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Re: Contract Approval for Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative (PAD)

Dear City Council Members,

I am writing to urge the immediate approval of the contract awarded to the Policing Alternatives and Diversion (PAD) program.

On October 12, 2022, the ACLU of Georgia released a report [“There are Better Solutions,”](#) our analysis of people detained at Fulton County Jail (many of whom are City of Atlanta residents). While initially, our goal was to show that leasing beds from the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC) was not the answer to overcrowding issues, we were able to provide four evidenced-based solutions that would help to alleviate the massive human costs of the overcrowding and safety concerns regarding plaguing City of Atlanta and Fulton County residents. The report was undertaken by our organization as a good faith attempt to determine the causes of overcrowding in the County. In sum: we found that there were better solutions.

One of those solutions was to increase utilization of the Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative (PAD) program. We found that a significant number of people could have been diverted and received services as opposed to languishing in the Fulton County Jail. Atlanta’s own recent Jail Population Review Committee found that, in 2022, 3,462 people were jailed in Fulton County for charges that were eligible for diversion through PAD.¹ Yet, in 2022, PAD reported only 369 diversions and 1,321 responses to requests from community members.² In the almost two years since we have released that report, we have watched as some of our recommendations have been implemented and we have seen some improvement in the crisis. We believe that PAD is a significant factor in that improvement. Just this year, from January – August PAD received 1,312 calls for service through ATL311. They diverted 221 people from jail to services, including 94 diverted by the Atlanta Police Department. They provided long-term case management services to over 700 people this year, which includes housing assistance, transportation assistance, food assistance, and assistance accessing benefits and healthcare. Additionally, 911 has transferred 131 calls out of their system to 311 this year in a pilot program with PAD.³ Greater utilization of PAD would have even more impact on reducing the jail population.

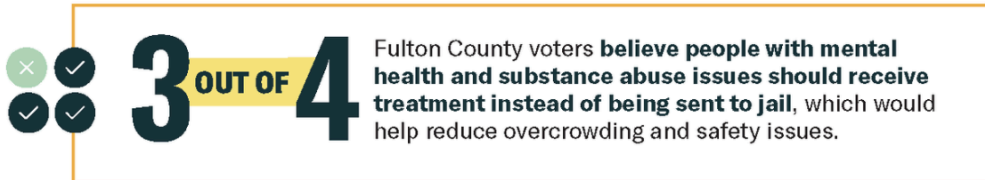
Data and statistics are great ways to track progress and metrics, but data doesn’t always tell the entire story. Many times the human aspect of the work that PAD does is overlooked. PAD serves the people, people like Renfroe. In 2021, Renfroe became homeless after facing challenges with his health, family, and career. After being diverted to PAD in March 2022, he demonstrated a strong desire to regain stability in his life and began working towards his goals alongside his Care Navigator, Eugene. In April 2024, Renfroe achieved a significant milestone – securing his own home. This accomplishment provides him with a stable living environment and serves as a testament to his resilience, hard work, and dedication to rebuilding his life on his own terms.⁴

¹ *Fulton County Jail Population Review: Assessing Short- and Long-Term Jail Use Trends*, 32 (Nov. 18, 2022), [JPRC+Review.pdf](#) (squarespace.com).

² PAD Monthly Report (December 2022), [PAD+December+2022+Report.pdf](#) (squarespace.com).

³ <https://www.atlantapad.org/reports/august-2024-report-eag9g-3xr3p>

⁴ <https://www.atlantapad.org/participant-stories/renfroe>



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The aforementioned context was necessary as we feel we must advocate for the present and future of PAD. The ACLU of Georgia unequivocally expresses its support for approving PADs awarded contract for mobile response to community referrals and pre-arrest diversion programs, as stated in the July 26, 2024, notice of award (NOA) issued by the City of Atlanta. It undermines PAD’s critical work that it must operate under reduced month to month funding because the contract that was awarded in July has not been approved by the council.

PAD was born out of the work, vision, and expressed needs of Atlanta residents. PAD works to reduce the arrest and imprisonment of people experiencing extreme poverty, substance use, and mental health concerns; it has increased the accessibility of supportive services in Atlanta and Fulton County. PAD has the data and success rates to show that their approach works.

The ACLU of Georgia respectfully requests that the City of Atlanta Council members approve the awarded contract for PAD.

Sincerely,

Andrea Young
Executive Director, ACLU of GA

⁵ From a poll of Fulton County voters conducted between January 31, 2024 and February 14, 2024 by The African American Research Collaborative. <https://www.acluga.org/en/campaigns/2-billion-reasons-fulton-county-doesnt-need-new-jail>