

JUSTICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



MINNESOTA JUSTICE

RESEARCH CENTER

LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Last year was a watershed year for the Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC). It was our new Executive Director's first full year. We also brought on a new Research Director, hit our budget goals, and significantly expanded our capacity to conduct research on the criminal legal system and work with the community on proposals for reform. We engaged hundreds of people through our annual conference and virtual programs, and people are starting to look to us for leadership to understand and meaningfully shift how our criminal legal system operates.

In February, we released *Trust in Policing: The Role of White Supremacy*, the MNJRC's first self-initiated report. We then used the report as a tool to engage and educate our community to build support for policy changes that would build trust in policing. During the Minnesota legislative session, we worked with the Minnesota Asset Building Coalition and other partners to provide background research and data analysis to support their successful advocacy to reform driver's license suspensions and monetary fines and fees. And we held a series of virtual conversations, carrying the momentum from our 2020 annual Re-Imagining Justice conference into 2021.

Our virtual conversations were just one way in which the MNJRC meaningfully expanded our national network and engaged with local scholars in 2021. We were honored to host conversations with national criminal legal reform experts, including Dr. Alexes Harris, Professor of Sociology at the University of Washington whose research focuses on monetary sanctions on the poor, and Tracey Meares, Yale Law School Professor and nationally recognized expert on policing in urban communities. During our Re-Imagining Justice conference – which you can read more about in this report – we brought together a great diversity of stakeholders to discuss how to transform the criminal legal system so that it delivers true justice. We heard from leaders in Minnesota, including Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison and author and psychotherapist specializing in racialized trauma Resmaa Menakem, as well as national leaders, including author and restorative justice leader Danielle Sered.

Thanks to all of the individuals and organizations that help us do this work. This includes the MNJRC Board, staff, organizational and research partners, donors, conference sponsors, and community members. A special thanks to Nick Sayner and The Difference Principle (TDP). The MNJRC is part of TDP's dynamic network, and they provide critical administrative support to our staff. We could not do this work without all of you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Martens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Andrew Martens, Board Chair

The Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC) is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit 501c3 organization dedicated to driving meaningful change to Minnesota's criminal legal system through rigorous research, education, and policy development.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The MNJRC partners with agencies, organizations, and individuals to conduct practical, high-impact research, analysis, and evaluations. The MNJRC centers our work around exploring values - like humane and fair treatment for all, safety, wellbeing, and trust - and provides our community and policy-makers with information and tools needed to create a criminal legal system that truly delivers justice.

As we wrap up the year, it is a great time to look back and reflect on the work we have done. An annual report allows us to reflect upon the “why” of our work, and share with you, the community, the work we are leading. Thanks to everyone who has supported us along the way.

Cornel West once reminded us that “justice is how we love each other in public.” And yet more and more it feels like justice is how we punish each other in public. At the MNJRC, we believe our systems of justice are needed to restore love and not increase punishment.

Imagine for a moment, that our criminal legal system focused on fairness, equity and accountability in delivering justice. Imagine that the end goal of the justice system wasn’t beating people into a submissive rehabilitation, at best, but an actual restorative process that centered the needs of the people and the communities that have been harmed, and used accountability to actually make right the wrongs.

As the Executive Director of the MNJRC, I seek this vision of justice. Every day we engage in rigorous and balanced research to educate our community and system-level actors and inform critical policies. We seek to expand people’s understanding of justice. We hope to move beyond the current punitive nature of the system and remind people that our criminal legal system must be fair in its procedures, be equitable in how it distributes resources, hold people accountable, and produce restorative outcomes. **This is what we mean by transforming the criminal legal justice system.**

This year at the MNJRC, we set out to put this theory to the test. If justice is how we love each other in public, we sought opportunities to build bridges and solve problems together. It is in that spirit that I am excited to offer this report on our work from 2021.

We look forward to continuing our partnership with you all to make our community more just for everyone.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justin Terrell'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large loop at the beginning.

Justin Terrell, Executive Director

Research Projects

Our research is collaborative and participatory, drives our education and engagement with the community, and has an impact on policy. We conduct three broad buckets of research: partnerships and evaluations, policy-focused research, and community-led research. Through our research - everything from shorter memos analyzing data to longer reports digging into critical issues - we support and move important policies and practices in the criminal legal space.



Returning Home Saint Paul

Returning Home St. Paul (RHSP) is a partnership between the City of Saint Paul and two community-based organizations designed to help successfully house residents returning to the community from incarceration. RHSP began as a pilot project in 2021 and will be implemented and tested over the course of 18 months with a goal of housing 20 residents total and supporting them in maintaining housing stability. The MNJRC research team measures, tracks and reports on program impact and success both in outcomes and qualitative participant and landlord experiences. Find our one-year impact analysis of the RHSP pilot on our website at www.mnjrc.org.

Criminal Legal System Reform: A Landscape Analysis of the Greater Twin Cities Area

The MNJRC research team partnered with the Justice for All collaboration and conducted a landscape analysis project to gain further insights on ways to affect change in the system locally, digging into process and change-making in the criminal legal system in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. First, we describe the interconnection and breadth of the criminal legal footprint via an in-depth look from arrest to charging and plea bargaining process. Next, we spotlight five case examples of local efforts toward change that demonstrate potential opportunities and learnings about how change can work in the local criminal legal system and place these on a broader landscape map. Finally, we consider the lessons-learned from our case examples and point out specific gaps and future directions considering the vast footprint of the criminal legal system.





Re-Imagining Driver's License Suspension and Monetary Sanctions Research

During the 2021 legislative session, MNJRC worked in collaboration with the Minnesota Asset Building Coalition to support two major policy successes that will transform how the State of Minnesota enforces driver's license suspensions and fees attached to traffic and criminal violations.

Critically, low-income individuals and people of color are more likely to have their driver's license suspended due to unpaid traffic tickets. The practice of suspending someone's driver's license because of unpaid tickets often escalates the person's involvement with the criminal legal system, and can even be an initial entry point. Removing this trigger will impact thousands of Minnesotans when they go into effect in 2022, making it easier for them to continue to drive legally, so they can keep their job and take care of their family.

Sign up for updates at www.mnjrc.org

Trust in Policing: The Role of White Supremacy Report

In February, the MNJRC released *Trust in Policing: The Role of White Supremacy*. The report examines the declining trust in policing and the role that white supremacy plays in that decline. The report lays out contemporary examples of white supremacy and a 25-year timeline of efforts to infiltrate law enforcement by domestic terrorist groups who subscribe to white supremacist ideologies. In the report, we offer four recommendations to combat this and build more trust in policing: 1) talk more about this issue; 2) conduct more research on white supremacy in law enforcement and racial bias in policing more broadly; 3) develop policies that protect both law enforcement and the community; and 4) evaluate the impact of these policies.

Throughout the year, the MNJRC used the report to engage with the community on the issue and inform policy responses. The MNJRC's Research Director Dr. Katie Remington Cunningham recorded a webinar summarizing the report for the public, and the MNJRC team hosted three virtual panel discussions bringing together community partners from legacy Black-led organizations, content experts, public policy makers and members of law enforcement. The report also supported policy efforts (HF593 and revised standards of conduct at the POST Board).

These experiences taught us that **language is powerful, that building bridges across divided communities on these issues is hard but absolutely critical, and that engaging in conversations and research around values is an important first step.** In order to be successful at our work, everyone needs to be at the table.



Education

Core to MNJRC's work is to engage a broad diversity of community members and criminal legal system stakeholders in conversations on ways to transform the existing system into one that provides real justice. We do this with MNJRC's annual Re-Imagining Justice conference, online webinars and events, and through our blog. Through 2021, we engaged hundreds of people through these programs. And while most of 2021's activities were held in virtual spaces, we're hoping that soon we will be able to convene in person.

2021 Re-Imagining Justice Conference

MNJRC's annual Re-Imagining Justice conference brings together criminal justice practitioners, legal experts, scholars, advocates, and people directly impacted by the system to re-imagine a justice system that functions more effectively, humanely, and with the public's trust.

The 2021 conference created virtual space for critical conversations like the one between our Executive Director, **Justin Terrell**, and award-winning author **Resmaa Menakem** about trauma in the criminal legal system and the discussion on participatory research with expert panelists **Dr. Michelle Fine**, Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Center, CUNY; **Dr. Joshua Page**, Fink Professor of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota; **Dr. Brittany Lewis**, Founder and CEO, Research in Action; and **Dr. Brian Lozenski**, Associate Professor at Macalester College. We experienced powerful keynotes about how we might re-imagine accountability and the road to repair with the incredible **Danielle Sered**, Executive Director of Common Justice and award-winning author of *Until We Reckon*, and learned lessons from the trial of Derek Chauvin with Minnesota Attorney General **Keith Ellison**.

Throughout the conference, our panelists discussed how to re-imagine standards of conduct for law enforcement, justice for women, restorative justice, and pre-trial experience. We explored how to interrupt violence in the juvenile justice system, what lessons we could learn from COVID-19. We heard from a long list of remarkable experts in this space both locally and nationally.

RE-IMAGINING JUSTICE

The Minnesota Justice Research Center is pleased to announce our 2021 Conference Keynote Speakers!



Danielle Sered

Award-Winning Author and Executive Director of Common Justice

- Virtual Workshops and Networking
- Tickets and Registration Coming Soon
- Continuing Learning Education Credit Available



Keith Ellison, Esq.
Minnesota Attorney General

Join us on November 16-17, 2021 for powerful conversations and various workshops designed to re-imagine Minnesota's criminal legal system.



Webinars and Virtual Public Forums

In 2021, the MNJRC initiated its education programming by providing online sessions. This included an inaugural webinar to share the findings of our *Trust in Policing* report as well as our “Continuing the Conversation” virtual public forum series. These virtual gatherings were an opportunity for the MNJRC to engage the community at a time of social distancing. We reached several hundred people through this work.

Blog

To summarize the work of the MNJRC and elevate work by our partners, in 2021 we launched a blog on our website called Re-Imagings and Reflections. Posts included detailed reflections on our *Trust in Policing* report, Fines and Fees and a published article by our Research Director Dr. Katie Remington Cunningham called *Lifting the Bar: A Relationship-Orienting Intervention Reduces Recidivism Among Children Reentering*. In 2022, the MNJRC will continue to use this space to reflect on our work and spark ideas to re-imagine the criminal legal system.

Continuing the Work in 2022

Building on the momentum of 2021, the MNJRC will continue our work in the community to transform the criminal legal system in 2022. Through partnerships with organizations and public agencies, we are expanding our capacity to engage in transformational research, education, and policy development across the state of Minnesota. As we wrap up current projects, we will be sharing our research findings with the public. We are eager to engage the community and criminal legal system stakeholders in hard conversations about what it means to be safe in community, the importance of accountability in policing, how to re-imagine pre-trial justice, and more.

We invite you to be a partner with us in our work. You can find the most updated information on our website at www.mnjrc.org, and by signing up for our email newsletter there.

“The whole conference was excellent. The nuanced thoughtful information from such competent/very experienced people is what made this a very educational experience.”



“I love how the organization is positioned to produce information to support what could be possible.”

Minnesota Justice Research Center Board of Directors



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MNJRC Founder

Tom Johnson served as Hennepin County Attorney for 12 years, served as President of the Council on Crime and Justice for ten years, and practiced law with the Gray Plant Mooty law firm.

Through all his work, Tom dedicated his life to addressing the unacceptable racial disparities in the criminal justice system, and the costs that those disparities have on our society. It was that life's work that led Tom to establish the MNJRC in 2017. Tom passed away in June 2020.

It is our honor to be able to continue his work.

MNJRC Staff

Our organization is led by our Executive Director, **Justin Terrell**. Our Research Director, **Dr. Katie Remington Cunningham**, directs our research program. For 2021, **Jamila Toussaint** coordinated our organizational logistics and strategic communications as our Administration and Communications Consultant.

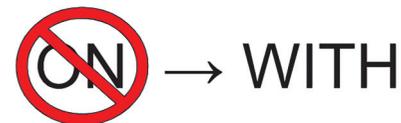
2021 Research Assistants

- **Amy Dorman**, MPP - PhD student at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work - *Returning Home St. Paul*
- **Victoria Piehowski** - PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota - *Criminal Legal System Reform: A Landscape Analysis of the Greater Twin Cities Area*
- **Lisa Gulya** - Visiting instructor of sociology at Macalester College and a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Minnesota - *Criminal Legal System Reform: A Landscape Analysis of the Greater Twin Cities Area*
- **Eskender Yousuf** - PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota in the Education Policy and Leadership program in the College of Education and Human Development - *Northside Residents Redevelopment Council - Community Safety Specialist Initiative*
- **Chris Robertson** - PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Minnesota - *Northside Residents Redevelopment Council - Community Safety Specialist Initiative*
- **Coy Carter Jr.** - PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota in the Education Policy and Leadership program in the College of Education and Human Development - *Northside Residents Redevelopment Council - Community Safety Specialist Initiative*

MNJRC Research Steering Committee

- **Dr. Joshua Page** - Fink Professor of Liberal Arts, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Faculty Affiliate in the Law School, University of Minnesota
- **Dr. Michelle Phelps** - Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota
- **Dr. Maria Ponomarenko** - Associate Professor of Law, University of Minnesota Law School, Co-Founder and Counsel, Policing Project
- **Mark Osler** - Professor and Robert and Marion Short Distinguished Chair in Law, University of St. Thomas
- **Dr. Ebony Ruhland** - Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, University of Cincinnati
- **Dr. Raj Sethuraju** - Associate Professor, School of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Metropolitan State University
- **Dr. Christopher Uggen** - Regents Professor and Distinguished McKnight Professor of Sociology and Law at the University of Minnesota

Research...



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- Minnesota Asset Building Coalition (MABC)
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety
- Minnesota Second Chance Coalition
- Northside Residents Redevelopment Council (NRRC)
- Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation
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- Wilder Research



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