



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members

**THROUGH:** Bruce Mills, Interim Assistant City Manager *BM*

**FROM:** Robert Kingham, Court Administrator, Downtown Austin Community Court *WTK*

**DATE:** March 27, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Staff Response to Resolution No. 20230816-016 regarding Downtown Austin Community Court Mobile Court Pilot

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This memorandum provides a staff response regarding the Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) Mobile Court Pilot, initiated in response to [Resolution 20230816-016](#).

Included as an attachment is a third-party analysis of the Pilot conducted by Sultan Justice Consulting Corp. The Report includes research on mobile court and community court models and a detailed account of the Pilot's development, implementation, and outcomes. Additionally, the Report includes the following recommendations:

1. Implement a sustainable, fully-staffed, DACC Mobile Court Program.
2. Continue and expand upon stakeholder engagement to scale Mobile Court implementation.
3. Study the impact on existing requests for current DACC services with the addition of Mobile Court to inform further DACC staffing needs and growth.
4. Invest in Mobile Court transportation resources and technology.

### **Mobile Court Pilot Development**

DACC consulted with the DACC Advisory Board regarding data collection and potential Pilot locations. DACC also engaged with the Austin Homelessness Advisory Council (AHAC) on data, locations, and how to build trust and encourage people to engage in services. Austin Municipal Court (AMC), the Homeless Strategy Office, and staff across DACC's Court Services, Homeless Services, and Support Services units offered insights to inform program development. In line with direction in the resolution, DACC engaged other stakeholders with a goal of identifying locations for Pilot sites that were geographically dispersed and trusted locations where members of the community were already engaging in services.

The Pilot was developed to bring the same level of services provided onsite at DACC directly to individuals in community-based locations. Throughout the Pilot, DACC provided individuals the opportunity to check for open cases and warrants with AMC and DACC, virtual access to a judge and prosecutor to resolve cases and clear warrants, as well as onsite access to a case manager to help with resource navigation and connection to services. When appropriate, individuals engaging

in the Pilot were able to enroll in ongoing case management through DACC's Clinical Diversion Program (CDP).

### **Mobile Court Pilot Implementation**

Between October 18, 2023 and February 5, 2024, there were 18 dates where DACC provided Pilot services. The service location partners for the Pilot included three Austin Public Health (APH) Neighborhood Centers, three Austin Public Library (APL) branch locations, The Charlie Center Homeless Hospitality & Navigation Center located at Mosaic Church, South Bridge Shelter in partnership with Austin Area Urban League, North Bridge Shelter and Marshalling Yard Emergency Shelter in partnership with the Homeless Strategy Office and Family Endeavors, Pop-Up Resource Clinics (PURCs) organized by Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services and Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center. Partners helped with outreach to the people they serve, APH assisted with translation of Pilot outreach documents, and APL posted Pilot service days online. Throughout the Pilot, enhancements were implemented to streamline operational processes, protect personal information of participants, and improve participant experience.

With consultation from the Innovation Office, DACC developed a data dashboard as a resource to track the Pilot's progress, available [here](#). During the Pilot period of October 18, 2023, through February 5, 2024:

- 383 individuals had their court case status checked by DACC
- 125 individuals had one or more open AMC or DACC court cases
- 35 individuals participated in a DACC Mobile Court hearing
  - 69 cases were docketed for these individuals
  - 48 warrants were cleared
- 8 individuals were enrolled into DACC's CDP for ongoing case management

### **Next Steps**

As identified in the Report, the cadence of service days in the Pilot period were beyond what DACC can continue to provide with existing resources while maintaining baseline services. Given the value provided to the community through the Pilot, DACC will continue to engage with stakeholders across the community to offer limited Mobile Court services, as staffing resources allow. Availability of a full-scale Mobile Court program that permeates broadly throughout the community will require additional resources as outlined in the report.

Should you need more information, please contact me at [Robert.Kingham@austintexas.gov](mailto:Robert.Kingham@austintexas.gov) or 512-974-1394.

CC: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager

# Analysis of the Downtown Austin Community Court Mobile Pilot Program: Recommendations for Implementation



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For correspondence, please contact:  
Bonnie Sultan, MA FMHC  
President, Sultan Justice Consulting Corp.  
[sultan.justice.consulting@gmail.com](mailto:sultan.justice.consulting@gmail.com)

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The author extends their gratitude to DACC's Court Services, Homeless Services, and Support Services staff members who participated in the Mobile Court Pilot and provided feedback for this report. Thank you for your continued dedication to your mission and to the individuals you support each day. Thank you to Austin City Council for their leadership in innovative justice diversion programs and their commitment to serving all members of the Austin community.

Thank you to the local stakeholders who served as DACC's valued trust partners in the planning of this Pilot, including the Austin Homelessness Advisory Council, the DACC Advisory Board, and the Travis County Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Advisory Committee. Austin Municipal Court was invaluable throughout the process, providing guidance and support to ensure technical needs were met at Mobile Court locations, as well as providing additional staff onsite at DACC from an AMC Clerk once a week. A special thank you to the Mobile Court site partners who collaborated with DACC to host this pilot in their spaces including Austin Public Health, Austin Public Library, Bridge Shelters and the Marshalling Yard run by the Homeless Strategy Office and Austin Area Urban League, Pop-up Resource Clinics organized by Emergency Medical Services, Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center, and The Charlie Center at Mosaic Church.



# Executive Summary

## Background

The Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) is a noted leader in advancing justice deflection and diversion opportunities for members of the Austin, Texas community. DACC has expertise in providing extensive wraparound and housing-focused services for court-involved people experiencing homelessness and behavioral health disorders. In August 2023, Council passed a resolution directing the creation of DACC's Mobile Court Pilot (Pilot).<sup>1</sup> The Pilot offered community-based court services, case management, and engagement, in trusted community-based settings where potential DACC clients currently connect with programming at other service agencies. In December 2023, Austin City Council (Council) expanded DACC's jurisdiction from Downtown Austin, West Campus, and East Austin areas to city-wide for prohibited camping and DACC's top 10 offenses.<sup>2</sup> This expansion offers equitable access to DACC's justice diversion and housing-focused case management services to all persons with certain Class C misdemeanors that fall within DACC's jurisdiction.

In response to Council's August 2023 resolution, DACC created a multi-site Pilot program offering community-based, trauma informed court services, including immediate access to case managers onsite providing outreach and education about DACC's Homeless Services. The Pilot aimed to remove barriers to accessing services by meeting people in geographically dispersed locations where they were already accessing assistance in the community. Upon implementation, it was quickly learned that a key benefit of this Pilot was informing individuals of active warrants or outstanding cases of which they were unaware. As many Pilot participants shared that they were not aware of these court statuses, and therefore not planning to address these cases, they were at risk for harsher legal penalties and consequences (such as warrants). By meeting people where they already are, the Pilot offered community members the chance to learn about and address these issues without fear of arrest or incarceration. The Pilot is a vital resource given that active warrants and incarceration records create barriers to housing, employment, and receiving other needed services.<sup>3</sup>

## Pilot Planning and Implementation

Prior to launching the Pilot, DACC collaborated with staff across their Court Services, Homeless Services, and Support Services teams to plan Pilot programming while continuing to provide quality onsite programming at DACC without interruption. DACC consulted with the Austin Homelessness Advisory Council (AHAC), a group of individuals with lived experience with homelessness in Austin, and the DACC Advisory Board to get insights on how to create a welcoming community-based service space to encourage engagement, data

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<sup>1</sup> Austin City Council. Resolution number 20230816-016. Accessed February 1, 2024, at <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=414094>

<sup>2</sup> Austin City Council. Resolution number 20230608-044. Accessed February 1, 2024, at <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=410406>

<sup>3</sup> National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty. December 2019. Housing not Handcuffs. Accessed on January 5, 2024 at <https://homelesslaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HOUSING-NOT-HANDCUFFS-2019-FINAL.pdf>



points to be collected for program evaluation, participant and stakeholder feedback, and Pilot locations with the goal of being geographically dispersed and meeting people where they are currently engaging in services.

The Pilot period began on October 18, 2023, and ended on February 5, 2024. DACC worked with partners to develop two types of Pilot opportunities: (1) programming co-located with other services, such as Pop-up Resource Clinics (PURCS) and (2) individual programming sites, such as Austin Public Health Neighborhood Centers, that offer a variety of onsite services for people experiencing homelessness. Onsite at each Pilot location, DACC staff offered a myriad of services intended to inform and engage potential participants in need of DACC support. Community members were offered the chance to learn their if they had an open Class C misdemeanor<sup>4</sup> without risk of arrest and were connected to virtual hearings and/or case management, when needed. Persons taking part in Pilot services were provided a private space for a virtual hearing with the DACC judge and prosecutor. Each court participant was provided the appropriate judicial proceeding and had the opportunity to resolve their case. Pilot participants were offered enrollment in DACC's Clinical Diversion Program (for ongoing case management and care to satisfy court requirements), community service, and other case management opportunities, as appropriate.

Persons who engaged in virtual Mobile Court hearings during the Pilot were provided a service delivery satisfaction survey. DACC staff were provided feedback surveys after each Pilot to learn what technical and programmatic needs took place at each site and to gain insight on what aspects of the Pilot were successful within individual settings and across locations. Finally, Pilot site partners were surveyed to learn if this program met expectations and to learn further community member feedback, when available. Results from these surveys are included in Section 4 of this report.

## **DACC Mobile Court Pilot Outcomes**

A snapshot of the DACC Mobile Court Pilot shows significant engagement among participants. With the current staffing capacity, DACC was able to conduct up to five court hearings per Pilot event, in addition to the provision of court case checks and education about DACC's Homeless Services for all who engaged. During the period of October 18, 2023, through February 5, 2024:

- 444 unduplicated individuals engaged in mobile court.
- 383 individuals had their court case status checked by DACC.
- 125 individuals had an open case.
- 35 individuals participated in a DACC Mobile Court hearing.
- 69 cases were docketed cases.
- 48 warrants were cleared.
- 8 individuals were enrolled into the DACC Clinical Diversion Program (CDP) for ongoing case management.
- 100% of surveyed Pilot site participants reported satisfaction in the program.
- 100% of surveyed Pilot site partners reported the program to be a benefit to clients and would be interested in further DACC Mobile Court collaboration.

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<sup>4</sup> DACC provided court case status checks within their jurisdiction of Class C Misdemeanors. Higher chargers were not searched for within this Pilot.

## **Conclusions**

At the direction of Council, DACC implemented the Pilot, offering community-based court and case management services for persons with justice and housing needs. The Pilot proved to be an asset for DACC staff, community partners, and people who engaged in the program. Working with a small team of onsite clinical case managers and virtual court services staff, the Pilot successfully met with community members where they currently receive housing and other social services to address current court needs. By meeting community members where they currently receive services, DACC was able to remove barriers, such as transportation or fear of arrest, to allow more community members the opportunity to proactively engage with court services and criminal justice diversion programming. By informing many community members of current cases in which they were unaware, and the opportunity to address cases via the Pilot, DACC offered an innovative service that stopped further justice system involvement with front-end diversion.

While no additional resources were allocated to the Pilot, DACC collaborated with Austin Municipal Court (AMC) for assistance with Pilot design, tech support during Pilot service days, as well as one AMC Court Clerk Assistant providing support onsite at DACC once a week. AMC support and consultation concerning their mobile practices, lessons learned, feedback and recommendations was essential to the Pilot's positive results. For DACC to fully implement and successfully sustain a Mobile Court, further staffing is required. When surveyed, DACC Court and Homeless Services staff shared that the current staffing resources and ratios are not able to sustain ongoing, full implementation of a Mobile Court program while continuing current services onsite at DACC. Additionally, with increasing numbers of people engaging in court following the jurisdiction expansion and a continued influx of walk-in case management clients, additional staff resources are needed to sustain ongoing, full implementation of a Mobile Court program.

## **Recommendations**

1. Implement a sustainable, fully staffed, DACC Mobile Court Program.
2. Continue and expand upon stakeholder engagement to scale Mobile Court implementation.
3. Study the impact on existing requests for current DACC services with the addition of Mobile Court to inform further DACC staffing needs and growth.
4. Invest in Mobile Court transportation resources and technology.



## **Section 1.**

### **Community and Mobile Court Research**

Community courts offer responsive services and connections to local programs for court defendants that provide both therapeutic and social service resources designed to solve root issues such as housing, behavioral health, and trauma. Community courts work with defendants to identify offense root causes and collaborate with them on person-centered, individualized action plans. These courts offer community-based solutions to satisfy justice obligations and link defendants to long-term supports. Community courts are collaborative programs that bring together entities that have historically been siloed, yet many times work with the same clients. For example, defendants in traditional court programs may also be working with housing and behavioral health programs, yet no communication or coordination takes place between them. A community court breaks down these walls to coordinate care and programming to better serve the individual and the community at large. At the heart of community courts are local solutions for defendants in need of support.

The first community court was established in Midtown Manhattan in 1993.<sup>5</sup> Today, it is estimated that 70 community courts are now operational across the country.<sup>6</sup> Community courts are founded on the concepts that justice should take place close to where restoration is needed, that courts can play a part in improving communities and offer community members the chance to be a part of these solutions, and that courts can be a part of a multi-agency collaborative that comes together to address offenses and community needs through connections to services and evidence-based practices.<sup>7</sup>

A shared component across community courts is a focus on treatment, recovery, and restoration rather than punishment. Courts vary based on community need, the availability of programs and services, as well as what offenses can be adjudicated in each setting. As each community is unique, their community court must also be unique to be responsive to needs in their jurisdiction. As communities grow and change in need, demographics, and resources, community courts must also evolve to address these concerns by offering new services, connect with new providers, and train staff to respond to community and client needs. Community courts are designed to reflect the communities they serve; therefore, a continued review of public need and available services is established best practice.

### **Mobile and Virtual Court**

At the onset of COVID-19, court programs across the country struggled to create safe settings for hearings and to connect defendants to needed services and referrals.<sup>8</sup> The adoption of technology to meet continuing justice needs provided the chance for court participants to maintain their connection to programming and services, but also identified

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<sup>5</sup> Center for Justice Innovation. Accessed on February 11, 2024, at <https://www.innovatingjustice.org/programs/midtown-community-justice-center>

<sup>6</sup> Bureau of Justice Assistance. May 2023.

<sup>7</sup> United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance. October 2000. Community Courts: An Evolving Model. Accessed December 21, 2023 from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/bja/183452.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Pew Charitable Trusts. December 1, 2021. How Courts Embraced Technology, Met the Pandemic Challenge, and Revolutionized Their Operations. Accessed on January 3, 2024 at <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2021/12/how-courts-embraced-technology-met-the-pandemic-challenge-and-revolutionized-their-operations>

significant needs for persons without access to computers, smart phones, tablets, Wi-Fi, and safe settings to take part in proceedings. To respond to this crisis and community need, court professionals began to develop mobile programs to provide safe environments and technology access for participants. Noting this new way to provide justice services and its fast implementation of mobile programming, The Pew Charitable Trust states, “the Texas court system, which had never held a civil hearing via video before the pandemic, conducted 1.1 million remote proceedings across its civil and criminal divisions between March 2020 and February 2021.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most at-risk population with the highest service needs benefitting from these mobile initiatives are persons with housing insecurities and/or experiencing homelessness. As many in this group do not readily have access to postal mail or email alerting them to hearing dates, internet access and virtual technology, and transportation to court or treatment settings, mobile court programs meet their unique needs. In communities such as Boulder, Colorado, the pandemic quickly showed barriers people experiencing homelessness have when attempting to access justice settings. When addressing the impact of COVID-19 on this population and the onset of their mobile program, The Boulder Community Court shares, “We started as a Mobile Court instead of an indoor court. But it was a blessing because Mobile Court reaches people where they are, utilizing a pop-up court model. Partner agencies were less available during COVID-19, and usually only virtually, but ordering documents such as medical records, social security cards and identification cards could be done electronically rather than in person.”<sup>10</sup> Looking at other justice professionals across the country, we find mobile programming being implemented to meet people in the community to remove transportation, family obligation, and financial barriers. The Placer County Probation Department in California, for example, has created a mobile program developed to serve justice impacted people with housing needs. The department plans to increase probation services to also include a mobile court component to connect people experiencing homelessness to virtual court services.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See 4.

<sup>10</sup> Boulder Community Court. Accessed January 5, 2024 at <https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/community-court>

<sup>11</sup> Chief Probation Officers of California. Removing Barriers & Bringing Services to the Community: A common-Sense Approach to Working with Justice-Involved Unhoused Individuals. Accessed January 22, 2024 at <https://www.cpoc.org/post/removing-barriers-bringing-services-community-common-sense-approach-working-justice-involved>



## Section 2.

### An Overview of the Downtown Austin Community Court

The Downtown Austin Community Court (DACC) was established in 1999 based on the Midtown Community Justice Center model. DACC was the first community court in Texas, and the eighth community court to be founded in the United States. DACC's mission is to administer justice equitably and compassionately to foster trust and accountability and utilize a person-centered and housing-focused intensive case management model to help individuals experiencing homelessness achieve long-term stability. DACC operates in four key areas: homeless services, court services, community services, and support services. Together, these comprehensive and holistic services come together to offer a community court that has been formally recognized as a national leader and best practice model for other communities looking to implement similar programs. For a description of DACC services areas see Table 1.

DACC has become a landmark program focused on the intersection of justice and housing. This is evidenced by DACC's designation as a Council of State Governments, Justice Center Criminal Justice Mental Health Learning Site Program.<sup>12</sup> As a learning site, DACC is one of the 10 sites selected nation-wide to serve as a mentor program for peers invested in serving people with behavioral health in the justice system. The United States Department of Community Oriented Policing (COPS) Office in partnership with the Center for Justice Innovation (CJI) featured DACC and its partnership with the Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST) in the 2023 multi-media toolkit '[Sharing the Solutions: Police-Court Partnerships to Address Homelessness](#).'<sup>13</sup> This 2-part feature offered the audience the opportunity to learn how DACC works with community and justice partners to serve this population as well as how community courts can be a key component to public safety and connecting those in need with sustainable housing.

The benefits of diversion interventions for people at the intersection of housing and justice is critical as this group experiences higher rates of law enforcement, court, and correctional contacts.<sup>14</sup> As many of those experiencing homelessness encounter the justice system through quality-of-life offenses, such as sleeping in public, community courts can offer a nontraditional response for defendants rather than continuing the cyclical pattern of arrests, missed court dates, warrants, and jail time.

DACC's specialization in serving this population sets them apart from other community courts and diversion programs. Though many courts work with defendants experiencing homelessness, they many times refer out for case management or navigation services rather than employing experts onsite who can work directly with clients to obtain and sustain housing. Justice programs across the country have long struggled with connecting clients

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<sup>12</sup> Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program. Accessed January 20, 2024 at <https://jmhcp.org/support/>

<sup>13</sup> Center for Justice Innovation. (2023). Sharing the Solutions: Police-Court Partnerships to Address Homelessness. Accessed on January 3, 2023 at <https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sharing-the-solutions-toolkit>

<sup>14</sup> Mayer, C.J., & Reichert, J. (2018). The Intersection of Homelessness and the Criminal Justice System. 10.13140/RG.2.2.34217.08803. Rountree, J. Hess, N. Lyke, A. California Policy Lab. October 2019. Health Conditions Among Unsheltered Adults in the U.S. Accessed December 15, 2023 at <https://www.capolicylab.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Health-Conditions-Among-Unsheltered-Adults-in-the-U.S..pdf>



experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness to sustainable housing. As earlier stated, many people experiencing homelessness lack a reliable mailing address, therefore receiving court paperwork and other justice materials such as probation requirements and case management appointments is problematic.<sup>15</sup> Missing these dates and appointments can create further justice involvement. For example, judges will issue bench warrants or further tickets for no-show hearings. This can lead defendants into significant risk of incarceration and further justice involvement: collateral consequences of homelessness. Understanding this revolving door and seeing great need within this intersection, DACC court and housing-focused case management staff have developed a niche specialization offering wraparound services for persons with justice and housing needs. As of 2015, DACC has connected over 550 people to long-term housing solutions. This ongoing commitment to and service of this population has led to DACC's national reputation of excellence. An overview of DACC services and outcomes may be found in Table 2.

### ***The DACC Clinical Diversion Program***

In March 2023 DACC launched the Clinical Diversion Program (CDP). CDP offers intensive, housing-focused case management, connections to housing, and treatment services for DACC defendants with housing needs. Within CDP, defendants are offered the chance to work with DACC housing-focused case managers to develop and work through an individualized case plan, in lieu of community service hours or fines, to meet court obligations and requirements. CDP clients work with DACC staff for an average of 90-days on activities such as housing assessments and connection, behavioral health treatment coordination, and accessing state or government identification.

### ***DACC Jurisdiction Expansion***

On June 8, 2023, the Austin City Council passed Resolution Number 20230608-044<sup>16</sup> directing City Code amendments be developed for the expansion of DACC's jurisdiction to adjudicate certain Class C misdemeanors city-wide, which was formally adopted on December 14, 2023 when Council approved Ordinance No. 20231214-006.<sup>17</sup> People engaging in DACC's Court Services are offered immediate access to housing-focused case managers and social service supports; the expansion was intended to create more equitable access to these resources. The citywide expansion applied to prohibited camping and DACC's top 10 offenses, as data reflects these violations are the most likely for people to need access to the services available at DACC.

Following approval of DACC's jurisdiction expansion, DACC partnered with AMC to ensure processes were in place for a seamless transition. Updates were made within Brazos, the electronic system used by the Austin Police Department (APD) so that cases would be automatically filed at the correct court, and backend processes are in place at AMC and DACC to solve for any cases that may be misdirected. DACC hosted APD Commanders

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<sup>15</sup> Collaborating for Change. (2014). Addressing the Intersections of Juvenile Justice Involvement and Youth Homelessness: Principles for Change. Accessed on January 8, 2024 at <https://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/Principles%2520for%2520Change-3-compressed-2.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> The City of Austin. Accessed February 9, 2024 at <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=410406>

<sup>17</sup> The City of Austin. Accessed February 9, 2024, at <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=421051>



across two meetings in early January 2024 to provide training on the jurisdiction expansion and have a collaborative conversation about the resources APD can connect people with at DACC. Data is currently being collected about the impacts of the jurisdiction expansion and will be reported out to City Council in late Spring 2024.

### **Section 3. DACC Mobile Pilot Program**

On August 16, 2023, Austin City Council passed resolution 20230816-016<sup>18</sup> directing DACC to offer a community-based Mobile Court Pilot program. Council, citing the need for community-based interventions for people with justice and housing needs, directed DACC to implement a Pilot with “solutions for resolving their case(s) and provide immediate connection to services through access to a case manager onsite.”<sup>19</sup> The Pilot began on October 18, 2023, and completed on February 5, 2024. The Pilot hosted 18 service days across numerous locations providing opportunities for persons to receive DACC court and case management services where they currently receive programming from site partners. To meet those in the community with the highest need, DACC offered the Pilot program in geographically dispersed locations with a focus on places with co-located services, such as homeless service navigation centers and community spaces such as libraries and neighborhood centers.

Prior to launching the Pilot, DACC followed Council’s direction to partner with service providers and community partners across Austin. To meet with clients where they already receive services, DACC coordinated with Austin Public Health (APH) Neighborhood Centers, Austin Public Libraries, and other providers to offer Pilot events while community members engaged in existing programming. DACC engaged with other City stakeholders, such as the Homeless Strategy Office, to coordinate Pilot events at Bridge Shelters. With the fast turnaround time for Pilot launch, DACC worked with partners to embed the Pilot into already scheduled events and service schedules. For example, DACC offered Pilot events when The Charlie Center at Mosaic Church provided hot meal services and while APH Neighborhood Centers offered their pantry grocery program. DACC also sought out trusted homeless service navigation spaces, including Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center and the Pop-up Resource Clinics (PURCS) organized by Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services (ATCEMS) to create convenient access to Pilot services for individuals already seeking assistance from a myriad of other onsite service providers. The full Pilot location schedule may be found in Table 3.

At each Pilot location, DACC staff provided a welcoming reception area with program information and floated throughout site locations to meet people where they were most comfortable to share information about DACC’s resources and services. Community members were offered risk-free court case status checks to learn if they had outstanding cases and/or warrants. Persons with outstanding cases and/or open warrants with AMC and/or DACC were offered private, virtual hearings with the DACC court and prosecution team to immediately address and rectify any justice needs. Court-involved individuals with housing and case management needs were offered the opportunity to work with a case manager onsite and sign up for ongoing case management through DACC’s Clinical Diversion Program (CDP) as one option to satisfy court requirements while also receiving needed connections to care and supportive services. When piloting the Mobile program, CDP

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<sup>18</sup> The City of Austin. Accessed on February 9, 2024, at <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=414094>

<sup>19</sup> The City of Austin. Accessed on February 2, 2024, at <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=414094>

clinical and DACC administrative team members staffed community-based programming with court services staff meeting virtually.

At each Pilot location, DACC surveyed Mobile Court participants, site partners, and staff following each event. Surveys offered all respondents the chance to share their experience and provide Pilot feedback. DACC Staff collected court data to learn more about the types of cases Pilot participants addressed with the court.

## **Section 4. DACC Mobile Court Pilot Outcomes**

DACC operated the Pilot between October 18, 2023, through February 5, 2024, and engaged with 444 individuals across 18 sites. Over 200 people received DACC Homeless Services information throughout the Pilot period. DACC conducted 383 court status checks for open cases in their jurisdiction, risk free, to assist community members address justice needs. As DACC did not receive additional staffing support for the Pilot, sites were limited to 5 Mobile Court hearings per location to allow for scheduled and walk-in dockets to continue as calendared onsite at DACC. With this staffing constraint, Pilot clients many times needed to wait for court services to be available. Across 18 Pilot locations, 35 people took part in the Mobile Court program: representing 69 docketed cases. Of these 35 people, 8 were enrolled into CDP for ongoing case management services.<sup>20</sup>

DACC Mobile Court Pilot participants were surveyed following their experience to learn more about how the program met expectations and receive their feedback on the service. DACC received a high response rate with 30 of the 35 Mobile Court Pilot participants taking the survey post court hearing. Pilot participants shared their number one barrier to addressing current cases is not knowing they had an active case. Other top barriers to addressing court cases included lack of transportation and fear of arrest. Most respondents shared that they were unlikely to have engaged with a Mobile Court prior to this engagement (likely due to not knowing about their active case or warrant status). Interestingly, though they reported being unlikely to have engaged with DACC, most participants shared they were very satisfied with the Pilot. Pilot participants reported a positive court experience with the judge treating them fairly and being satisfied with case management engagement. Looking at case management, 22 of the 30 participants surveyed met with a case manager with most participants being very satisfied with this interaction.<sup>21</sup>

DACC staff and partners alike reported the Pilot successfully meeting expectations. Of note, 100% of community-based site hosts stated that the Pilot was a benefit to their clients. Further, 100% of community-based site hosts stated that if a Mobile Court program was sustained, they would be interested in continuing to be a host location in the future. When surveyed, DACC Pilot team members, within both Homeless and Court services, reported the Pilot as a community benefit but noted the need for more staff support for the Mobile Program to be successfully sustained. Staff further reported a need for greater planning efforts to take place both internally and with Mobile Court site partners before moving forward with sustained implementation. With the fast startup time, staff reported, Pilot events conflicted with current court operations, leading to long wait time for Pilot participants. Finally, staff reported more Spanish speaking team members are needed to meet the language needs of participants. Though DACC had brought Spanish speaking staff to Pilot sites, when available, this at times created a gap for Spanish speaking needs onsite at DACC.<sup>22</sup> As more communities are engaged through DACC jurisdiction expansion, it is recommended that planning around language needs and translation services continue to be a discussion for leadership.

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<sup>20</sup> Further Mobile Court Pilot outcomes may be found in Table 4.

<sup>21</sup> For other Pilot participant feedback see Tables 9-11.

<sup>22</sup> DACC included translation services for one site where Spanish speaking staff were not available to attend and have a standing contract for translation services available as needed.



## Section 5. Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

#### Implement a sustainable, fully staffed, DACC Mobile Court Program

DACC swiftly responded to Council's resolution to create the Pilot program showing a true commitment to those they serve and the community at large. DACC successfully implemented the Pilot program serving a total of 444 people, with a total of 35 Mobile Court participants, clearing 48 warrants, and enrolling 8 into the Clinical Diversion Program for ongoing case management needs. DACC surveyed Pilot participants, staff, and site partners to learn more about their experiences with the program and their ideas on how the court might be improved upon. The Pilot received overwhelming support from clients, staff, and partners.

Due to staffing and time constraints, the Pilot was able to host up to five hearings per Pilot event. Without additional staff allocated to this Pilot, DACC assigned 3-6 staff members to be present onsite at each Pilot location. For virtual court hearings, 1 Judge, 1 Prosecutor, and least 1 Court Clerk were available remotely. Less staff working within DACC Court Services and Homeless Services programs during Pilot events led to longer wait time for clients and staff working additional hours and over lunchtime to accommodate the influx of needs.

The Pilot has proven to be successful in meeting people in the community to address their court involvement as well as connecting them to expert housing-focused case management services. DACC successfully worked with a range of community-based partners across the City of Austin to learn how to best offer court services in different settings. The following activities are recommended for successful implementation:

1. **Staffing:** It is recommended that additional staff be added to the DACC team to sustain a Mobile Court program while maintaining full operations for the physical Court and Homeless Services location. Recommended staffing additions includes:
  - a. A minimum of one FTE Mobile Court Program Coordinator,
  - b. A minimum of one FTE Housing-Focused Case Manager,
  - c. Funding to schedule a substitute judge from the current pool of substitute judges to staff mobile events; and
  - d. Continue collaboration with AMC to embed a Court Clerk Assistant at DACC.
2. **Scheduling:** First thing in the morning, DACC currently is focused on court-based dockets for people in custody. It is recommended to not offer Mobile programming at this time to allow for people in custody to be processed through court services. Prosecutors are currently not available between 12:00pm-1:00pm. It is advised to avoid scheduling Mobile Court during these times unless these schedules change or if a substitute prosecutor is assigned.
3. **Locations:** Staff shared that not all sites were prime locations for outreach and engagement for all services. It is recommended that DACC work with staff and partners to identify high-volume sites to maximize participation in a mobile court program.

4. Services offered: During the Pilot period DACC offered a range of services, including Mobile Court, for persons at community-based program providers. When planning for full implementation, it is recommended that DACC staff consider if a full range of services will be provided at each site or if the Mobile program would offer court services at certain events at designated times with court case checks, outreach and engagement being the focus of other events.
5. Partner Cross-training: It is recommended that DACC develop a program on how they may partner with community providers for cross training opportunities that would benefit clients, offer professional development opportunities, and ease Mobile Court processes. Such opportunities might include training partners on identifying open cases and connecting clients to DACC for Court and Homeless Services.

## **Recommendation 2**

### **Continue and expand upon stakeholder engagement to inform full Mobile Court Implementation**

Stakeholder engagement practices allow for DACC to identify and meet with community members in new jurisdiction locations to learn neighborhood needs, community strengths, and how DACC can offer its services to a variety of people citywide with both mobile and court-based programming. DACC staff is currently in the process of identifying not for profit organizations, houses of faith, community advocates, as well as city and government partners invested in this work. DACC is committed to continued learning and professional development opportunities for staff and leadership alike. As a part of this community engagement, DACC is invested in learning how to best serve all persons eligible for their services and is committed to culturally, gender, age, and developmentally appropriate best practices.

With jurisdictional expansion, and additional resources to implement a sustainable Mobile Court program, further community engagement is vital. As different communities have a range of historical and present-day relationships with the criminal justice system, it is important for DACC to learn new ways to engage these communities. Minority populations have experienced generational trauma and higher rates of incarceration due to historically biased policies and over-policing.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, many of these community members may not be trusting or interested in voluntarily engaging with justice practitioners. Further, embedding in their community space may be seen as further traumatic or intrusive, and must be handled with caution, care, and authenticity. As DACC aims to embed Mobile programming in trusted community spaces, working with different groups will require new engagement and education strategies.

It is recommended that DACC meet with community leaders in new jurisdiction areas to learn more about their needs and how DACC might be of service. As new populations will be engaged through expansion and community-based outreach, it is recommended that DACC invest in culturally responsive training for staff to continue their mission to

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<sup>23</sup> Gust, L.V. (2012), Can Policy Reduce the Collateral Damage Caused by the Criminal Justice System? *Strengthening Social Capital in Families and Communities*. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 82: 174-180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2012.01156.x>

administer justice equitably and compassionately to foster trust and accountability, and to utilize a client-centered and housing-focused intensive case management model to help individuals experiencing homelessness achieve long-term stability. Finally, as language needs were noted by team members across Mobile sites, it is recommended that DACC hire staff with these skills as well as work with translation services for printed and in person support.

### **Recommendation 3**

#### **Increase onsite staff to address impact on existing requests for DACC services with the implementation of Mobile Court**

Austin City Council Resolution No: 20230608-044<sup>24</sup> states that for the past several years, DACC's waitlist for the Intensive Case Management program has included between 200-300 people. With the onset of COVID-19, DACC found that service requests for walk-in case management nearly tripled without the needed increase of corresponding resources. Adding an additional community-based Mobile Court program will certainly add to current waitlist and caseload issues. By increasing community-based efforts to invite people to visit DACC for continued court and/or case management services, it is fair to state that more people will access walk-in and scheduled programming. To meet these needs, it is recommended that DACC increase onsite Court and Homeless Services staff. Implementing mobile court programming without further staffing resources will create a significant strain on walk-in case management, Intensive Case Management, as well as walk-in and scheduled court dockets.

DACC has founded its efforts on a 'no wrong door' engagement approach where staff meet clients where they are and work in a collaborative manner to respond to individual needs. This wraparound approach is both time and resource intensive as true engagement and client retention requires time to develop mutual trust and respect. Working with clients to identify their needs and obtain resources (such as obtaining identification documents and completing Coordinated Assessments and housing applications) takes a significant amount of staff time and attention. When looking specifically at CDP, Case Managers provide clients with validated screening tools to learn what behavioral health could be addressed that satisfy the court's requirement for cases to be resolved. This work includes both housing-focused case management and prosecution team members to come together with the client to develop and agree upon a case plan for the judge's approval. Again, this is time intensive by nature and requires a team of staff with competencies in the intersection of justice, housing, and case management. It is this group of staff currently working on the Pilot without further resources or assistance. With case management staff working offsite for several hours per Pilot and accepting new cases virtually (regarding court services staff), DACC staffing is at a critical mass.

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<sup>24</sup> See 17.



## Recommendation 4

### Invest in Mobile Court transportation resources and technology

Mobile services and clinics have proven to be successful within the public health space<sup>25</sup> and continues to grow within the justice sphere.<sup>26</sup> Within Texas, Mobile Outreach has expanded across the state to meet people in the community and remove barriers to care. Texas Children's offers mobile clinics for youth without access to healthcare.<sup>27</sup> Parkland's Homeless Outreach Medical Services (HOMES) offers dental, physical, and behavioral health care for children and adults experiencing homelessness across five mobile medical clinics in Dallas.<sup>28</sup> In Austin, The Other One's Foundation operates the Mobile Hygiene Clinic offering access to basic needs and services.<sup>29</sup>

The Pilot offers DACC and the City of Austin to continue to be leaders in diversion and innovative community court models by expanding the Mobile program. DACC's reputation as a trusted partner across housing, justice, health, and social service agencies, coupled with its experience in mobile outreach with individuals experiencing homelessness, makes it is well positioned to facilitate a Mobile Court offering diversion opportunities city-wide. A key example of DACC's successful cross-agency collaborative efforts is the Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST). HOST proactively engages community members living on the streets of Austin and connects them to case management, housing assistance, and medical care. Host, staffed by the Austin Police Department, Emergency Medical Services, Integral Care, and DACC, has had more than 10,000 visits individuals experiencing homelessness and diverted nearly 1,000 people from jail, psychiatric hospitals, and emergency rooms.<sup>30</sup> With DACC's experience with outreach via HOST, and the success of the Pilot, it is recommended that DACC create a Mobile Court that may operate independently or be driven to co-locate with other services (such as with the Pilot locations).

DACC is primed to be the next Mobile innovation, especially with jurisdictional expansion, by offering a self-contained as the Mobile Court. The DACC Mobile Court would deploy staff across the City, regardless of having a partner location, to establish mobile court operations. The Mobile Court would be staffed by DACC court services and case management staff and operate similarly to other mobile resource centers. The DACC Mobile Court would be housed within a recreational vehicle (or similar vehicle) equipped with video equipment, Wi-Fi, office technology (including phone, fax, printers, and scanners), and private meeting space for case management and court hearings.

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<sup>25</sup> Leibowitz, A. et al. Using mobile clinics to deliver care to difficult-to-reach populations: A COVID-19 practice we should keep. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, Volume 24, 2021, 101551, ISSN 2211-3355, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2021.101551>.

<sup>26</sup> Hubbard, B., Saladen, M., Tushaus, D. W., & Upreti, N. K. (2019). Taking justice to people in crisis: Mobile legal clinics. *Alternative Law Journal*, 44(1), 76-81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1037969X19829550>

<sup>27</sup> Texas Children's. Accessed on February 11, 2024, at <https://www.texaschildrens.org/departments/mobile-clinics>

<sup>28</sup> Parkland. Accessed on February 11, 2024, at <https://www.parklandhealth.org/homeless-outreach>

<sup>29</sup> The Other Ones Foundation. Accessed on February 11, 2024, at [https://toofound.org/mobile-hygiene-clinic/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1707691946.9253759384155273437500](https://toofound.org/mobile-hygiene-clinic/?doing_wp_cron=1707691946.9253759384155273437500)

<sup>30</sup> The City of Austin. Accessed on February 11, 2024, at <https://www.austintexas.gov/homelessness/host>

The DACC Mobile Court could continue to work with partners within this Pilot and co-locate services, operate independently, or partner with other City initiatives working with this population. Such a collaboration might include the Housing-focused Encampment Assistance Link (HEAL) Initiative. The HEAL initiative is intended to benevolently close encampments and work with people to obtain housing. Having the DACC Mobile Court coordinate with HEAL as they engage with people living in encampments prior to closure, for example, offers community members time to work with DACC case managers to access housing while also addressing outstanding court cases, as needed. DACC has shown through its years of service, and with this Pilot, that they have the expertise and vision to operate a Mobile Court Program. With the appropriate staffing, technology, and resources allocated, DACC stands to become a groundbreaking program within the Mobile services space. It is recommended this program be fully implemented.



**Table 1: DACC Service Areas and Descriptions**

<b>DACC Service Areas</b>	
<b><i>Homeless Services</i></b>	
<b>Walk-in case management</b>	With a daily average of 50-60 walk-ins per day, DACC works with clients to sign up for public assistance, obtain documentation and identification, access to food, and connections to health and behavioral health services.
<b>Intensive case management</b>	Trauma informed and gender responsive wrap around services connecting clients to long-term housing solutions and connections to clinical services. Over 550 clients have been connected to long-term housing since October 2015.
<b>Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOST)</b>	A multi-agency justice and mental health partnership, HOST is comprised of Austin Police officers, a DACC housing-focused case manager, EMS Community Health Paramedics, and Integral Care staff providing clinical and peer support services. HOST offers community-based outreach and engagement for people with housing needs. DACC Homeless Services prioritized HOST referrals to ensure a swift continuation of services.
<b><i>Court Services</i></b>	
<b>Problem-solving court</b>	Fine-only, alternative resolution focused court program for C Class Misdemeanors.
<b>Clinical Diversion Program</b>	Case management and resource navigation for court-involved clients with an expertise and focus on increasing case completion rates while improving connections to behavioral health and social service supports to help individuals achieve stability and resolve their experience with homelessness.
<b><i>Community Services</i></b>	
<b>Community Services Program (CS)</b>	Court participants can take part in community service requirements through beautification projects, graffiti abatement, public space cleaning, and Edgar Fincher III Program Garden, which donates all food and eggs to local providers who feed the homeless community.
<b>Violet KeepSafe Storage Program (VKS)</b>	Free storage located downtown with secure bins to store vital documents, family memories, clothing, bedding, and more. Operates 7:00am-7:00pm, Monday-Friday. VKS employs people with lived experience to improve service experiences and offer positive employment opportunities.
<b><i>Support Services</i></b>	
<b>Austin Homelessness Advisory Council (AHAC)</b>	Created in 2017 through the Innovation Office with the support of Bloomberg funding, this council is comprised of people with lived experience providing programmatic and policy consultation for practices impacting people experiencing homelessness. AHAC has been working with DACC since 2019.

**Table 2: DACC Program Outcomes**

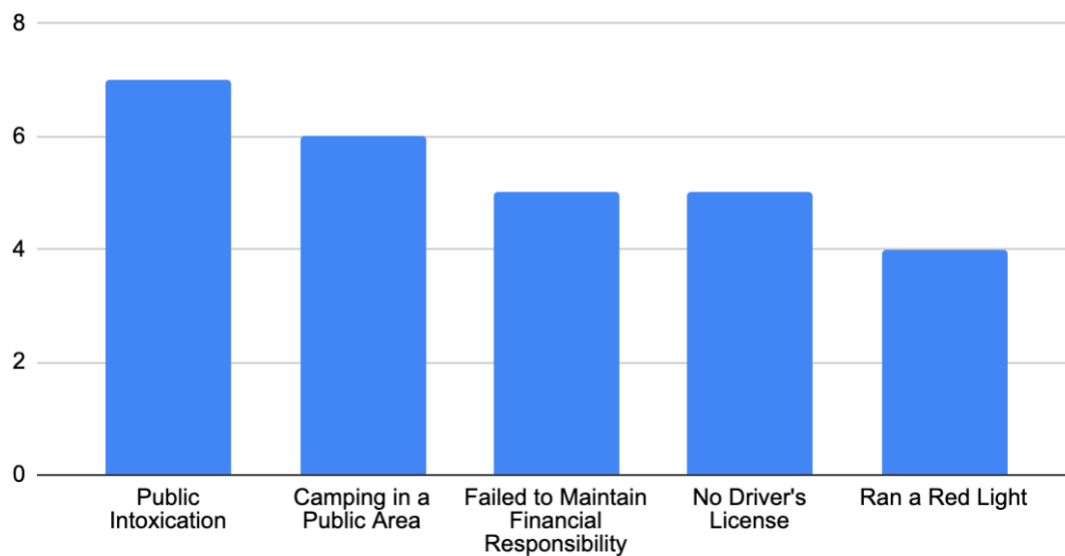
<b>DACC Program</b>	<b>Program Successes Fiscal Year 23 (Oct. 1, 2022-Sept. 30, 2023)</b>
<b>Community Services</b>	1,323 service hours
<b>Violet KeepSafe Storage Program</b>	855 active participants
<b>DACC cases filed</b>	898 cases
<b>DACC cases docketed</b>	3,142 cases
<b>CDP Clients</b>	122
<b>Cases resolved through participation in CDP</b>	160
<b>Walk-in case management interactions</b>	13,562
<b>Average daily walk-in management interactions</b>	54 clients
<b>Number of individuals connected to housing</b>	99 clients

**Table 3: DACC Mobile Court Pilot Program Schedule**

<b>DACC Mobile Court Pilot Date</b>	<b>DACC Mobile Court Pilot Location</b>
October 18, 2023	Pop-Up Resource Clinic (PURC) at First United Methodist Church of Austin
November 2, 2023	Austin Public Health - South Austin Neighborhood Center
November 9, 2023	Charlie Center-Mosaic Church
November 15, 2023	Pop-Up Resource Clinic (PURC) at YMCA North Park
November 17, 2023	Sunrise Navigation Center
November 27, 2023	Ruiz Branch Public Library
December 5, 2023	Austin Public Health - East Austin Neighborhood Center
December 14, 2023	Charlie Center-Mosaic Church
December 15, 2023	Sunrise Navigation Center
December 18, 2023	Milwood Branch Public Library
December 20, 2023	Pop-Up Resource Clinic (PURC) at Central Library
December 28, 2023	Northbridge Shelter
January 11, 2024	Charlie Center-Mosaic Church
January 17, 2024	Pop-Up Resource Clinic (PURC) at Marshalling Yard
January 19, 2024	Sunrise Navigation Center
January 23, 2024	Austin Public Health - St. Johns Community Center
January 29, 2024	Terrazas Branch Library
February 5, 2024	South Bridge Shelter

**Table 4: DACC Mobile Court Pilot Program Outcomes**

DACC Mobile Court Pilot Population and Activities	DACC Mobile Court Pilot Outcomes
Total unduplicated individuals engaged in mobile court	444
Total number of individuals received information about DACC homeless services	204
Total number of individuals had their court case status checked by DACC	383
Total number of individuals had an open case	125
Total number of cases docketed <sup>31</sup>	69
Total number of warrants cleared	48
Total number of individuals who participated in a DACC Mobile Court hearing	35
Total number of individuals enrolled in Clinical Diversion Program (CDP)	8

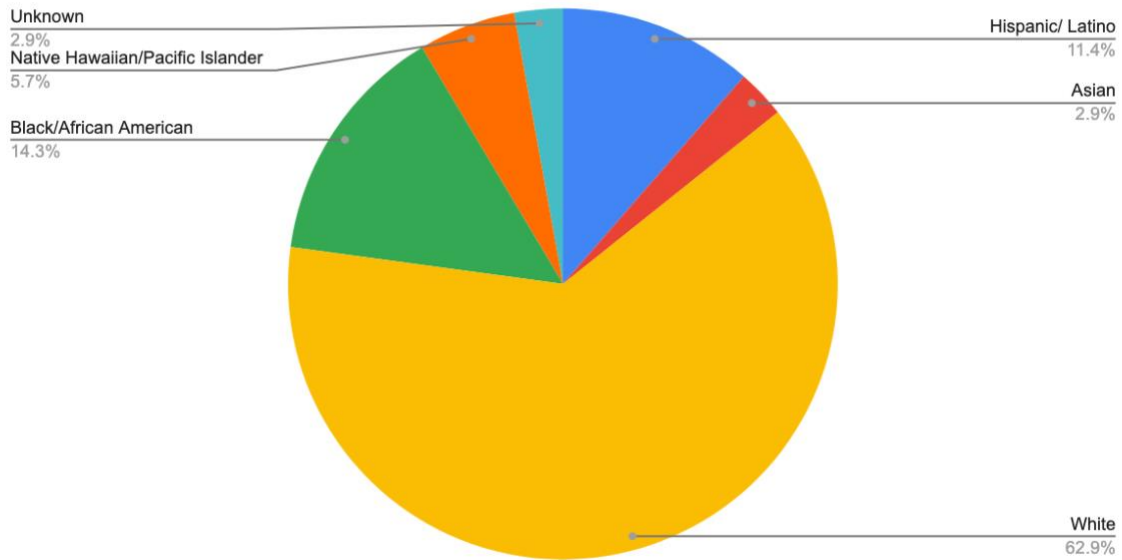
**Table 5: DACC Mobile Court Pilot Program Most Frequent Charges by Unduplicated Client****DACC Mobile Court Pilot Most Frequent Charges by Unduplicated Client**

<sup>31</sup> 59 cases were AMC. Defendants seen at Mobile Court with cases, whether at AMC or DACC, were appropriate for DACC services. This is noted as jurisdiction expansion continues, more of these cases will be with DACC.

**Table 6: DACC Mobile Court Pilot: Client Race**

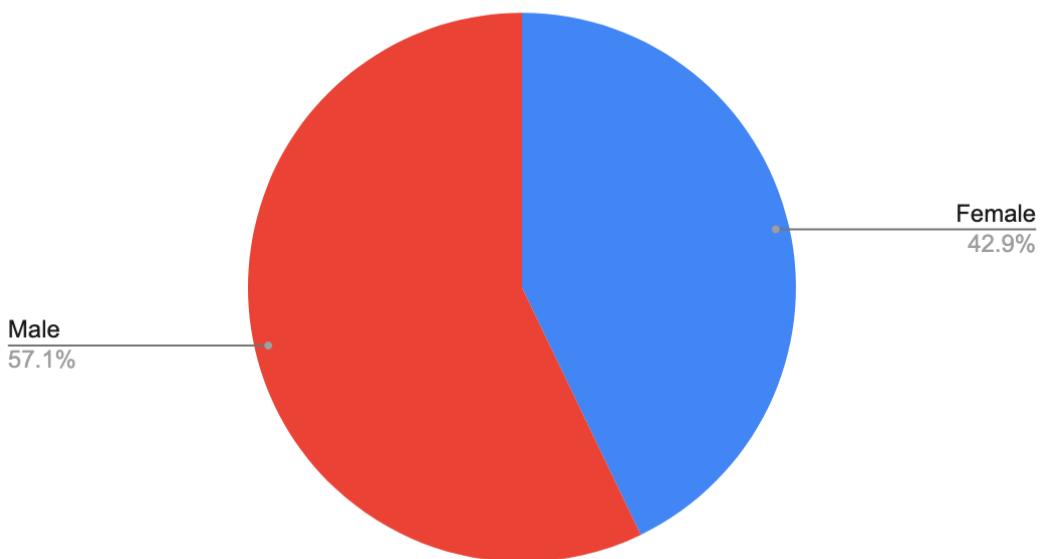
### DACC Mobile Pilot: Client Race

Race categories have been collected and reported by law enforcement



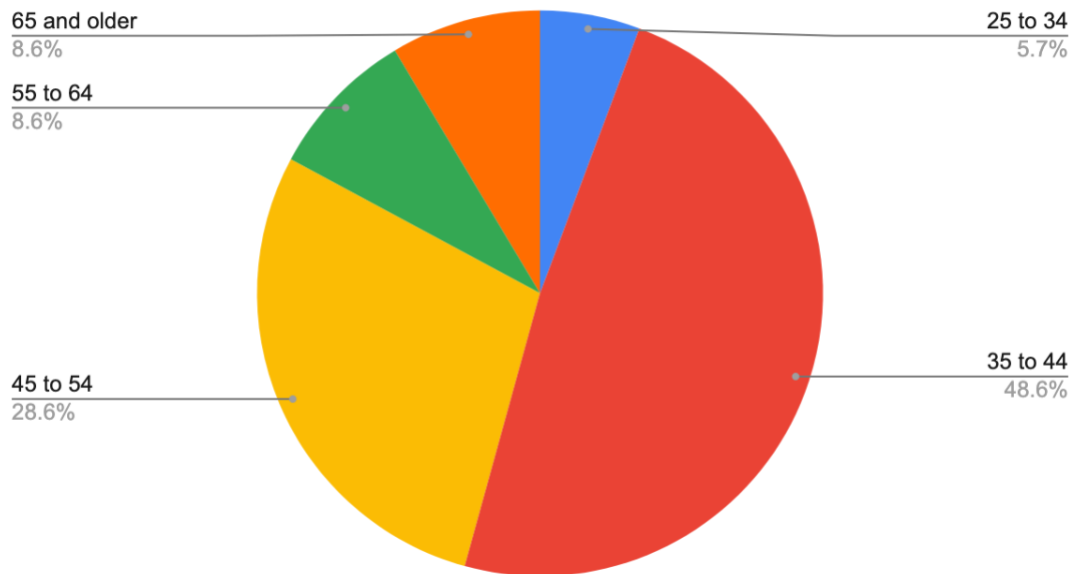
**Table 7: DACC Mobile Court Pilot: Client Sex**

### DACC Mobile Court Pilot: Client Sex



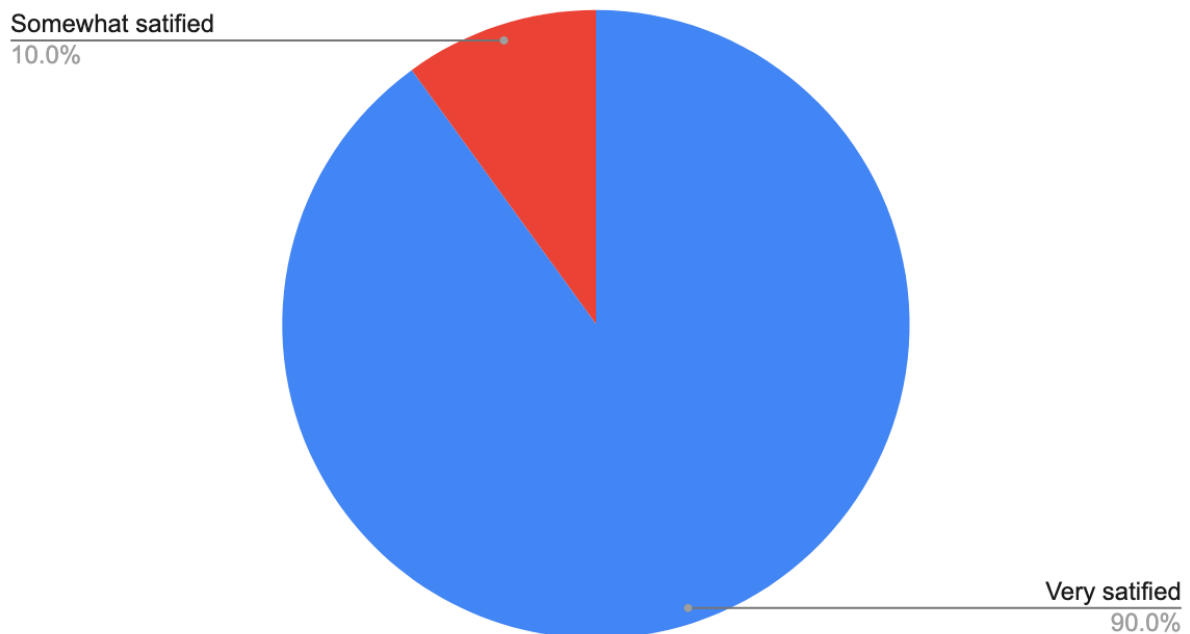
**Table 8: DACC Mobile Court Pilot: Client Age**

**DACC Mobile Court Pilot: Client Age**



**Table 9: DACC Mobile Court Pilot Client Satisfaction**

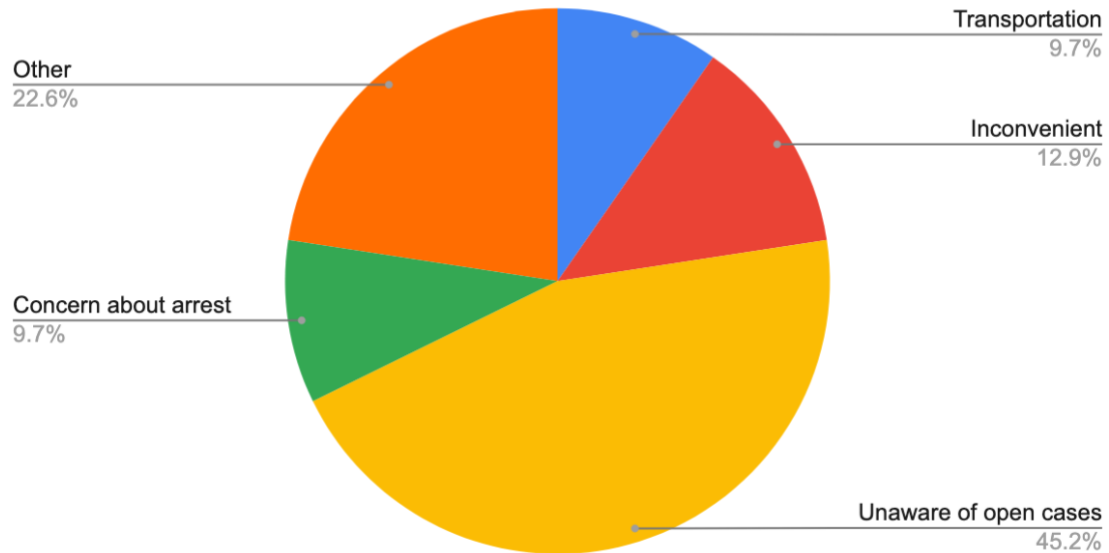
**DACC Mobile Court Pilot Client Satisfaction**





**Table 10: DACC Mobile Court Pilot Client Barriers to Accessing Court Services**

**DACC Mobile Court Pilot Client Barriers to Accessing Court Services**



**Table 11: DACC Mobile Court Client Likelihood of Addressing Case Without Pilot**

**DACC Mobile Court Client Likelihood of Addressing Case Without Pilot**

