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Disclaimer

APPR developed this summary—using online searches of academic databases and publicly available information—to provide an overview of current research on this topic. The online search may not have identified every relevant resource, and new research will shed additional light on this topic. APPR will continue to monitor the research and will update this summary as needed. Due to the broad nature of this summary, readers are encouraged to identify areas to explore in depth and to consider the local implications of the research for future advancements related to pretrial goals, values, policies, and practices.

Pretrial Monitoring

When a person is released while their case is pending, a jurisdiction has two primary interests: to maximize court appearance and maximize community well-being and safety (i.e., minimize the likelihood of the person’s rearrest during the pretrial stage). Most people succeed on pretrial release: they return to court and abide by the law. Courts sometimes order additional conditions of release to provide reasonable assurance of these positive outcomes. This summary examines the current base of knowledge regarding the effectiveness of pretrial monitoring in improving court appearance and law-abiding behavior.

Pretrial research is always evolving. This research summary, which was updated in April 2025, includes findings from recently published studies that may change the interpretation of the takeaways and conclusions presented in earlier versions of the document. To explain why these changes occurred or why there may not be a singular conclusion, greater detail is provided on research study methodology, and additional guidance is offered on how to interpret different findings. Overall, the inclusion of more recent research and a closer critique of past studies has not significantly altered the key findings previously presented to the field.

A few updates have been made to this summary:

- the inclusion of two new studies,
- the exclusion of an older study that had weaker links with pretrial monitoring, and
- outlines of different research designs and study limitations.

It is hoped that this update equips readers with a greater understanding of the state of the research in the field.

What Is Pretrial Monitoring?

Many jurisdictions across the country use pretrial monitoring—often referred to as pretrial supervision—as a strategy to increase the likelihood that

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The **Center for Effective Public Policy** (cepp.com) leads APPR's technical assistance, training, resource development, and website management (advancingpretrial.org).

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people will appear for court and abide by the law during the pretrial period. According to a 2019 survey of pretrial practices nationwide, 17 out of every 20 jurisdictions have some mechanism in place to monitor people in the community while their case is pending.¹

Pretrial monitoring typically involves some form of recurring contact between pretrial services staff and a person in the community, but it can differ broadly in terms of who is responsible for overseeing operations (e.g., probation, sheriff, other county or state department, nonprofit, for-profit agency), the monitoring method (e.g., face to face, telephone, mail-in), frequency (e.g., weekly, biweekly, monthly), and the location of in-person monitoring (e.g., courtroom, pretrial services office, home of person being monitored).

Pretrial monitoring typically involves a pretrial services staff member maintaining periodic contact with a person in the community to support the person's compliance with court-ordered conditions of release.

Strategies to enforce compliance with court-ordered release conditions (e.g., criminal record checks, court date notifications, location monitoring, drug testing, rewarding people for adherence to pretrial conditions)² also vary, as do responses to infractions (technical violations and law violations). Some pretrial services agencies practice differential monitoring—adjusting the frequency and type of monitoring depending on pretrial assessment results or the specific population.

This summary reviews key research findings on the effect of pretrial monitoring on court appearance and law-abiding behavior during the pretrial period.

Research Designs

There are three main challenges with evaluating the impact of pretrial monitoring on pretrial outcomes. First, people assigned to more restrictive release options may have risk factors associated with higher rates of pretrial failure—that is, failing to appear for court, violations of release conditions, or being arrested while on pretrial release. For example, if judicial officers are assigning people with more significant risk factors to pretrial monitoring, it is difficult to disentangle whether differences in pretrial outcomes are a result of pretrial monitoring or the person's risk factors. Some studies do control for a host of such factors (e.g., criminal history), but if the set of factors is not exhaustive, it becomes less reliable to attribute any differences in outcomes to pretrial monitoring. Second, system responses can impact individual

behavior in a way that leads to an unintentional decrease in pretrial success. People under pretrial monitoring face more scrutiny than people released under less restrictive options. Pretrial monitoring increases the level of surveillance and requires people to comply with more rules, which gives the supervising agent more scenarios where they can petition for a technical revocation. Thus, pretrial monitoring could increase the likelihood of violations and sanctions, which can overshadow changes in individual behavior or deterrence effects. These challenges can lead to overestimates of pretrial failure for people assigned to pretrial monitoring. Third, pretrial monitoring encompasses a variety of approaches and practices, and the lack of consistency across jurisdictions stands as a significant obstacle to evaluating the practices' impact and replicating the monitoring practices that most improve the likelihood of people appearing in court and remaining arrest-free during the pretrial period.

Studies vary in their ability to isolate the effects of pretrial monitoring and to produce causal or more credible findings. Rigorous studies can rule out alternative explanations and more convincingly link an intervention to differences in outcomes (as opposed to suggesting a correlational relationship).

1. **Randomized controlled trials** (RCTs) are considered “the gold standard” in research. People are randomly assigned to either an experimental group (which is subject to an intervention or to a policy or practice change) or to a control group (which is not subject to the intervention or to the policy or practice change). If the sample size is large enough and there is an effective randomization procedure, all of the factors that could influence the outcome other than the intervention or policy change will likely be distributed evenly between the two groups. In this way, differences in outcomes can be explained by the intervention or policy change alone rather than by an alternative factor. **RCTs are included in this summary.**
2. **Quasi-experimental studies** aim to estimate the effect of an intervention, policy, or practice without random assignment driven by the researcher (e.g., comparing the outcomes of people released to pretrial monitoring to those released on money bond with no monitoring). Quasi-experimental studies encompass a broad range of approaches: more rigorous quasi-experimental studies can produce causal estimates while weaker quasi-experimental studies may leave the door open to alternative explanations. **Some studies cited in this research summary are quasi-experimental studies.**
3. **Descriptive or correlational studies** examine differences in outcomes between nonequivalent groups that were or were not subject to an

intervention or to a policy or practice change. Under these designs, it is difficult to attribute any changes in outcomes to an intervention. Differences in outcomes may be driven by pre-existing differences or other alternative explanations. In general, strong conclusions should not be drawn from these studies. However, because descriptive or correlational studies are still informative and can pave the way for more rigorous studies, **this research summary cites some descriptive or correlational studies.**

In general, the lack of rigorous research on pretrial monitoring serves as a barrier to determining its effectiveness.³ While there are many descriptive and correlational studies on the topic, only a handful of quasi-experimental studies and randomized-controlled trials focus on this issue. The sparse number of rigorous studies highlights the need for more research in this area. For example, future research will ideally explore the effect of pretrial monitoring on other outcomes, such as a pretrial arrest for a violent offense, and how different components of pretrial monitoring influence pretrial outcomes.

Key Finding #1: Pretrial Monitoring Is Associated with Somewhat Higher Court Appearance Rates but Has No Clear Association with Changes in Arrest-Free Rates

Studies that have examined pretrial monitoring have found, on the whole, some evidence that it may modestly improve court appearance rates but no evidence that it impacts pretrial arrests. For example:

- A study in Orange County, California, found that pretrial monitoring compared to cash bonds with no pretrial monitoring was associated with a 43% decrease in the failure to appear rate.⁴
- A study of over 3,900 people released before trial in two states found that, after matching them on important characteristics (e.g., state, gender, race, age, likelihood of success as determined by a statistically validated assessment, amount of time on release), the people released with pretrial monitoring had statistically higher court appearance rates (93% versus 88%) and similar arrest-free rates (78% versus 77%).⁵

The strength of the conclusions that can be drawn from the above studies is limited by the fact that people assigned pretrial monitoring may have different characteristics than the comparison group, including characteristics that may not show up in the data (e.g., higher rates of unemployment⁶) and that therefore

cannot be matched. Some studies have used more rigorous quasi-experimental designs to control for factors that might account for differences in outcomes:

- One study examined the effect of pretrial monitoring in two undisclosed jurisdictions that used a pretrial assessment tool to guide different levels of pretrial monitoring. Researchers compared people just above and right below the different thresholds (e.g., a risk score of 37 out of 50 recommends no monitoring, while a risk score of 38 recommends low-intensity monitoring). When matched on case type and risk factors, people who did and did not receive pretrial monitoring showed similar court appearance and arrest-free rates.⁷
- Similarly, researchers examined how pretrial outcomes changed after the implementation of a prosecutorial policy in Philadelphia in 2018 that led to a reduction in pretrial monitoring for a subgroup of cases. The study found that reducing pretrial monitoring from 11% of cases to 2% of cases had no statistically significant impact on court appearance rates (70% to 69%) and recidivism rates (19.8% to 17.4%).⁸

Pretrial monitoring appears to have limited impact on court appearance rates and no impact on arrest-free rates.

Key Finding #2: The Intensity of Pretrial Monitoring Does Not Appear to Impact Court Appearance and Arrest-Free Rates

Studies suggest that more intensive⁹ pretrial monitoring versus less intensive pretrial monitoring does not seem to impact court appearance or arrest-free rates. For example:

- In the study of two undisclosed jurisdictions described above, researchers also compared outcomes for those who received low-intensity monitoring with those who received medium-intensity monitoring. They found that people in the low-intensity and medium-intensity groups were equally likely to appear in court and remain law-abiding. Similarly, researchers compared outcomes for those who received medium-intensity monitoring with those who received high-intensity monitoring, and found that both groups showed similar court appearance and arrest-free rates.¹⁰
- In two randomized controlled trials in Philadelphia in 1996—one focusing on people categorized as medium risk and one focusing on

people categorized as high risk—higher levels of monitoring intensity made no difference in court appearance or arrest-free rates.¹¹ The study noted that both experiments were unable to enforce compliance with monitoring conditions, which makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions from the study.

Different intensities of pretrial monitoring do not seem to impact pretrial outcomes.

Key Finding #3: For People Assessed as Least Likely to Succeed Pretrial, Pretrial Monitoring Shows More Promise

Two studies suggest that pretrial monitoring is associated with better court appearance rates for people assessed by a statistically validated assessment tool as being least likely to succeed.

- In the descriptive study of 3,900 people in two jurisdictions described earlier, the apparent impact of pretrial monitoring on appearance rates was greater among people assessed as less likely to succeed pretrial. Among those with the highest assessment scores (categorized as least likely to succeed), the appearance rate for those who were monitored was 90% compared to 80% for those who were not monitored.¹² When comparing rates of pretrial arrest, monitoring had no impact.
- Another study, examining over 170,000 people on pretrial release in 93 of the 94 federal judicial districts, found that, on average, people assessed as being statistically most likely to succeed pretrial were 1%–2% *more* likely to fail (defined as failure to appear or a new arrest) if they received pretrial monitoring.¹³ Conversely, pretrial monitoring had the most benefit for those assessed as being statistically less likely to succeed pretrial; these people were more likely to succeed pretrial if they received pretrial monitoring compared to those without monitoring.¹⁴

This research is consistent with research in the post-adjudication space about the “risk principle,” which argues that interventions are more effective when they are allocated in a way that is proportional to a person’s likelihood of failure. However, more research is needed to understand the applicability of the risk principle to the pretrial space, particularly in terms of whether pretrial monitoring has different impacts depending on a person’s likelihood to succeed.

Studies suggest that pretrial monitoring is associated with improved pretrial outcomes for people whom statistically validated assessment tools indicate are less likely to succeed pretrial.

Key Finding #4: There Is a Lack of Research on Common Pretrial Monitoring Conditions and Practices

The most notable gap in the pretrial monitoring literature is the absence of empirical evaluations regarding the effectiveness of common pretrial release conditions and practices on a person's likelihood of appearing in court or remaining arrest-free pretrial. Unevaluated conditions include, among others, no-contact orders, curfews, and driving interlock devices. Additionally, how pretrial services agencies respond to people's compliance and noncompliance (or "technical violations") with court-ordered conditions has not, to our knowledge, been studied in terms of impact on court appearance and pretrial arrest.

Many common pretrial release conditions and practices—including no-contact orders, curfews, driving interlock devices, and pretrial services' responses to compliance and noncompliance with court-ordered conditions—lack empirical grounding.

Best Practice Recommendations

Professional practice standards are consistent with the findings of the research literature, emphasizing the importance of monitoring people pretrial within certain parameters.

1. American Bar Association (ABA)

Standard 10-1.10 in *ABA Standards for Criminal Justice: Pretrial Release* explains the role of a pretrial services agency and states: "Pretrial services should...monitor, supervise, and assist defendants released prior to trial, and...review the status and release eligibility of detained defendants for the court on an ongoing basis. The pretrial services agency should...(e) monitor the compliance of released defendants with the requirements of assigned release conditions...; (f) promptly inform the court of all apparent violations of pretrial release conditions or arrests of persons released pending trial...and recommend appropriate modifications of release conditions according to approved court policy...; (j) assist persons released

prior to trial in securing any necessary employment, medical, drug, mental or other health treatment, legal or other needed social services that would increase the chances of successful compliance with conditions of pretrial release; and (k) remind persons released before trial of their court dates and assist them in attending court.”¹⁵

2. The National Association of Pretrial Services Agencies (NAPSA)

NAPSA’s *Pretrial Standards: Revised 2024* provides multiple practice standards for pretrial services agencies, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Standard 2.9: “Pretrial supervision should be individualized to a person’s assessed likelihood of pretrial success and include the least restrictive conditions necessary to reasonably assure the individual’s future court appearance and arrest-free behavior” (p. 37).
- Standard 3.5(b): “The prosecutor, defense or the pretrial services agency may request a hearing to consider changes to an individual’s release or detention status, including modification to supervision levels or conditions based on the individual’s behavior on supervision, willful failure to appear in court, or an arrest on a new offense” (p. 58).
- Standard 4.1(b): “A pretrial services agency should adopt the following core functions to support its purposes:...(iii) use an individual’s background interview and investigation, criminal history, outcome assessment results, and other information to...recommend appropriate conditions of pretrial release; (iv) monitor and supervise released individuals, in accordance with court-imposed conditions...; (v) notify the Court, prosecution, and defense of an individual’s compliance with release conditions and recommend appropriate changes to pretrial release status and conditions” (p. 62).¹⁶

3. National Institute of Corrections (NIC)

A Framework for Pretrial Justice cites pretrial monitoring as an essential element of an effective pretrial services agency, and cautions against blanket or “one-size-fits-all” approaches; recognizes that release conditions need to be individualized for each person; and acknowledges that responses to violations of court-ordered conditions must adhere to due process considerations.¹⁷

Notes

1. Pretrial Justice Institute. (2019). *Scan of pretrial practices 2019*. <https://www.pretrial.org/files/resources/scanofpretrialpractices.pdf>
2. For more information, see the research summaries on pretrial drug testing and pretrial location monitoring available at <https://advancingpretrial.org/improving-pretrial-justice/appr-resources/pretrial-research-summaries/>.
3. For example, many studies are unpublished (thus have not gone through peer review), and they fail to clearly articulate the methodology that was used, report basic data (e.g., sample characteristics), or use sample sizes that are adequate for making statistical comparisons. Many studies also do not rule out alternative explanations of findings (i.e., by controlling for demographics, pretrial assessment scores, time on pretrial release, etc.). See: Bechtel, K., Holsinger, A. M., Lowenkamp, C. T., & Warren, M. J. (2016). A meta-analytic review of pretrial research: Risk assessment, bond type, and interventions. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42(2), 443–467. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2741635>.
4. Barno, M., Nevárez Martínez, D., & Williams, K. R. (2020). Exploring alternatives to cash bail: An evaluation of Orange County's Pretrial Assessment and Release Supervision (PARS) program. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(3), 363–378. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-019-09506-3>
5. Lowenkamp, C. T., & VanNostrand, M. (2013). *Exploring the impact of supervision on pretrial outcomes*. Laura and John Arnold Foundation. <https://search.issuelab.org/resource/exploring-the-impact-of-supervision-on-pretrial-outcomes.html>
6. Barno et al., 2020
7. Valentine, E., & Picard, S. (2023). *Assessing the effectiveness of varying intensities of pretrial supervision: Full findings from the Pretrial Justice Collaborative*. MDRC. https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/PJC_Pretrial_Supervision.pdf
8. Ouss, A., & Stevenson, M. (2023). Does cash bail deter misconduct? *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 15(3), 150–182. <https://aouss.github.io/NCB.pdf>
9. "Intensity" typically refers to the method (e.g., face-to-face, telephone, mail-in) and frequency (e.g., weekly, biweekly, once per month) of contact between pretrial services and the person being monitored.
10. Valentine & Picard, 2023
11. Goldkamp, J. S., & White, M. D. (2006). Restoring accountability in pretrial release: The Philadelphia pretrial release supervision experiments. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 2(2), 143–181. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225135854_Restoring_Accountability_in_Pretial_Release_The_Philadelphia_Pretial_Release_Supervision_Experiments. Focusing on 369 people charged with misdemeanor or felonies and categorized as *medium* risk, the experiment compared people with weekly telephone reporting to people with weekly telephone reporting and additional reminder calls before court hearings. Concentrating on 476 people charged with misdemeanor or felonies and categorized as *high* risk, the experiment compared people with twice weekly reporting to people with twice weekly telephone reporting and in-person meetings before court dates.
12. Lowenkamp & VanNostrand, 2013
13. In this study, pretrial monitoring also included multiple programs and interventions, such as substance use testing and treatment, location monitoring, housing and shelter, mental health treatment, etc.
14. VanNostrand, M., & Keebler, G. (2009). Pretrial risk assessment in the federal court. *Federal Probation*, 73(2). https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/73_2_1_0.pdf
15. American Bar Association. (2007). *ABA standards for criminal justice: Pretrial release* (3rd ed.). https://www.americanbar.org/groups/criminal_justice/publications/criminal_justice_section_archive/crimjust_standards_pretrialrelease_bk/
16. National Association of Pretrial Services Agencies. (2024). *Pretrial standards: Revised 2024*. https://napsa.memberclicks.net/assets/NAPSA_Pretial_Standards_Revised_2024.pdf
17. Pilnik, L., Hankey, B., Simoni, E., Kennedy, S., Moore, L. J., & Sawyer, J. (2017). *A framework for pretrial justice: Essential elements of an effective pretrial system and agency* (NIC Accession No. 032831). National Institute of Corrections. <https://t.ly/jxQd6>