONDER MODELS

LVJI's Police Reform Committee has been working with local governments to attempt to implement an alternative 911 response system which would involve mental health professionals, as well as traditional law enforcement response. Earlier this year LVJI sponsored a meeting of approximately 30 Lehigh County and City of Allentown officials to discuss two models. The first was presented by the CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) program started in Eugene, Oregon. Under this approach, mental health professionals are first responders in appropriate situations as determined by the 911 dispatcher. CAHOOTS experience has been that less than one percent of such calls require police backup. The Police Chief of Bensalem, Pennsylvania presented an alternative model which he is implementing. Under the Bensalem model mental health professionals are co-responders, with the police making the initial contact while mental health professionals await the law enforcement determination that it is safe to proceed. The essential feature, however, of any true alternative response model is that the mental health professionals are on-scene at the time of the incident to de-escalate the situation.

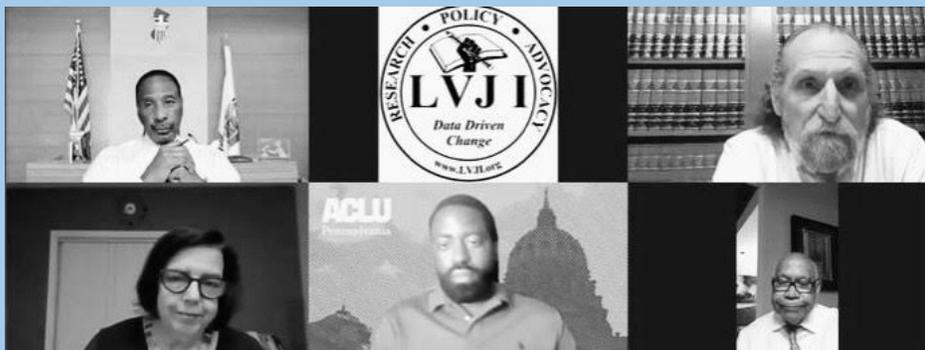


We have met with Bethlehem Police Chief Michelle Kott and are planning meetings with other municipalities. As a follow up to our meeting with Chief Kott, LVJI is planning to analyze the 65,000 calls for service which the Bethlehem Police Department received in the past year, to determine how many calls involved mental health issues. This will assist in department planning for an integrated police/healthcare response to crisis calls



LVJI CASH BAIL FORUM

Nationally, it is estimated that two thirds of the overall jail population has not been convicted of a crime; their inability to post cash bail keeps them locked up. Cash bail criminalizes poverty. New Jersey set an example as a state that has passed groundbreaking legislation to overhaul its bail laws and practices. The results show that it has been a resounding success. On April 29th LVJI hosted a compelling forum on the elimination of cash bail. The forum featured two of the architects of bail reform in New Jersey. Judge Glenn A. Grant and Attorney Roseanne Scotti, along with Alex Domingos of ACLU-PA spoke to reforms that we can undertake locally to move toward abolishing the cash aspect of bail. The forum garnered approximately 100 attendees and is available on our YouTube channel.



Pictured: LVJI hosted a successful Cash Bail Forum featuring Judge Glenn Grant, Attorney Rosanne Scotti, Alex Domingos of ACLU, and Attorney Gary Asteak. April 29, 2021



LVJI AS A TRUSTED COMMUNITY PARTNER

In all of our work we have been reaching out to our communities and to local government officials, of all political persuasions, to work as a reliable partner and source of information to bring about change. We have been invited, and appeared before both the Lehigh County Commissioners and the Northampton County Council. We had very productive meetings with both counties President Judges, and officials from Court Administration, Adult and Juvenile Probation, Pretrial Services, Departments of Corrections, as well as many city officials throughout the Lehigh Valley. As an example, in Northampton County, we arranged a meeting between Pre-Trial Services and representatives of the Quaker Bail Fund. It was a very good “nuts and bolts” session of integrating the Bail Fund with the operating procedures of Pre-Trial Services. Many technical issues were discussed and ironed out. We also had the pleasure of meeting twice with Dr. Mark Erickson, President of Northampton Community College. Among other issues, we discussed educational programming at Northampton County Jail. Dr. Erickson asked if LVJI could obtain length of stay data for the Jail for purposes of planning such programming. We obtained and analyzed the data for NCC. In these and many other ways we have in less than a year positioned LVJI as a trusted community partner for both governmental and private agencies.

*Thank you to all of our donors and volunteers
who have made our work possible!*



The Lehigh Valley Justice Institute (EIN 85-3519661) is operating as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization pending certification by the Internal Revenue Service. Contributions to LVJI are tax-deductible as provided by law.

The official registration and financial information of the Lehigh Valley Justice Institute may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999.
Registration does not imply endorsement.

For more information regarding your donation, contact us at 484.544.4125 or email info@lvji.org.