



Survey of Pretrial Programs Series: Calculating Failure to Appear (FTA) Rates

PJI has recently released the fourth national survey of pretrial services programs. Previous surveys were conducted in 1979, 1989, and 2001.

Listed below are the findings relating to calculating failure to appear (FTA) rates.

Because one of the goals of a pretrial services program is to minimize instances of FTA in court, it is crucial that programs be able to keep track of the number of defendants who do fail to appear. However, 32 percent of pretrial programs in 2008 report that they do not calculate FTA rates. In comparison to the 2001 survey, 45 percent of the programs reported that they do not calculate FTA rates. Although this is an improvement, more work needs to be done to close this gap.

In addition, even those programs that do calculate FTA rates vary in the population for which they calculate those rates. By far, most programs that calculate FTA rates do so only for those defendants who are under the program's supervision, (88 percent). Another 14 percent calculate the rates only for those placed on any kind of nonfinancial release. Only 12 percent calculate the rates for all those interviewed by the pretrial program, regardless of the release type.

Programs differ in how they calculate FTA rates. Fifty-six percent use an appearance-based measure, in which the total number of missed court appearances is divided by the total number of scheduled court appearances. Forty-two percent use a defendant-based measure, in which the number of defendants who miss at least one court appearance is divided by the number of defendants with scheduled court appearances.

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