



The University of New Mexico

Analysis of Traffic Warrant Bookings in the Metropolitan Detention Center

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Introduction

House Memorial 22 passed by the New Mexico Legislature during the 2008 Session requested the creation of a task to study and make recommendations on the decriminalization of traffic offenses. According to the Memorial the task force was to include representatives from the New Mexico Association of Counties, the New Mexico Municipal League, the Public Defender Department, the New District Attorneys Association, and the Motor Vehicle Division.

Towards this end the University of New Mexico Institute for Social Research conducted a review of all individuals booked on traffic warrants into the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) during the month of May 2008. The review includes length of stay, court information, and how individuals were released from the MDC. This report looks at how bookings on traffic warrants impact the population at the Bernalillo County Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC). The MDC is one of 31 county level detention centers in New Mexico. This report does not study the potential effect of decriminalizing traffic offenses on the law enforcement, the court system, or other parts of the criminal justice system. It also does not look at other potential effects that could include how fines and fees are currently apportioned from traffic tickets and the movement of the traffic statutes from the criminal code to civil.

To begin this brief study we generated a list of all individuals booked into the MDC during May 2008. This list of individuals is based upon software code written by Institute for Social Research (ISR) staff that generates a count of individuals booked into the MDC by highest charge using data from the MDC's information system. One of the counts generated is the number of individuals booked into the MDC for the reporting period (usually a calendar month) on the highest charge of a traffic warrant. After discussing this report it was decided to review the number of individuals booked into the MDC on the highest charge of a traffic warrant. Several steps and tasks were undertaken to complete this review. First, the MDC Corrections Analyst sampled a small set of individuals from the report for May 2008. Her preliminary review based upon booking information found a number of the individuals did not have a highest charge of a traffic warrant. Rather, a number of individuals in addition to having a traffic warrant had other types of warrants including criminal and domestic violence warrants. Based on this review it was decided to conduct a complete review and study of individuals booked into the MDC in May 2008 on the highest charge of a traffic warrant. This review took the form of two tasks. First, we pulled the hard copy of all booking sheets for individuals we believed, based upon the report, were booked on the highest charge of a traffic warrant. Second, we reviewed the software code used to generate the report and manually reviewed each individual to confirm their booking charges.

To complete the first task a hard copy of all booking sheets was provided to the ISR by MDC staff for individuals who we believed were booked into the MDC on the highest charge of a traffic warrant in May 2008. A database was constructed and information from each booking sheet was data entered. Information entered consisted of: name, booking number, booking date and time, basic demographics (DOB, gender, and race), each charge,

the court case number, the judge associated with each charge, bail type, bail amount, release type (i.e ROR, credit time served), and release date.

Simultaneous to this first task, ISR staff also reviewed the software code used to generate the report with the goal of fixing the code so it correctly counts individuals booked on traffic warrants as their highest charge. The software code was adjusted, the output reviewed and the report was corrected. The current report correctly classifies individuals booked on the highest charge of a traffic warrant. The report only includes individuals booked on a “TR” warrant.

In total the number of individuals booked on traffic warrants reduced from approximately 8.9% (315) of total bookings in the initial report to 7.6% (264) of total bookings.

The remainder of this report discusses the individuals booked on traffic warrants for May 2008 based on individuals generated from the revised software code and the manual review of booking sheets.

Data

Each booking to the MDC was examined for the number of traffic warrants the person was arrested under, the types of warrants issued for the individual, and the number of judges that issued the various warrants. Details of the case and the adjudication process were also collected, including the specific violations that led to the issuance of the warrant, as well as when and how the individuals were once again released from the MDC.

A total of 264 individuals were booked into the MDC during the month of May 2008 on at least one traffic warrant. This excludes individuals who also had misdemeanor or felony warrants or new charges. Some individuals had multiple traffic warrants resulting in a total of 339 warrants (see Table 1). The warrants were divided into several categories, Failure to Comply/Report, Failure to Pay, and Failure to Appear, the totals can be seen in the table below. In a small percent of cases a booking sheet was not available and a precise reason for the traffic warrant could not be established.

Table 1: Types of Warrants

Failure to Comply/Report	Failure to Pay	Failure to Appear	Unknown	Total
7 (2.1%)	119 (34.9%)	206 (60.4%)	9(2.6%)	339

Though most individuals were booked on one warrant, a number were jailed on several different warrants; the precise numbers can be seen in Table 2 below. On average, individuals were booked on 1.4 warrants. Eighteen individuals were booked on at least one out of county warrant, 15 of these individuals had only out of county warrants and two of the 15 individuals were booked on multiple out of county warrants.

Table 2: Number of Warrants

Number of Warrants	Count	Percent
1	184	73.0
2	51	20.2
3	14	5.6

4	2	0.8
5	1	0.4

Because some individuals had multiple warrants they also sometimes were issued by multiple judges. The precise numerical breakdown can be seen below.

Table 3: Number of Judges

Number of Judges	Count	Percent
1	201	79.8
2	41	16.3
3	9	3.6
4	1	0.4

The warrants were adjudicated in a set variety of ways and each release was categorized into one of three different categories: Credit Time Served, Bond Out, or ROR. A final category of Other was included to reflect those whose cases were dismissed or were released to another agency. Finally, due to data limitations we were unable to establish the conditions of release of some warrants. The frequencies of each category can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Count of Release Type

Release Type	Count	Percent
Credit Time Served	125	36.9
Bond Out	109	32.1
ROR	33	9.7
Other	3	0.9
Unknown	71	20.9

Finally, it was important to establish the amount of time each individual spent in the MDC. The length of stay in the MDC was calculated using the admit date and the final release date, counting if an individual was admitted and released on the same day as a single days stay. This means that an individual who spent 2 hours before being released was counted as 1 day. This accounts for a total of 972 days spent in the MDC by individuals arrested on traffic warrants. The average stay was 3.7 days, with one individual staying 54 days, while the majority stayed one (36%) or two (34.1%) days.

Analysis

With the basic dimensions of traffic warrant jail time understood, it is prudent to focus on what contributes to a lengthy stay in the MDC for a traffic warrant. We first examine the most obvious condition of a long stay at the MDC, multiple warrants. We use the Pearson correlation coefficient (*Pearson's r*) to determine if there is a correlation between the numbers of any specific type of warrant, or the total number, the results can be seen in the Table 5 below.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis

	Failure to Comply/Report	Failure to Pay	Failure to Appear	Total Warrants
Pearson's <i>r</i>	-.039	.032	.099	.082

In addition to immensely low correlation values, none appear statistically significant, indicating the number of warrants, whether of a specific type or total, do not contribute to the time spent in the MDC.

We also tested if the number of judges was correlated to length of stay. The correlation was low (.135) but statistically significant, indicating a relationship might be present.

Finally we tested the effect the manner of release had on the amount of time spent in the MDC and we found a significant effect ($p < 0.001$) on the length of stay.

Several other demographic features of individuals in the MDC were also tested including ethnicity, gender, and age. None were found to have a significant effect on the length of time spent in the MDC.

Statistical tests determined that the manner of release has a significant effect on the total amount of time served. We examined the manner of release on the first warrant, and the average stay for each category. The results can be seen in the table below.

Table 6: Average Length of Stay by Release Type

Release Type	Average
Credit Time Served	3.72
Bond Out	1.66
ROR	2.57

The table shows the rather counterintuitive fact that those who are able to bond out are released more quickly than those ROR'd. It may be because some offenders are ROR'd soon after arrest and others are ROR'd by a Judge when they are seen at their custody arraignment. Further investigation will be needed to determine why this is the case.

Additional analysis was completed to determine the effect the number of judges has on the time each individual served at MDC. Controlling for the release type (the most influential factor) it was found that each additional judge issuing warrants for the individual increased the length of stay by roughly half a day.

Conclusion

In the month of May 2008, 3543 individuals were booked into the Metropolitan Detention Center. Two hundred sixty four (7.6%) of those individuals were there because they were arrested for traffic warrants. These traffic warrants accounted for 972 of the 80,463 total bed days spent by individuals in the MDC (this does not include Out of County beds, individuals in the booking area, or individuals in CCP) or approximately roughly 1.2% of all bed days in the month of May 2008. At \$65.00 a day (the average cost per day of housing an individual in the MDC) the monthly cost is \$63,180.00 or \$758,160.00 annually. The stay for most of these individuals was short and most were released within a few days, the primary reason for their extended stay most likely being an inability to secure a bond.