

Research Brief

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Examining Issues and Factors Associated with Crime and the Criminal Justice System in Jackson, Mississippi: Findings and Proposed Recommendations

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Abstract

This report examined issues and factors associated with crime and the criminal justice system in Jackson, Mississippi, and how those issues are interacting and thus impacting crime and crime prevention activities. This report is linked to a larger, more comprehensive report prepared by One Voice Mississippi in conjunction with the Mississippi State Conference NAACP, the Jackson State University (JSU) Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and the JSU Mississippi Urban Research Center. A review of statistical factors impacting the city's criminal justice system indicated Jackson is shrinking in population size; has high rates of poverty; low levels of educational attainment; and has a large youth demographic population. Crime statistics published by the FBI indicated Jackson has the highest amount of violent crime in Mississippi, and contributed to over half of all murders committed in the State. The criminal justice system operating in Jackson/Hinds County is composed of many complex, inter-dependent, yet often autonomous components encompassing federal, state, local, and nonprofit organizations. Major issues identified in this report include a multitude of unmet socio-economic needs; increasing violent crime rates; law enforcement staffing challenges; an overburdened correctional system; limited funding to address system needs; difficulties in implementing a federal Consent Decree; and growing citizen discontent with system results. By identifying and discussing some of the major issues flowing from this complex interaction, this report intends to provide policymakers and other concerned parties with information that can be used to make the system more efficient, just, and responsive to the needs of all citizens within or outside of the criminal justice system in Jackson, Mississippi.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Background on City of Jackson	4
Jackson/Hinds Criminal Justice System	9
Law Enforcement.....	9
Courts.....	10
Court Officers	10
Local Corrections (Incarceration/Jail)	12
Department of Corrections.....	12
Other System Components	12
Discussion.....	13
Summary Issues Identified.....	14
Conclusions.....	16
Recommendations.....	16
References.....	17

Examining Issues and Factors Associated with Crime and the Criminal Justice System in Jackson, Mississippi: Findings and Proposed Recommendations

Introduction

In considering Jackson’s potential to be at the forefront of development in the state of Mississippi, there are numerous issues that are hindering the achievement of that potential. The most notable of these issues is crime. This report examines several issues and factors associated with crime and the criminal justice system in Jackson, Mississippi. Its purpose is to examine how those issues and factors are interacting and thus impacting crime and crime prevention activities. The functionality of a city’s criminal justice system is an important component in determining the health, safety, and economic vitality of that city. By examining various issues associated with the current system in Jackson, Mississippi, this report hopes to enable concerned individuals and organizations to take effective actions that will help improve the system and thus the quality of life for city residents.

This report is linked to a larger, more comprehensive report prepared by One Voice Mississippi (Lambright-Hayes, 2022) in conjunction with the Mississippi State Conference NAACP, the Jackson State University (JSU) Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and the JSU Mississippi Urban Research Center. The larger report presents a more comprehensive, historical look at the criminal justice system in Hinds County overall; whereas this report concentrates on examining Jackson’s crime rate and criminal justice system’s structure, operations, and supporting auxiliaries impacting crime and crime prevention activities. As discussed in more detail later, several research-related factors impact this report findings. For example, these factors included the lack of data availability on the City of Jackson which necessitated in some cases utilizing Hinds County data (which includes the City of Jackson); the limited release of relevant details contained in the Consent Decree between the City of Jackson and the U.S. Federal Court; and recently passed state legislation creating additional contested elements to Jackson’s criminal justice system. (NOTE: as of the publishing of this research brief (2023), the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled the Mississippi legislature has the constitutional authority to create an additional court within the City of Jackson; however the appointment of temporary circuit judges to that court system violates the state Constitution and is thus prohibited (Smith and Warren, 2023).

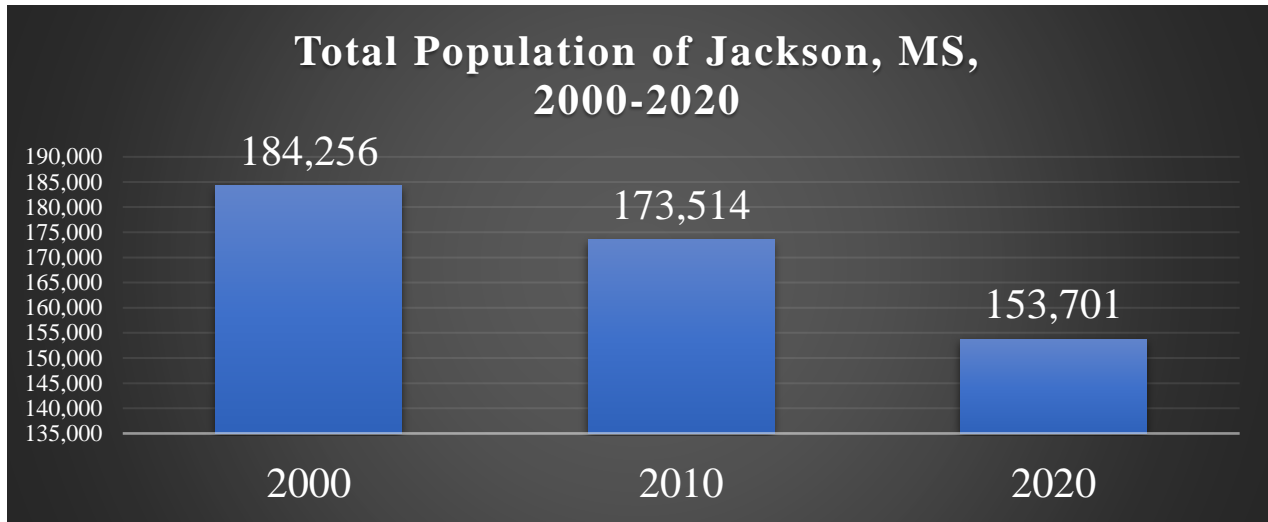
The previous listing of factors impacting this report are prime examples of the complexity and inter-connectedness of crime and criminal justice related issues in Jackson. This report intends to highlight some of those complex issues and how they are potentially impacting crime and crime prevention activities. This report also offers recommendations that policymakers and other concerned parties can possibly adapt through policy measures, increases in funding, and/or through implementing targeted service/program interventions. By examining this issue, the Mississippi Urban Research Center (MURC) at Jackson State University is fulfilling its mission of conducting basic and applied research into urban problems and public policy, and disseminating the results of this research to the general public. Because other urban areas across the state of Mississippi are also experiencing similar types of issues with their criminal justice systems, MURC intends to use reports such as this one to provide those urban areas with a framework for considering how to improve their current systems.

Background on City of Jackson

To assist in understanding crime and the criminal justice system in the city of Jackson, it is important from a contextual standpoint to briefly examine some of the city's key socio-demographic characteristics. The City of Jackson is the capital of the state of Mississippi. Jackson is Mississippi's most populous city and is home to approximately 145,995 residents. Approximately 82.2% of city residents are Black or African American, 15.1% of city residents are White, and approximately 4% of city residents collectively identified as another race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

The city has experienced a decline in population of over 30,000 individuals over the past 20 years, and persons aged 18-24 now make up 11.1% of the city's population, compared to 12.7% in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, 2022). Children under ten years old are 13.6% of the population, compared to 14.5% in 2012, and older adults (aged 60 and older) make up 20.4%, compared to 15% in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, 2022). The change in these first two demographic groups indicate that fewer young people are staying and starting families with small children in the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, 2022). Figure 1 shows how the total population of Jackson has decreased over the years.

Figure 1. Total Population of Jackson, MS, 2000-2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020

Poverty, Income, and Education

A review of U.S. Census data indicates the city of Jackson is severely affected by poverty. As of the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates, approximately 25.6% of the overall population lives below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Nearly 33.8% of youth under the age of 18 are below the poverty line, as well as 18.7% of adults age 60 or over, and the poverty rate of male residents is 26.2%, and 25.1% for female residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Jackson also has a 13.3% unemployment rate (among members of the population age 16 and over), and a median household income of \$40,631 according to 2022 ACS data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

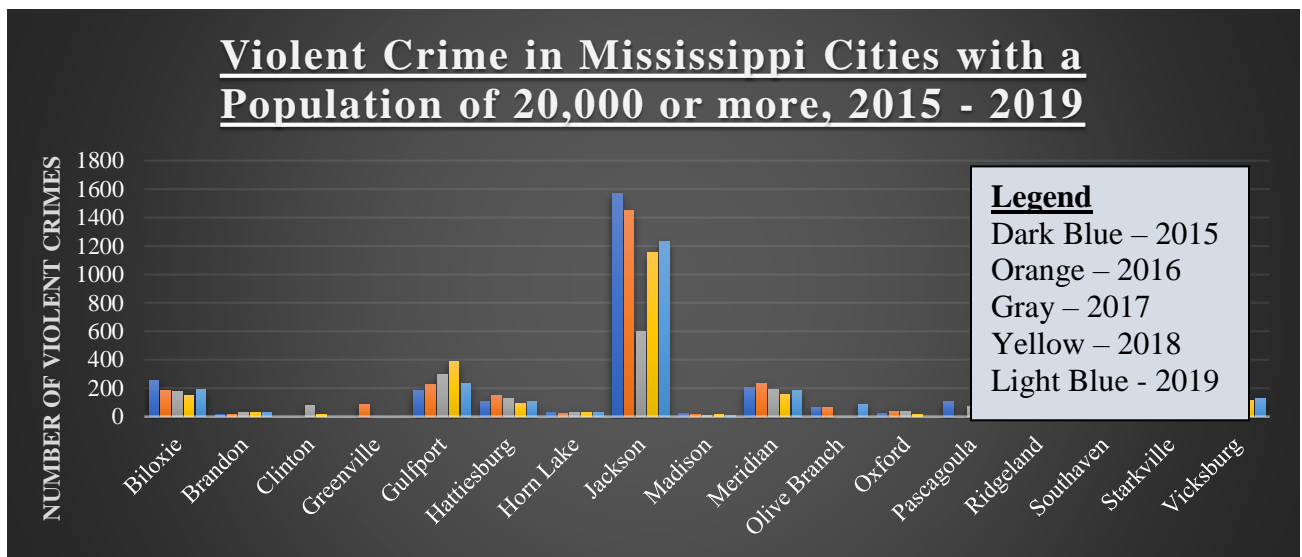
With regard to educational attainment, 26.2% percent of Jackson’s population age 25 and older has a high school diploma or its equivalent. Nearly eight percent of residents age 25 and older have some high school education but no diploma, and 3.6% have less than a ninth-grade education. Sixteen percent of the population representing the range of 18-24 do not have a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Crime in Jackson/Hinds County 2015-2019

In 2021, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations’ (FBI) Annual Crime Report data showed the city of Jackson’s homicide rate for 2020 was the highest in its history, with a total of

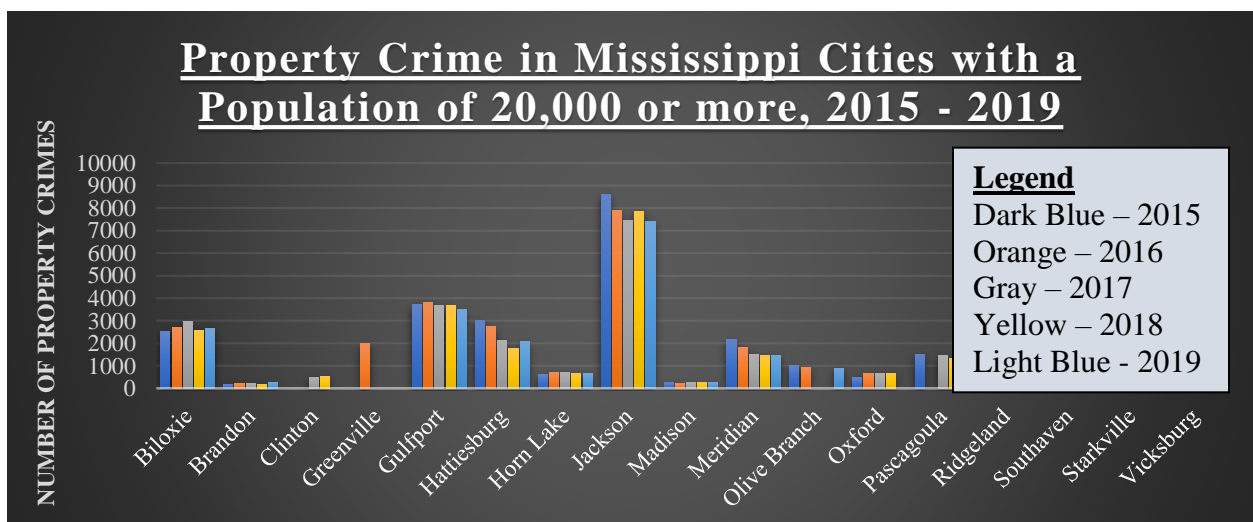
128 homicides and a rate of 79.69 homicides per 100,000 residents (FBI, 2021). This rate was second behind the city of St. Louis for major U.S. cities. By the end of 2021, Jackson again set a record with 152 homicides – most of which were gun deaths (Carter, 2021). Under the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, violent crime is composed of four offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Violent crimes are defined in the UCR Program as those offenses that involve force or threat of force.

Figure 2. Violent Crime in Mississippi Cities with a Population of 20,000 or more, 2015–2019



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, 2019

Figure 3. Property Crime in Mississippi Cities with a Population of 20,000 or more, 2015-2019



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, 2019

Property crime includes the offenses of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Additional crime statistics published by the FBI indicate Jackson has the highest amount of violent crime in Mississippi, with over half of all murders committed in the State. As seen in Figures 2 and 3, the largest number of violent and property crimes also occurred in Jackson (FBI, 2021).

Comparison of Additional Years

Violent Crime

City of Jackson data was not reported for violent or property crime in 2021 and 2022; however, most Mississippi cities are following the National trend of decreasing from 2020 to 2022. The table below provides additional FBI crime data for the years 2020 to 2022 for all Mississippi cities with a population greater than 20,000. Again, the general trend was that most cities were decreasing in violent crime.

Table 1. Violent Crime*

Year	Biloxi	Brandon	Clinton	Greenville	Gulfport	Hattiesburg	Horn Lake	Jackson	Madison
2020	186	24	16	#	321	184	47	1614	12
2021	181	13	42	#	310	194	28	#	6
2022	43	29	25	#	180	161	40	#	13

Year	Meridian	Olive Branch	Oxford	Pascagoula	Ridgeland	Southaven	Starkville	Vicksburg
2020	132	94	45	67	73	123	42	165
2021	#	130	39	65	102	160	43	147
2022	#	128	35	88	86	128	38	103

* # indicates data not reported

Property Crime

Just as with the updated violent crime table presented earlier, the general trend for property crimes in Mississippi cities with a population greater than 20,000 is a decrease. Most Mississippi cities are following the National trend of decreasing from 2020 to 2022.

Table 2. Property Crime*

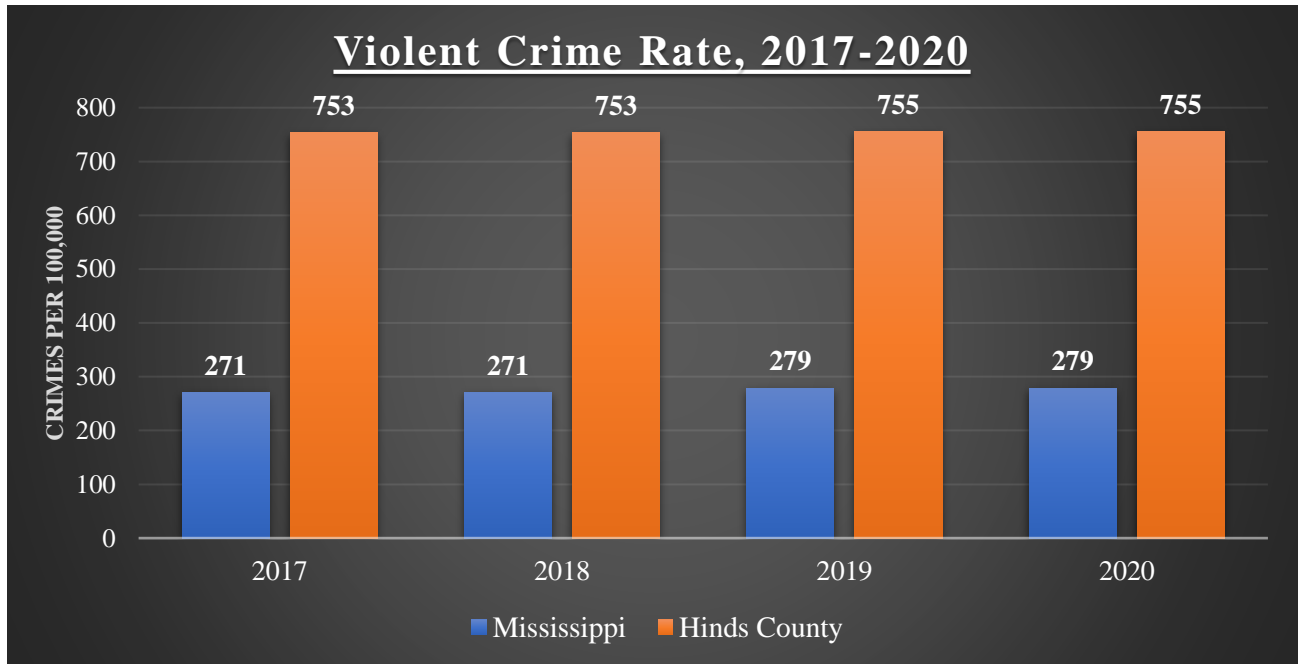
Year	Biloxi	Brandon	Clinton	Greenville	Gulfport	Hattiesburg	Horn Lake	Jackson	Madison
2020	2323	189	467	#	3090	2457	605	6579	175
2021	2368	123	294	#	3137	2363	515	#	119
2022	465	123	297	#	1396	2099	560	#	161

Year	Meridian	Olive Branch	Oxford	Pascagoula	Ridgeland	Southaven	Starkville	Vicksburg
2020	1220	869	609	1197	528	1654	869	902
2021	#	701	504	1037	400	1624	533	746
2022	#	755	441	989	463	1832	617	915

* # indicates data not reported

Due to the limited availability of Jackson crime data for the years 2017-2020, Figure 4 presents data (per 100,000 population) for Hinds County (MS) which houses the city of Jackson.

Figure 4. Violent Crime Rate in Mississippi and Hinds County, 2017-2020*



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, 2020

* Data for 2021-22 data was not reported. The similarities in numbers over time may be a result of the reporting strategy rather than actual crime rate. See website for more detail on the description and unavailability of data.

As can be seen in the previous figures and tables, Jackson – like many other cities, has experienced variations in its violent and property crime rates over the last few years. A major challenge for the city of Jackson concerns selecting and implementing policies and practices that best address Jackson’s unique characteristics and resources. Data presented in the previous sections help describe the volume and seriousness of crime occurring in the city of Jackson. The next section discusses the current criminal justice system operating in Jackson, and issues associated with that system as related to reducing crime and/or promoting crime prevention activities.

Jackson/Hinds Criminal Justice System

This section provides an overview of how the Criminal Justice System in Jackson/Hinds County is structured to deal with Jackson’s crime and incarceration needs. The criminal justice system operating in Jackson/Hinds County is comprised of many complex, inter-dependent, yet often autonomous components encompassing federal, state, and local organizations. Figure 5 provides a general schematic of the current criminal justice system. In an ideal system when an alleged crime is committed by a youth or adult offender, that offender would move through the various components in a timely, just, and efficient manner. That is not always the case in the city of Jackson’s system. To provide more insight into the current criminal justice system in Jackson, the following narratives provide a description of the system’s major organizational structures.

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement is provided by multiple organizations within the city of Jackson’s boundaries. Those organizations include: (1) the Jackson Police Department which provides law enforcement services within the city limits of Jackson; (2) the Hinds County Sheriff’s Office which provides law enforcement services for all of Hinds county; (3) the recently created Office of the Capitol Police, a unit of the Mississippi Department of Public Safety, which provides law enforcement services within the boundaries of the Capital Complex Improvement District inside the city of Jackson; and (4) the Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol which is the law enforcement agency with control over the state’s roads and highways including those within the city of Jackson. Additionally, the above law enforcement agencies are assisted by several Federal law enforcement agencies that include the U.S. Dept. of Justice and the U.S. Marshall’s Service.

Courts

Just as there are multiple federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, there are also multiple court systems operating inside the city of Jackson, sometimes with competing jurisdictional interests (see recently passed House Bill 1020 and Senate Bill 2343) (Sayers and Jimenez, 2023). Table 3 provides a brief listing of those courts that conduct adjudicating functions for alleged offenders whose cases are brought before them:

Table 3. Court Systems Operating Inside the City of Jackson

<u>Federal Court</u>	<u>State Courts</u>	<u>County Courts</u>
United States District Court Southern District of Mississippi	Mississippi Supreme Court Mississippi Court of Appeals Special State Court	Hinds County Circuit Clerk Hinds County Drug Court Hinds County Chancery Court Hinds County Justice Court
<u>Youth Court</u>	<u>Municipal Courts</u>	
Hinds County Youth Court	Jackson Municipal Court	

Court Officers

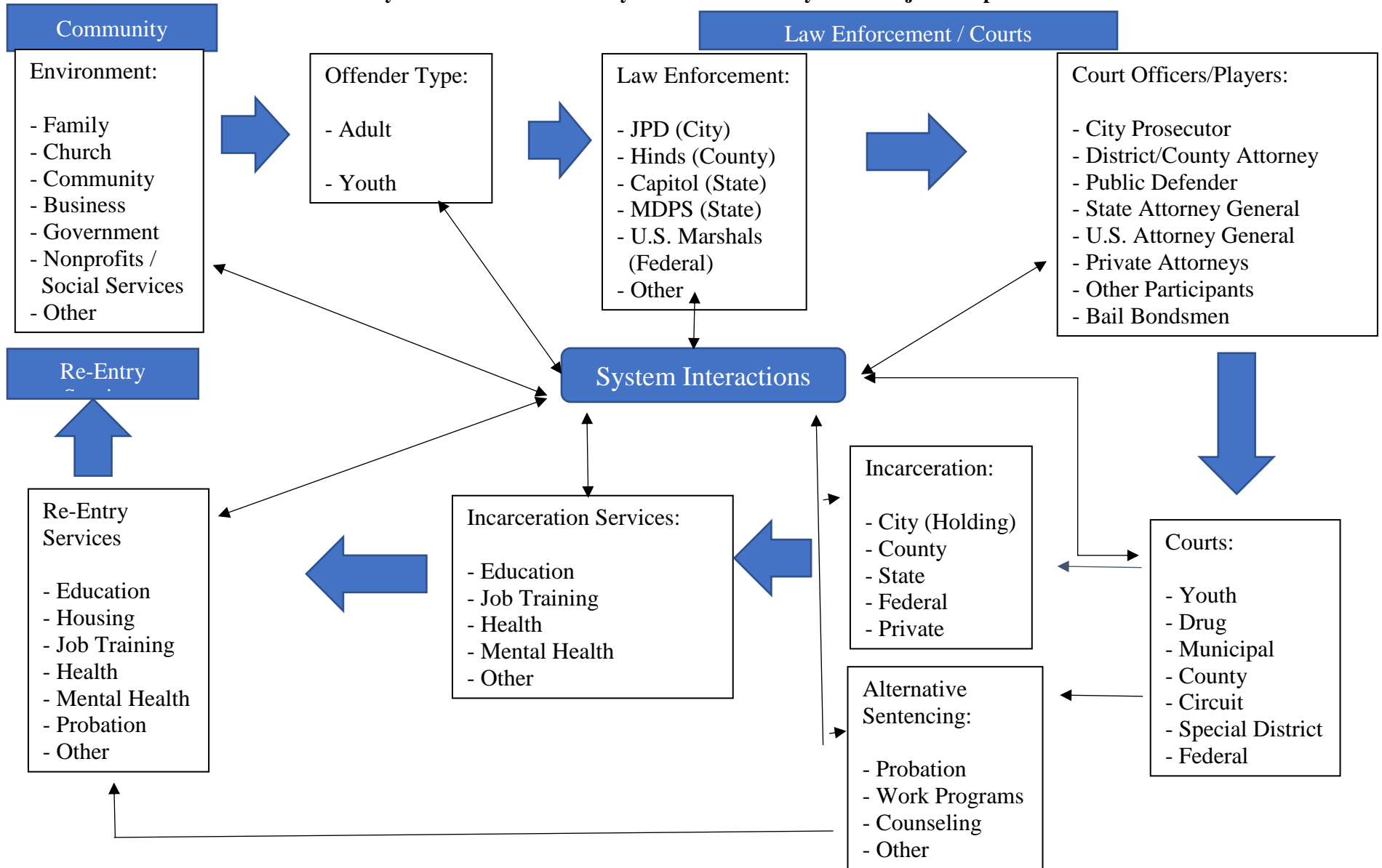
Table 4 provides a brief listing of Court Officers whose primary responsibility is either bringing criminal charges against an alleged offender, or to represent an alleged offender against such criminal charges:

Table 4. Listing of Primary Court Officers

United States District Attorney's Office	Mississippi Attorney General's Office	Public Defenders (Federal, State, & Local)
City Attorney's Office	County Attorney	District Attorney

Figure 5. Overview of Jackson/Hinds County Criminal Justice System Structure, Organizations, and Services

City of Jackson/Hinds County Criminal Justice System: Major Components



Local Corrections (Incarceration/Jail)

Below is a listing of agencies that perform local correctional functions for the city of Jackson. As will be discussed later, some of these functions are dictated by a court Consent Decree order which dictates who should be incarcerated and under what conditions. Those local correctional agencies include: (1) the Jackson Police Department which performs limited incarceration activities due to an agreement with the Hinds County Board of Supervisors; and (2) the Hinds County Sheriff's Office which operates the main incarceration/detention facilities for the county. Detention centers within Hinds County include the Jackson Detention Center, Raymond Detention Center, Joint County and State Work Facility, and the Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center.

Department of Corrections

At the state-level, Mississippi's corrections system is administered by the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) which oversees several programs including the Mississippi Prison Agricultural Enterprises, community corrections, as well as twenty-one state, private, and county institutions. Mississippi has the second-highest prison population per capita in the United States, holding more people in prison than all but one other state (MDOC, 2020). As related to this report, Hinds County represents one of Mississippi's top ten counties with the highest MDOC convictions (MDOC, 2020).

A study conducted by the Mississippi Legislature's "*Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review* (PEER)" committee produced the following data points on Mississippi's Department of Corrections: MDOC's total population numbered 19,426 individuals; ninety-two percent of those individuals are males; 36% of the population was white and 62% was black; seventy-nine percent of the population ranged in the 20-49 age group (PEER Mississippi, 2021). Primary offenses for individuals within MDOC institutions included: violent offenses - 50%, drug offenses - 18%, and non-violent offenses - 16%. Individuals with sentences between 3-5 years contributed to the majority of MDOC releases. Most individuals (64%) were released on parole, probation constituted approximately 16% of MDOC releases, and MDOC's recidivism rate was 37.4% (PEER Mississippi, 2021).

Other System Components

As depicted on the criminal justice system diagram (Figure 5), there are several other components that help comprise the overall system. Those components generally fall under the

category of “support services” and include organizations providing health services, mental health services, educational services, job training services, and probation and other types of reentry services. Although often not typically associated with the criminal justice system, churches/faith-based organizations and community-oriented organizations also provide services that support/interact with the system in some capacity. Examples of these types of interactions include providing housing services, counseling services, food/nutritional services, and mentoring services.

The previous descriptions of Jackson/Hinds County’s criminal justice system components provide insight into the complexity, size, responsibilities, and often competing interests associated with the criminal justice system serving the city of Jackson. It is a system charged with the responsibility of serving literally hundreds of individuals from pre-arrest to adjudication to incarceration to societal re-entry. The next section discusses some of the major issues resulting from the system’s complex array of actors, actions, agendas, processes, facilities, rules, and laws. By identifying and discussing some of the major issues flowing from this complex interaction, this report intends to provide policymakers and other concerned parties with information that can be used to make the system more efficient, just, and responsive to the needs of all citizens whether within or outside of the criminal justice system in Jackson, Mississippi.

Discussion

Jackson is one of many cities affected by a combination of factors that include under-addressed community needs; law enforcement staffing challenges; an overburdened correctional system; limited funding to address system’s needs; and growing citizen discontent with system results. High poverty rates, education attainment levels, limited employment opportunities, Jackson’s shrinking population, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic only served to compound the problem. Further, the city continues to deal with an aging infrastructure, outmigration to suburban and out-of-state cities, and clashes between local and state administration (Reily, 2023). All of these factors have been associated with high levels of crime and social dysfunction in cities (FBI, 2011), and the combination of so many of these factors within a single city lends itself to potentially disastrous outcomes in the long-term. The saying “nothing exists in a vacuum” – meaning that all things affect and are affected by their environment – underscores the necessity of evidence-based policies and interventions to address all of the social and economic factors outlined above. Without addressing such issues as high

levels of poverty, shifting service needs caused by demographic changes (for example, an increasing percentage of young adults), and other basic quality of life indicators, solutions designed solely for the law enforcement and criminal justice systems within Jackson will fail to adequately or comprehensively improve crime rates. Because the problems contributing to high crime rates are multifaceted, potential solutions addressing those same problems also need to be multifaceted.

Example of New Challenges: Property Crimes and Social Media

Overall, national property crime data trends have shown a decrease from 2015 to 2021 (FBI Crime Data, 2023). After comparing 2022 and 2021 data, the result was a 7.1% increase. Larceny and theft made of 72% of the property crimes reported and 15% of those were auto theft (Edwards, 2023). Social media is a big influence on the behavior of teenagers and young adults. Some criminologists say that after the “Kia Boyz” videos about stealing cars went viral on social media, car thefts soared (The Marshal Project, 2023). “In Chicago, the number of stolen Kia and Hyundai cars jumped 35 times over a couple of months from 45 cars stolen in May 2022 to more than 1,400 cars stolen that October” (The Marshal Project, 2023). Data from Los Angeles, Denver, and other major cities also exhibited that trend (The Marshal Project, 2023). In January 2021, Jackson Police were called to investigate a “Street Takeover” event on interstate I-55 (Smith, 2021). Street takeovers are events that may have originated in Los Angeles, CA in 2018, but have spread to other cities through the use of social media (LA Times, 2022). Jackson city and law enforcement officials may want to monitor criminal social events in other cities as a way to begin anticipating and preparing for similar types of crime activities here in Mississippi.

Summary Issues Identified

The following is a summary of issues identified in this report related to crime and the criminal justice system in Jackson, Mississippi:

- An increase in crime rates overall and in areas related to gun violence and homicides
- A growing detention/incarcerated population of younger youth and young adult offenders
- An under-staffed Jackson Police Department not having enough patrol officers
- Jurisdictional disputes among competing law enforcement agencies serving the city of Jackson

- Accusations of an unfair Bond/Bail system that prioritizes financial gains at the expense of defendants
- Long Bail and Pre-trial detention detainment for defendants unable to pay cash bails
- Inadequate detention/incarceration facilities in terms of space needed and the overall quality of facilities
- Under-staffed detention/incarceration facilities serving offenders
- Lack of speedy trials for accused offenders / A backed-up court system and state Crime Lab to process evidence collected from crime scenes
- Under-staffed Public Defenders representing accused offenders
- Perceived racial and economic biases against minorities during arrest and adjudication
- Lack of mental health services for pre-, during, and post-trial offenders
- Lack of technology needed to integrate the various components of the criminal justice system in Jackson/Hinds County
- Lack of coordination between formal system components and community support services
- Lacks of reentry community support services such as housing, employment, and mental health services
- A growing number of guns and other types of firearms possessed by offenders
- A growing number of state laws relaxing gun possession and gun carrying requirements
- Local officials contesting recently passed state legislation adding components to the criminal justice system in the city of Jackson.

Impact of Federal Consent Decree

Further complicating the crime/criminal justice system interactions in Jackson is the issue of the federal consent decree that Hinds County operated under from June 2016 until April 15, 2022. A consent decree is a judge's written order based upon an agreement between parties to a lawsuit as opposed to the case being decided through trial or a hearing. As a result of certain provisions in the consent decree regarding the treatment and housing of offenders, the Hinds County Sheriff's Office confirmed to local news media that the Sheriff's Office was not taking misdemeanor offenders in the three county jails, except those involved in domestic violence (Crown, 2020). A likely impact of the Sheriff's position regarding implementing the consent

decree was that misdemeanor criminal offenders remained free to commit more crimes (including felonies) since they were not incarcerated for their misdemeanor offences.

Conclusions

Like many other cities, Jackson has seen periods of increases in violent crimes over the last few years (FBI, 2021). As identified throughout this report, there are many socio-economic issues impacting crime and the criminal justice system in Jackson. Some of those issues include its declining population, high poverty rates, low educational attainment levels, and a multitude of system-related issues discussed earlier. To effectively address the complexity of issues associated with crime and the criminal justice system in Jackson, policy considerations should be inclusive of socio-economic and non-socio-economic considerations.

In addition to the more traditional public policy approaches requiring legislative action, utilizing solutions such as getting families and community organizations to provide early intervention to help prevent or navigate contact with the criminal justice system should be considered. Other nonpolicy-oriented interventions include addressing the city's high levels of poverty or untreated mental illness. The ending of the federal consent decree should be viewed as an opportunity to improve the criminal justice system in Jackson, and to build better relations between the community, law enforcement, the courts, and support-type organizations.

State and local efforts to effectively address many of these issues identified in this report have often not succeeded. As discussed earlier, the interaction between crime and the criminal justice system in Jackson is complex and involves many different actors, actions, processes, facilities, regulations, laws, and non-legal factors. However, this complexity should not stop policymakers and other concerned parties from systematically addressing those issues limiting the quality of life for those inside and outside of the criminal justice system.

Recommendations

The following section provides a listing of recommended policy approaches based upon the findings and observations contained in this report. These recommendations are designed to help address many of the issues, challenges, and opportunities associated with crime and the criminal justice system in Jackson/Hinds County. Based upon the findings listed in this report, the following recommendations are presented for consideration by state and local policymakers, as well as community members and other concerned parties:

- Increase funding to hire and retain more law enforcement officers, and increase the level of training received by law enforcement officers in the city
- Implement changes to state and local gun-related laws and ordinances for the purpose of reducing the wide-spread availability of guns and similar weapons used to commit crimes and homicides
- Construct more correctional facilities to house the increasing number of adult and juvenile offenders (especially offenders committing violent crimes)
- Provide more effective youth services, vocational training services, school support services, and other community and economic development activities designed to address the community's socio-economic needs
- Provide more family training classes and services for struggling parents of juvenile offenders.

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