

**Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice  
Local Law 25 of 2018 Report  
March 4, 2019**

**I. Introduction and Reporting**

This report is submitted by the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice in accordance with Local Law 25 of 2018, which provides that we will use “best efforts” to “seek the accuracy of records regarding outstanding criminal warrants,” “facilitate the reduction of outstanding criminal warrants” and “seek access to efficient processes for members of the public to rectify inaccurate criminal warrants.” This first report will describe the background and efforts of that work.

As of the date of this report, February 1, 2019, there were 1,168,876 outstanding criminal warrants in the City of New York, as set forth below.

<b>Court</b>	<b>Outstanding Warrants</b>	<b>Percent of All Outstanding Warrants</b>
Summons	<b>752,118</b>	<b>64%</b>
Criminal	<b>374,422</b>	<b>32%</b>
Supreme	<b>42,336</b>	<b>4%</b>

**II. Background**

Individuals charged with crimes who miss court appearances may be issued criminal warrants for their failure to appear. These criminal warrants can subject individuals to arrest and unnecessary periods of incarceration. The Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) has been engaged in several efforts with our criminal justice partners (inside and outside of government) that have led to decreases in criminal warrants being issued, advising the public of these matters and rectifying inaccuracies in records.

In June 2017, the Criminal Justice Reform Act (CJRA), legislation passed by the City Council and signed by the Mayor, went into effect. CJRA gives law enforcement the option to issue civil summonses instead of criminal summonses for a group of common low-level offenses such as open container, public urination, and littering. These offenses previously accounted for approximately 50% of criminal summonses issued.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike a criminal summonses, civil summonses are similar to traffic tickets, and compliance is ensured through monetary penalties, not warrants and arrests. In addition, civil summonses carry no possible jail time and are adjudicated by the city’s administrative tribunal.

The City has also implemented efforts aimed at improving court appearance rates for people who are issued a criminal summons to avoid having a warrant issued for a failure to appear. A redesigned summons form makes court appearance dates, locations, and consequences of failing

1. MOCJ NYC. “Summons Reform: One Year After Legislation (CJRA)” 5 Sept. 2018, [https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/summons\\_ref\\_factsheet\\_v3.pdf](https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/summons_ref_factsheet_v3.pdf)

to appear clearer. A randomized controlled trial conducted between March 2016 and September 2017 revealed that the redesigned summons form reduced the failure to appear rate by 13%.<sup>2</sup>

That new summons form also included, for the first time, a field for cell phone numbers. The Office of Court Administration (OCA) was then able to use those numbers to provide text messages to people reminding them of their upcoming court appearance. The randomized controlled trial revealed that text message reminders reduced the failure to appear rate by 26%.

In August of 2017, the City worked with District Attorneys, OCA and other criminal justice partners to administratively clear more than 644,000 criminal summons warrants that were 10 years old or older.

### **III. 2018 Efforts**

Set forth below are highlights of the work undertaken in 2018 by MOCJ and our criminal justice partners to address outstanding criminal warrants ranging from warrant clearing events, publicizing resources and piloting a warrant clearing hotline. Here are the highlights of that work:

- District Attorney's Offices hosted various warrant clearing events that resulted in the clearing of over 8,000 New York City criminal warrants.
- In the one year since the CJRA went into effect (June 2017-June 2018), criminal summonses for CJRA-eligible offenses, and warrants that resulted from them, were down 89% and 94%, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Criminal summonses for CJRA offenses declined by 92% from CY 2017 to 2018. Overall, criminal summonses (including those for CJRA-eligible offenses) declined by 46% from 2017 to 2018 (165,093 to 89,865).
- MOCJ contracted with Reboot, a public interest research and design firm, to better understand the underlying barriers that residents face in clearing warrants. Based on the research conducted, Reboot recommended potential interventions geared towards easing the process of returning on a warrant. Building on Reboot's findings, MOCJ partnered with the Legal Aid Society and the Office of Court Administration to pilot a confidential warrant hotline in the Bronx. The hotline provided residents with a number to call, where they could speak to a live operator and determine whether they had an outstanding criminal warrant. For those individuals who did have a warrant, the operator gave instructions on how to clear it. The hotline operator also offered information on legal and community services that could make it easier to clear the warrant. The hotline was publicized through community-based organizations, social media, and local news outlets<sup>3</sup>. The pilot was concluded in late 2018.
- OCA continued to issue text messages (to those people who provided PD with a cell phone number) reminding them of their required upcoming court appearance. This effort

2. Cooke, Brice *et al.* "Using Behavioral Science to Improve Criminal Justice Outcomes" 31 January 2019 <http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Using-Behavioral-Science-to-Improve-Criminal-Justice-Outcomes.pdf>

3. MOCJ NYC. "Having a Warrant Can Disrupt Your Life. Make a Plan to Clear Your Warrant and Call the Secure #Bronx Warrant Hotline at 212-298-3160 Pic.twitter.com/BPZ9yfBnuf." *CrimJusticeNYC*, Twitter, 12 Oct. 2018, <https://twitter.com/CrimJusticeNYC/status/1050792843898511360>

was scaled city-wide in late 2017 and continued throughout 2018.

- The Office of Court Administration and the NYPD analytic and technical staff began meeting regularly to focus on warrant reconciliation. These joint efforts help to ensure the timely and accurate transmission and processing of criminal warrant data and to ensure alignment of open/vacated warrants between NYPD and OCA.

Over the course of the next year, we will continue to make best efforts and work with our criminal justice partners to seek the accuracy of records regarding outstanding criminal warrants, facilitate the reduction of outstanding criminal warrants, and seek access to efficient processes for members of the public to rectify inaccurate criminal warrants in furtherance of Local Law 25.

2. Cooke, Brice *et al.* "Using Behavioral Science to Improve Criminal Justice Outcomes" 31 January 2019 <http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Using-Behavioral-Science-to-Improve-Criminal-Justice-Outcomes.pdf>
3. MOCJ NYC. "Having a Warrant Can Disrupt Your Life. Make a Plan to Clear Your Warrant and Call the Secure #Bronx Warrant Hotline at 212-298-3160 Pic.twitter.com/BPZ9yfBnuf." *CrimJusticeNYC*, Twitter, 12 Oct. 2018, <https://twitter.com/CrimJusticeNYC/status/1050792843898511360>