

Letter To The Editor: Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice Opposes the Statewide Expansion of Electronic Monitoring

August 30 2023 3:02 PM



Letter To The Editor:

The Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice opposes [the Office of Statewide Pretrial Services' launch of an Electronic Monitoring program that will cover 70 counties](#), many

of which have never used electronic monitoring for people awaiting trial. The announcement of this program in conjunction with the implementation of the [Pretrial Fairness Act](#) is of particular concern. There is no reason for Illinois to expand its use of electronic monitoring in response to ending money bond. The law simply ensures that people who would have been required to purchase their freedom in the past are allowed to return to their homes, families, and jobs while awaiting trial without having to empty their bank account or otherwise languish in jail if they could not afford their money bond. Requiring anyone to wear an ankle shackle and be monitored in lieu of having to pay bond is an injustice that is in direct conflict with the spirit of the law and its intended impact.

An extensive body of research shows that electronic monitoring does nothing to improve community safety or ensure that people return to court, and the [extensive harms](#) it causes monitored people are [well documented](#). The restrictions of electronic monitoring make it difficult for people to do essential tasks like grocery shopping, attending doctor's appointments, or take care of children and other dependents. Rigorous research into effects of electronic monitoring [in Cook County](#), and [nationally](#), have repeatedly led to recommendations to reduce, not increase, its use.

The Pretrial Fairness Act includes [protections for people subjected to electronic monitoring](#) to address the human rights crisis happening in Cook County, home of one the [nation's largest and most restrictive electronic monitoring programs](#). These provisions are meant to be a floor, not the ceiling, for shaping policies regarding how people on electronic monitoring are treated, and are not meant to facilitate the expansion of this harmful technology.

Cook County has dramatically reduced the number of people incarcerated pretrial [without seeing an uptick in rearrests or missed court dates](#). Notably, the state of New Jersey limited its use of money bond and nearly halved the number of people in its jails without increasing its use of electronic monitoring. Today, there are dramatically more people on electronic monitoring in Cook County than the entire state of New Jersey.

We are concerned by the lack of transparency and lack of engagement with other stakeholders, advocates, the authors of the Pretrial Fairness Act, and most importantly from impacted communities in the creation of this program. Illinois' road to ending money bond began with the [Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Pretrial Practices](#), a two year project that included representatives from all branches of government and members of the public. Collaboration has been central to Illinois' reforms of its pretrial system. It is alarming that the new Office of Statewide Pretrial Services would take steps that could [expand mass incarceration](#) without engaging in a transparent and collaborative process.

The announcement from the Office of Statewide Pretrial Services included a casual mention of “hundreds of alerts and alarms” that do not appear to have endangered public safety. These are a sign that GPS technology is not sophisticated enough to perform the task it is being used for. A [WTTW story](#) highlighted severe technological issues with electronic monitoring devices in Illinois. The devices use GPS technology to report people’s locations and struggle to track people indoors. As a result, law enforcement officials believe people have left their homes when they have not. Utilizing law enforcement to respond to these alerts puts people at unnecessary risk of being harmed or wrongfully being reincarcerated.

The Office of Statewide Pretrial Services has an opportunity to support the successful implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act by providing services to people awaiting trial. Electronic monitoring is not a service, it's a form of pretrial punishment. Centering this technology in our transition to a fairer pretrial system would be a blight and a major setback to the work that our state has committed to advance. The Office Statewide of Pretrial Services should focus on using its funding to provide actual services that have been proven to support people as they return to court, like reminder calls, transportation, and linkages to social service agencies. This, not more punishment, is what would truly promote community safety and thriving.

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The [Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice](#), whose member organizations have been working to end money bond since 2016, is made up of over 45 community, legal, policy and service organizations across the state. Together, we are working to reduce pretrial incarceration in Illinois and, more broadly, to end mass incarceration and address the root causes of socioeconomic and racial inequity in our legal system. Our Network is grounded in the [Principles of Pretrial Reform in Illinois](#), and in 2021 we helped pass the [Pretrial Fairness Act](#), a law that will end wealth-based pretrial incarceration in our state when fully implemented. The Pretrial Fairness Act has been endorsed by more than 225 organizations.

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