

WHAT IS DRIVING JAIL POPULATIONS IN FERRY COUNTY, WASHINGTON?

May 2022

TOP FINDINGS FROM FERRY COUNTY

- 61 percent of jail admissions were for either community custody (probation) violations while under Department of Corrections (DOC) supervision (26 percent) or due to bed rental contracts with other agencies (35 percent, although this proportion has dropped in recent years). Pretrial admissions accounted for 28 percent of jail admissions.
- The leading reason people went to jail pretrial (35 percent) was for inability to navigate the local criminal legal system, such as **failure to appear in court or reinstate a driver's license**, rather than charges against people or property.
- Assault charges are the second most common reason (16 percent). A majority of assault bookings included charges of domestic violence (66 percent of all assault charges). Most **domestic violence** assault charges were misdemeanors (82 percent for women and 94 percent for men).
- About 6 percent of pretrial jail admissions were for drug-related charges.
- **78 percent of people** arrested and booked into Ferry County Jail **did not return on new charges**.

Ferry County, in rural Northern Washington, borders Canada to the north. The Colville National Forest takes up much of the northern part of this mountainous county. The southern boundary overlaps the Colville Indian Reservation. Ferry County's population is 16.6 percent Native American and 73.0 percent white according to recent Census data. The county is one of the least populous in the state, with just over 7,000 people. Timber and mining have dominated the local economy. Recreation and tourism are a growing part.

The current Ferry County Jail in Republic, WA, was built in 1976 with the capacity for 92 and up to 110 people during an emergency. The jail, managed by Ferry County Sheriff's Office, also houses people on community custody (probation) violations under supervision of Washington State Department of Corrections. Ferry County Jail also maintains bed rental contracts with nearby counties. This fact sheet presents some of the key trends in the Ferry County jail population, based on research done by Washington State University faculty and graduate students and the Washington Rural Jails Network, using jail administrative records from January 2016 to August 2021 requested from and provided by the Ferry County Sheriff's Office.

Monthly jail admissions in Ferry County declined over the five-and-a-half year period studied. Admissions numbered around 55-60 per month in 2016 and 2017. By 2019, admissions totaled around 30 per month. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, starting in March 2020, jail admissions were fewer than 20 per month. After a low of 7 admissions in both March and April 2021, admissions started increasing. About 28 percent of admissions to jail were pretrial, 26 percent were admitted for a community custody violation under DOC supervision, and 35 percent were admitted to be held for another jurisdiction. A smaller proportion of people (11 percent) entered the jail to serve time under a sentence.



- Of *all* those with a failure to appear charge among their booking charges (24 percent of pretrial bookings), failure to appear was the most serious charge for 96% of people. Only 4% of people were booked on a more serious charge along with failure to appear.
 - Rural residents may fail to appear in court for various reasons: they don't receive legal notifications nor any reminder, they may not understand complex legal documents, their overburdened defense lawyers are unable to help ensure clients appear in court, they face housing instability, they have difficulty securing transportation, they don't trust the criminal legal system, and/or they can't take time off from work and/or arrange for childcare.
- **Ten percent of people booked pretrial into Ferry County Jail were admitted on charges of driving with a suspended or invalidated license (DWLS).** DWLS can result from unpaid fines, traffic tickets, or child support payments due; failure to reinstate one's license after suspension; or failure to appear for hearings or comply with conditions related to traffic infractions, among other reasons.¹

“I was paying off all my [driving-related] tickets and I was making monthly payments. Well, then, in 2015 when we had all the fires and stuff, where I was working, the owner's house burned down in those fires. So she ended up closing the business. Well, during that time, I was helping out the fire victims—both me and the waitress that I worked with were helping out the fire victims and cooking for the elders and stuff, and I ended up getting evicted from my home because I was helping because I was the only person [here] that was helping everybody else... So we—I got evicted, so I ended up moving in...with my sister for a little while. And, you know, basically starting over. And I didn't have any income at the time. So, they re-suspended my license.

Q *So you just got behind on the bills, basically.*

A *Yeah, because everything kind of went up in smoke, literally.”*

—45-year-old white and Native American woman

- **Another 2 percent of people were booked into jail pretrial for *difficulties complying with system requirements other than failure to appear.*** These included assorted other legal system requirements, such as failures to pay fines and fees, pay child support, obey criminal justice system officials' orders, properly register a car, or transfer a title.

Assault charges accounted for 16 percent of pretrial jail bookings in Ferry County. Of these, 71 percent were misdemeanors and 66 percent involved domestic violence charges.

- Domestic violence assault was the second-most common top charge for women booked into jail pretrial (14 percent) (after failure to appear) and the fourth-most common top charge for men booked into jail pretrial (9 percent).



- Most bookings for domestic violence assault for both men and women were misdemeanor-level charges (82 percent for women and 94 percent for men). Misdemeanor assaults do not result in severe bodily harm and do not involve a deadly weapon.²

Driving under the influence (DUI) charges were twice as common as drug-related charges as the reason for people being booked pretrial into the Ferry County Jail.

- DUI was the top charge in 12 percent of bookings, whereas drug-related charges were the most serious in about 6 percent of pretrial bookings.

LENGTH OF STAY AND FREQUENCY OF BOOKINGS

Some 42 percent of people booked into jail pretrial in Ferry County were released within one day, yet the average length of stay was more than one week (9.9 days). Some who were in jail longer than one day had very long stays, which significantly increased the average length of stay. People held for community custody violations under Department of Corrections supervision had a slightly longer average length of stay, about 10.5 days.

Length of pretrial stay in Ferry County Jail varied by charge type. People booked on drug-related charges tended to have lengthier jail stays of over 12 days, longer than the overall average. Those booked for failure to appear—a minor charge and the most common pretrial charge in Ferry County—spent more than one week (8.9 days) in jail on average.

A minority of those who were booked into jail on charges of failure to appear (27%) or related to drugs (25%) were released within 24 hours. By contrast, more than half the people charged with driving under the influence (52%) or driving with a suspended license (56%) were released from jail within 24 hours. Although bond information is not analyzed in this study, the contrast may be due to more people in the latter two groups being released without bail and/or able to post bail.

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

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

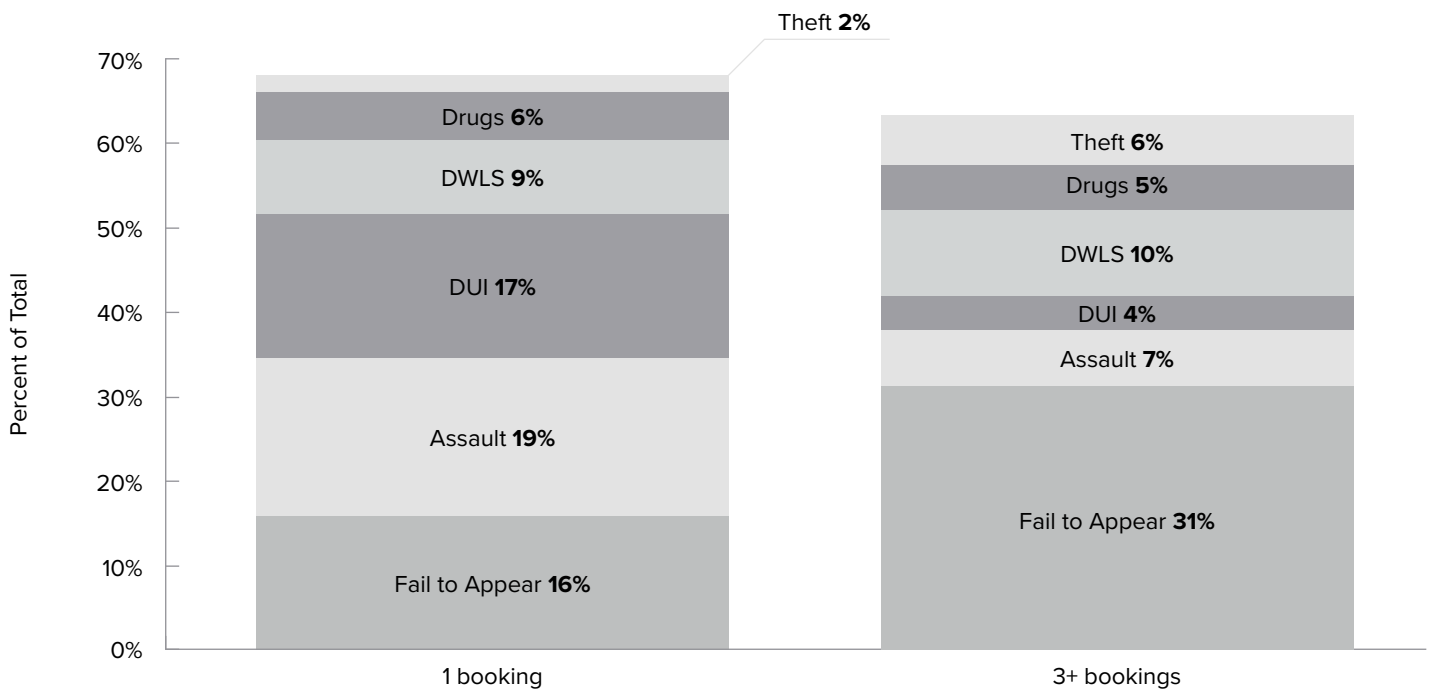
2.0	Driving w/ License Susp	56%
2.1	DUI	52%
8.9	Failure to Appear (FTA)	27%
9.6	Assaults	40%
11.9	Theft	30%
12.4	Drugs	25%
9.9	Overall Average (all pretrial charges)	42%



Most people (78 percent) who were booked into Ferry County Jail pretrial did not return to the jail on new charges over the five-and-a-half year period (Jan 2016 – Aug 2021) the research team examined.

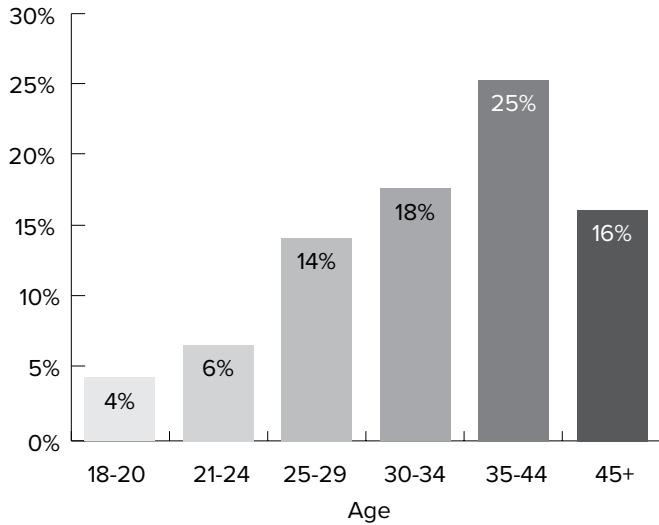
- Nearly one-third (31 percent) of all repeated pretrial jail admissions were due to failure to appear charges. **This demonstrates that many repeat bookings stem from the challenges of meeting legal requirements during the pretrial process** rather than new criminal charges.
- **The 7 percent of people who were reincarcerated three or more times in Ferry County Jail accounted for 22 percent of all pretrial bookings over five-and-a-half years.** This group—about 40 people—had a broad impact on jail trends in Ferry County. People cycling in and out of jail are more likely to experience homelessness, substance use, lack of stable income, and mental and physical health problems than the general population.³ Increased social services and/or assistance meeting legal-system obligations could have an outsized impact by helping them stabilize and meet their day-to-day needs and ultimately end the cycle of incarceration.

Charge categories for people with single versus multiple pretrial bookings



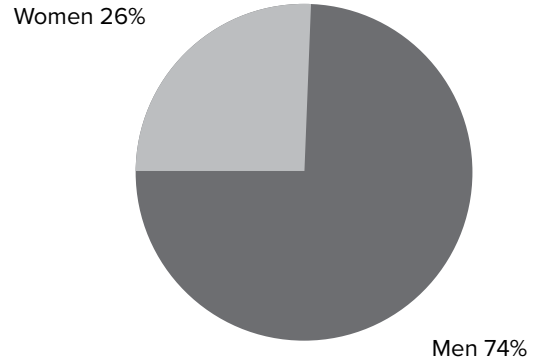
APPENDIX A – ADDITIONAL CHARTS

Figure 1. Age at pretrial booking, % distribution



Age at booking. The average age at arrest/booking was 39. More than half of people were aged 35 or older when admitted to jail. Nearly one in ten people were under the age of 25 when booked.

Figure 2. Pretrial Jail Admissions by Gender

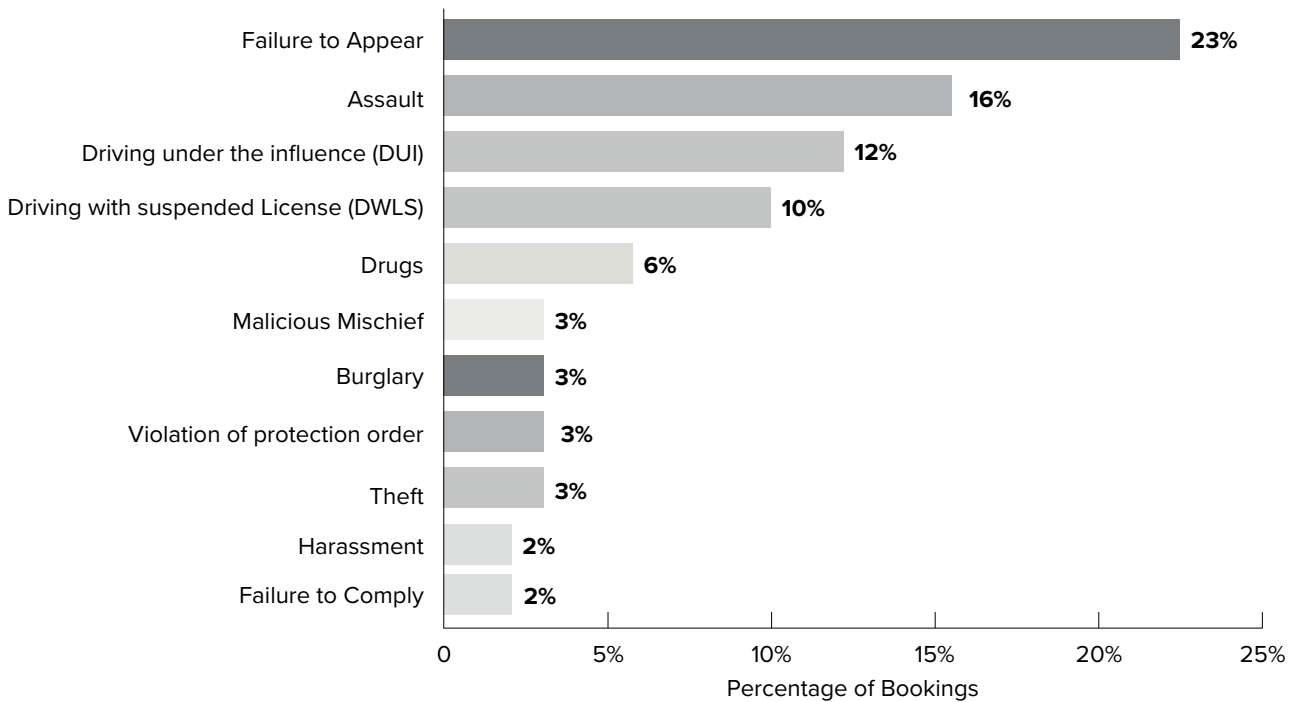


Jail admissions by gender. Women made up more than one-quarter of pretrial jail bookings into Ferry County Jail. Nationally, women's presence in jails has been growing.

Jail admissions by race and ethnicity. Like Ferry County's population, most pretrial jail admissions were of white people (87 percent of pretrial admissions, 73 percent of population). Fewer than 3 percent of admissions were Hispanic/Latinx people (5 percent of county population). Seven percent were Native American (17 percent of the county population). Jail admissions of Hispanic/Latinx people, Native American people, and people with multi-racial/ethnic identities tend to be underestimated because jail staff may misclassify some people as white at admission. This tendency to underestimate is common in jails across the country.⁴ Black people were 1 percent of jail admissions, same as the county population.

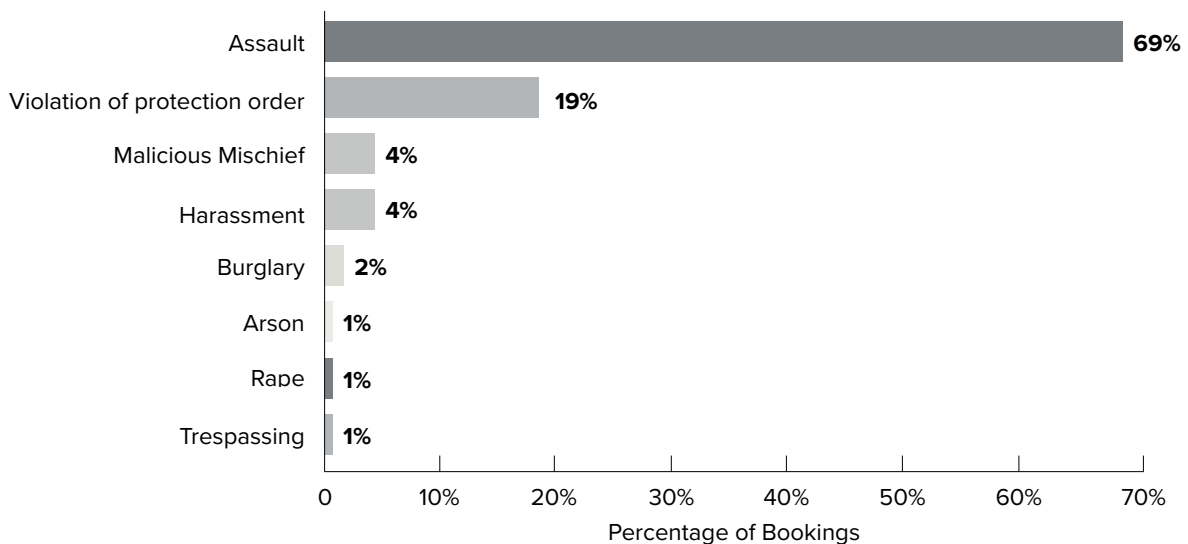


Figure 3. Percent of pretrial bookings by primary charge



Top charges for pretrial jail bookings: Failure to Appear in court (23 percent), Assault (16 percent, with 66 percent of those for domestic violence), Driving under the influence (12 percent), and Driving with License Suspended (10 percent).

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



Most common domestic violence charge types. Assault (69 percent) was the most common top charge in cases involving domestic violence. Violating a protection order (19 percent), then malicious mischief and harassment (4 percent, each) were the next most common top charges in domestic violence cases.



Figure 5. Multiple Pretrial Bookings



Multiple pretrial bookings. Most people were arrested and booked into Ferry County Jail only once during the observed period (78 percent). However, 7 percent experienced three or more pretrial jails stays over five and one-half years (January 2016 - August 2021).



APPENDIX B – METHODOLOGY

The findings in this brief come from analysis conducted by Washington State University faculty and graduate students in the Rural Jails Research and Policy Network. The Ferry County Sheriff's Department provided requested data on all jail bookings (and releases) initiated between January 1, 2016, and August 31, 2021. In total, the WSU team analyzed 2,668 bookings: in 1,617 booking incidents, people were admitted and held on behalf of a contracting county or the WA DOC (probation violation), in 292 booking incidents, people were committed locally to serve a sentence, and in 759 incidents (involving 550 individual people), they were booked pretrial.

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

Endnotes

- 1 A 2021 law (SB 5226) eliminated mandatory suspension of license as a consequence for unpaid fines and fees; courts now have the option to suspend or revoke a license and must assess ability to pay.
- 2 Washington state requires police officers to make an arrest when they respond to a domestic violence call and have probable cause to believe that an incident of domestic violence or a violation of a no-contact order occurred in the last four hours. When an officer believes that more than one party is at fault, they are not required to make more than one arrest—typically, they will arrest only the party who appears to be the “primary aggressor.”
- 3 Madeline Bailey, Erica Crew, and Madz Reeve, *No Access to Justice: Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness and Jail* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2020), <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/no-access-to-justice.pdf>; Jennifer Bronson, Jessica Stroop, Stephanie Zimmer, and Marcus Berzofsky, *Drug Use, Dependence, and Abuse Among State Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2007-2009* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/dudaspi0709.pdf>; and Urban Institute, “Five Charts that Explain the Homelessness-Jail Cycle – and How to Break It,” September 16, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/features/five-charts-explain-homelessness-jail-cycle-and-how-break-it>.
- 4 According to a 2016 report, when people in prison had the opportunity to self-identify, a higher percentage of people reported Hispanic/Latinx origin or multiple races and fewer identified as non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic Black than reported in corrections department administrative data. See E. Ann Carson, *Prisoners in 2016* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018), 7, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p16.pdf>.
- 5 The law that established this practice was an attempt to reduce the number of people in state prisons, so some were released under community custody. People who have to return to detention due to violating the conditions of community custody generally go to county jails, not state prisons. See Rev. Code Wa. Rev. Code Wa. §9.94A.701. DOC-supervised community custody is separate from county-supervised probation.

For more information

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

