

## January 2022

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## REASONS FOR JAIL ADMISSIONS

From 2015 to 2020, more than one-third of people booked into Grant County Jail pretrial were admitted due to failure to appear in court or for not meeting other system requirements (such as paying a fine), rather than on charges for an offense against persons or property.

- The most common reason for pretrial booking into Grant County Jail was for failure to appear in court, making up 30 percent of all pretrial jail bookings.
  - ➔ Nearly all people (99 percent) arrested and booked into Grant County Jail on a top charge of failure to appear in court had only that charge against them, which means they did not have any new criminal charges and were booked simply for failure to appear.
  - ➔ Rural residents may fail to appear in court for various reasons: they don't receive legal notifications, they can't understand complex legal documents, their overburdened defense lawyers are unable to help ensure clients appear in court, they face housing instability, they have difficulty securing transportation, they don't trust the criminal legal system, and/or they can't take time off from work or arrange for childcare.
- Another 7 percent of people booked into jail pretrial were incarcerated for difficulties complying with system requirements other than failure to appear. These included failure to comply (4 percent), driving with a suspended license (2 percent), and assorted other requirements, such as failures to pay fines and fees, pay child support, properly register a car or transfer title, or comply with criminal legal system officials' orders (1 percent).

*"I got picked up on a warrant. It was [for] a failure to appear. . . . I was driving and the state patrol pulled the car over because I had a headlight out. Well, I kind of had a funny feeling that I might have had a warrant. . . . And he asked me for my ID . . . and it was discovered I had a warrant. So I went to jail and then was transported to Grant County the following Tuesday."*

—48-year-old Latinx and Native American man

- The most common original charge in failure to appear cases was driving with a suspended license (DWLS), which itself can be the consequence for a series of unpaid fees, rather than a driving-related charge.<sup>1</sup> Theft and Driving under the influence (DUI) were the next most common original charges.

*"People that go to jail . . . want to have a better life. But when you get in their system deep enough, you can't. You can't get a decent job. If you can't get a decent job, how do you pay to get your license back? If you can't get a license back, you can't get a decent job. It is this downward spiral effect that it is really hard to hit the brakes and it is really hard to stop."*

—32-year-old white man



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Assault and other violence-related charges accounted for 14 percent of pretrial jail bookings. Of these, 63 percent involved domestic violence charges.

- Most bookings for domestic violence assault for both men and women were for misdemeanor-level charges (90 percent for women and 85 percent for men).
- Domestic violence assault was the second-most common top charge for women booked into jail pretrial (9 percent) and the fifth-most common top charge for men booked into jail pretrial (5 percent).

One out of every five pretrial bookings was to hold someone awaiting transfer elsewhere, such as to the state Department of Corrections (11 percent) or to another jurisdiction for adjudication (9 percent).

About 6 percent of pretrial jail bookings in Grant County were for drug-related charges. This was the fifth most common charge category.

LENGTH OF STAY AND FREQUENCY OF BOOKINGS

Although 36 percent of people were released from Grant County Jail within one day, the average length of stay was still nearly 10 days.

Average pretrial stay length by charge category, number of days in jail

People charged with assault were released more quickly than people with more minor charges like failure to appear and drugs.

Percentage of people per charge category who spend 24 hours or less in jail (pretrial)

6.9 days	Failure to appear (FTA)	34%
7.0 days	Theft	43%
9.2 days	Assaults	59%
9.6 days	Out-of-county warrant holds	27%
12.1days	Drugs	33%
14 days	Dept of Corrections (DOC) hold	10%
9.9 days	Overall average (all charges)	36%
9.4 days	Overall average (all charges) w/o USMS* holds	41%

\* United States Marshals Service

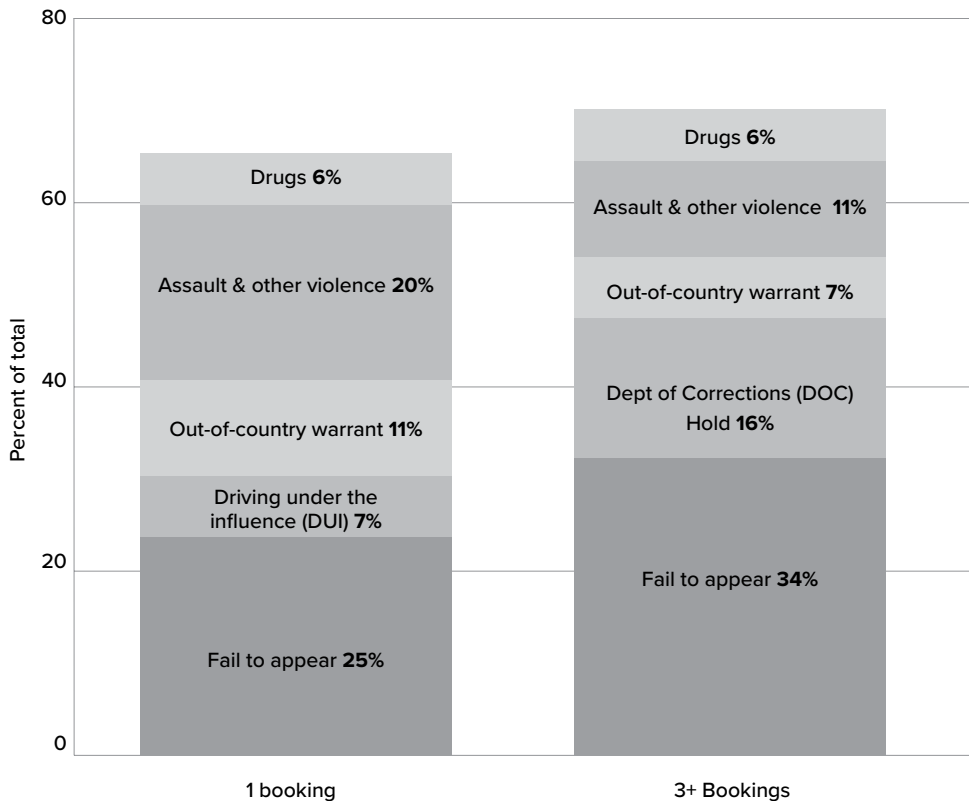
People with drug-related charges and people held pending transfer to state prisons tended to stay longer than average—12 and 14 days, respectively. (People being held for other jurisdictions have higher lengths of stay (LOS) that drive up the total average, yet the average length of stay *excluding* this group was still 9.4 days, only slightly less than the overall average.) Those jailed for failure to appear—a minor charge and the most common charge in Grant County—spent nearly one week (6.9 days) in jail on average.

Most people (59 percent) who were charged with assault were released from jail within one day. (However, 2 percent of people charged with assault were held in jail for more than four months, and some people were held for longer than a year.) A smaller proportion of people with failure to appear or drug-related charges were released within one day (33 percent and 34 percent, respectively).



Most people who were arrested and booked into Grant County Jail pretrial (60 percent) were incarcerated only once over the nearly six years the research team examined.

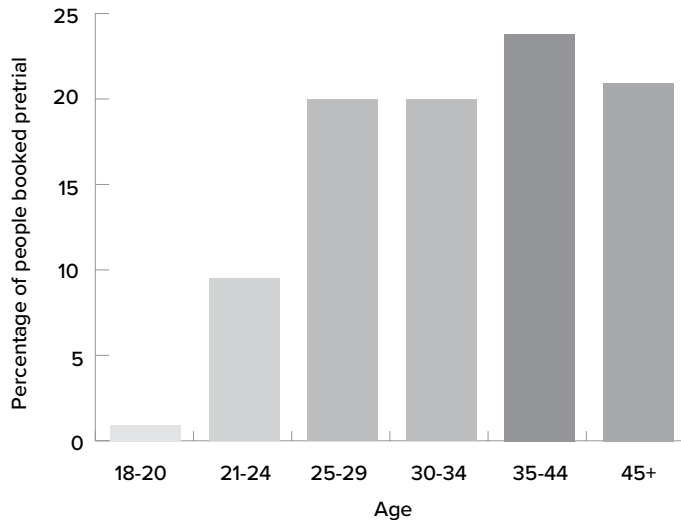
Charge categories for people with single versus multiple pretrial bookings



- More than one-third of all people with three or more pretrial admissions were held due to failure to appear charges. This demonstrates that many repeat bookings stem from the challenges of meeting legal requirements during the pretrial process rather than new charges.
- The 12 percent of people who were reincarcerated five or more times in Grant County Jail accounted for nearly 40 percent of all pretrial bookings over five-and-a-half years. This group—about 900 people—is having a broad impact on jail trends in Grant County. Research suggests that people cycling in and out of jail are more likely to experience homelessness, substance use, lack of stable income, and mental and physical health problems than the general population.<sup>2</sup> Increased social services focused on this relatively small group could have an outsize impact in helping them stabilize, meet their day-to-day needs, and ultimately end the cycle of incarceration.

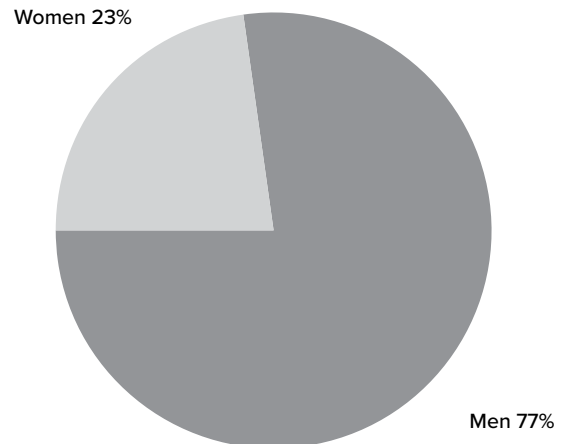
## APPENDIX A – ADDITIONAL CHARTS

Figure 1. Age at booking



**Age at booking.** The average age at arrest/booking was 36. Nearly half of people were aged 35 or older when admitted to jail.

Figure 2. Jail admissions by gender



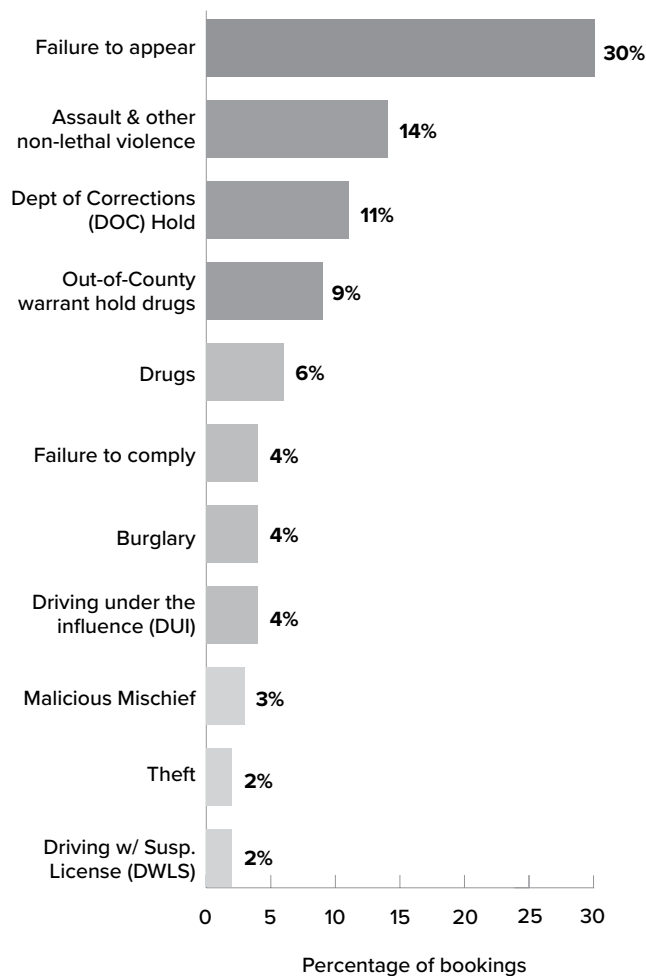
**Jail admissions by gender.** Women made up nearly one-quarter of jail bookings into Grant County Jail. Nationally, women's presence in jails has been growing.

**There are disparities in jail admissions by race and ethnicity.** Tracking Grant County's population, most pretrial jail admissions were of white and Hispanic/Latinx people. However, the numbers for Hispanic/Latinx people and people with multiple racial/ethnic identities are likely underestimated because jail staff may misclassify some people as white at admission. This pattern is common in jails across the country and can generate misleading estimates of racial disparities.<sup>3</sup>

- Black and Native American people were overrepresented in the jail (each making up 4 percent of admissions to jail) compared to the county population (each making up 2 percent of the county population).



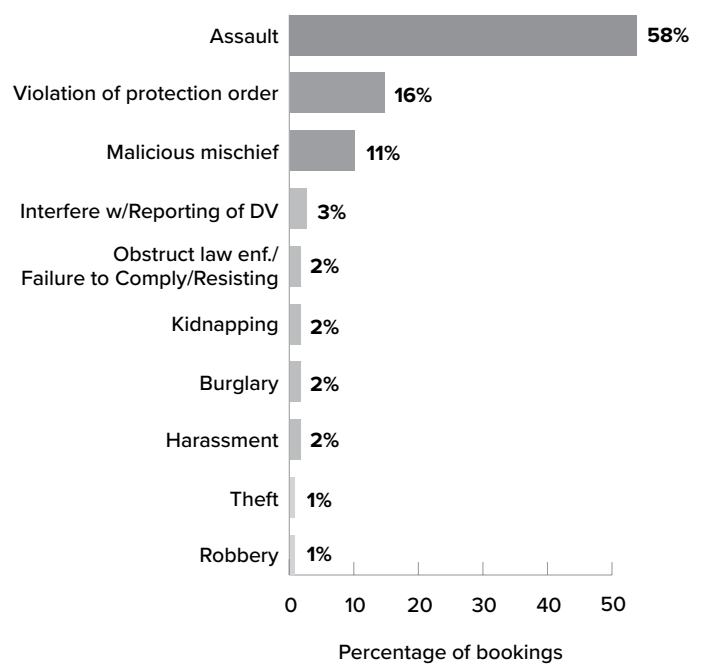
Figure 3. Percent of pretrial jail bookings by primary charge



**Top charges for pretrial jail bookings.** Failure to appear (30 percent), assault and other non-lethal violence (14 percent), and Department of Corrections holds (11 percent) were the most common top charges, making up more than half of all pretrial jail bookings.

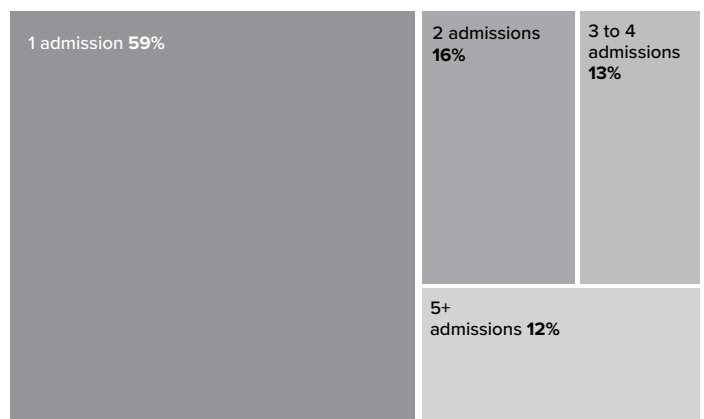
Assorted other failures to meet system requirements (failures to pay fines and fees, pay child support, properly register a car or transfer title, or comply with criminal legal system officials' orders) made up another 1 percent of bookings, not shown in the figure.

Figure 4. Most common domestic violence charge type, percentage distribution



**Most common domestic violence charge types.** Assault (58 percent) was the most common top charge in cases involving domestic violence. Violating a protection order (16 percent) and malicious mischief (11 percent) were the next most common top charges in domestic violence cases.

Figure 5. Multiple pretrial bookings.



**Multiple pretrial bookings.** Most people were arrested and booked into Grant County Jail only once during the observed period (59 percent of people). However, 25 percent experienced three or more pretrial jail stays over 68 months.

## APPENDIX B – METHODOLOGY

The findings in this brief come from analysis conducted by WSU faculty and graduate students in the Rural Jails Research and Policy Network. The Grant County Sheriff's Department provided data on all jail bookings and releases initiated from January 1, 2015, to August 17, 2020. In total, the WSU team analyzed 22,107 bookings: in 4,586 booking incidents, people were committed to serve a sentence, and in 17,521 booking incidents, they were booked pretrial (upon arrest). Among pretrial bookings, there were 7,811 unique people.

The WSU team also conducted qualitative and ethnographic work; future reports will provide more detailed findings. Quotes come from qualitative interviews conducted from August 2020 to August 2021 with people who had been held in Grant County Jail at some point during that period. In all, researchers interviewed 37 people for this project who had spent time in rural Washington jails; six had spent time in the Grant County Jail. Interviews lasted approximately one to two hours and were conducted by phone by WSU faculty. They were audio recorded and later transcribed and analyzed for thematic patterns.

The study also included 90 hours of virtual court watching and note-taking from May to December 2020 by a graduate research assistant. The District and Superior Courts of Whitman and Grant counties were observed via YouTube streaming of Zoom meetings and WebEx video conferencing, respectively. Notes from observations were compiled and analyzed for patterns.

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### Endnotes

1. A 2021 Washington State law (SB 5226) eliminated mandatory suspension of license as a consequence for unpaid fines and fees; courts now have the *option* to suspend or revoke a license and must assess ability to pay.
2. Madeline Bailey, Erica Crew, and Madz Reeve, *No Access to Justice: Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness and Jail* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2020), <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/no-access-to-justice.pdf>; Jennifer Bronson, Jessica Stroop, Stephanie Zimmer, and Marcus Berzofsky, *Drug Use, Dependence, and Abuse Among State Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2007-2009* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/dudaspi0709.pdf>; and Urban Institute, "Five Charts that Explain the Homelessness-Jail Cycle – and How to Break It," September 16, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/features/five-charts-explain-homelessness-jail-cycle-and-how-break-it>.
3. According to a 2016 report, when people in prison had the opportunity to self-identify, a higher percentage of people reported Hispanic/Latinx origin or multiple races and fewer identified as non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic Black than reported in corrections department administrative data. See E. Ann Carson, *Prisoners in 2016* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018), 7, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p16.pdf>.

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### For more information

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For more information about this fact sheet, please contact the Washington Rural Jails Network at <https://labs.wsu.edu/wrjn> or Dr. Jennifer Schwartz, [jennifer.schwartz@wsu.edu](mailto:jennifer.schwartz@wsu.edu), WSU Department of Sociology, Pullman, WA 99164. The Washington Rural Jails Network is part of the Rural Jails Research and Policy Network, a project at the Vera Institute of Justice, with funding from Arnold Ventures.

