

RESEARCH REPORT

# Assisting Women throughout the Justice Continuum

An Innovation Fund Case Study from Cumberland County, Maine

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*March 2020*



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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Assisting Women throughout the Justice Continuum</b>	<b>1</b>
What Is Project Safe Release?	1
What Prompted Project Safe Release?	2
How Project Safe Release Was Implemented	5
Cross-Trainings and Knowledge Transfer	5
Pretrial Process Changes: Intake Screening and Ongoing Supervision	5
Accepting Women for the Pilot and Providing Services in Jail	7
Supervising Women on Pretrial Release	8
Introducing the New Risk Assessment	9
Data System Improvements	11
<b>Lessons Learned</b>	<b>13</b>
Early Outcomes and Indicators	14
Ongoing Challenges	15
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix: MOVERS Assessment</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>About the Authors</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Statement of Independence</b>	<b>21</b>

# Acknowledgments

This report was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at [urban.org/fundingprinciples](http://urban.org/fundingprinciples).

We thank Cumberland County, Maine, for its generosity and collaboration, not only in developing this case study but throughout our technical assistance partnership during the early design and adoption of Project Safe Release. We are grateful to everyone who has participated in interviews and calls. We want to extend our special thanks to Jen LaChance, Shawn LaGrega, and Jenny Stasio, who oversaw the initiation and implementation of Project Safe Release and who have been incredible partners to the Urban Institute throughout the project. We are also grateful for the support from Project Safe Release's directors and community partners, especially Rebecca Hobbs, Elizabeth Simoni, Faye Luppi, and Sheriff Kevin Joyce. Finally, we would like to thank Janeen Buck Willison, Malore Dusenbery, and Evelyn McCoy for reviewing and providing feedback on this case study.



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

This report was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce overincarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

[www.SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org](http://www.SafetyAndJusticeChallenge.org)

# Executive Summary

**Women are the fastest-growing population in America's correctional facilities. Researchers estimate that the number of incarcerated women has increased between 750 and 900 percent over the past four decades (The Sentencing Project 2019).<sup>1</sup> In response, many jails are working to better assess justice-involved women's risks and needs, improve their conditions of confinement and service delivery, and support community reentry.**

This case study belongs to a series highlighting work supported by the Safety and Justice Challenge's Innovation Fund. It describes Project Safe Release, a pilot implemented in Cumberland County, Maine, to better identify the needs of women entering the Cumberland County Jail, understand their victimization histories, and connect them to appropriate services before and after release. It also outlines Project Safe Release's inception, evolution, and implementation (including key policies and processes); examines early outcomes and implementation challenges; and shows how other localities can better coordinate services for women released on pretrial supervision.

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## BOX 1

### The Safety and Justice Challenge's Innovation Fund

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation launched the Safety and Justice Challenge in 2015 to address the misuse and overuse of jails, a main driver of incarceration in America. In 2016, the foundation established the Innovation Fund to provide jurisdictions small grants to test ideas for safely reducing the US jail population while maintaining or enhancing public safety. Innovation Fund jurisdictions received small grant awards, technical assistance from the Urban Institute, and access to the Challenge's peer learning network. The initial Innovation Fund cohort included 20 competitively selected jurisdictions in 2017, and in June 2018, Urban added 12 sites through a second competition, to expand the breadth and variety of initiatives.

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# Assisting Women throughout the Justice Continuum

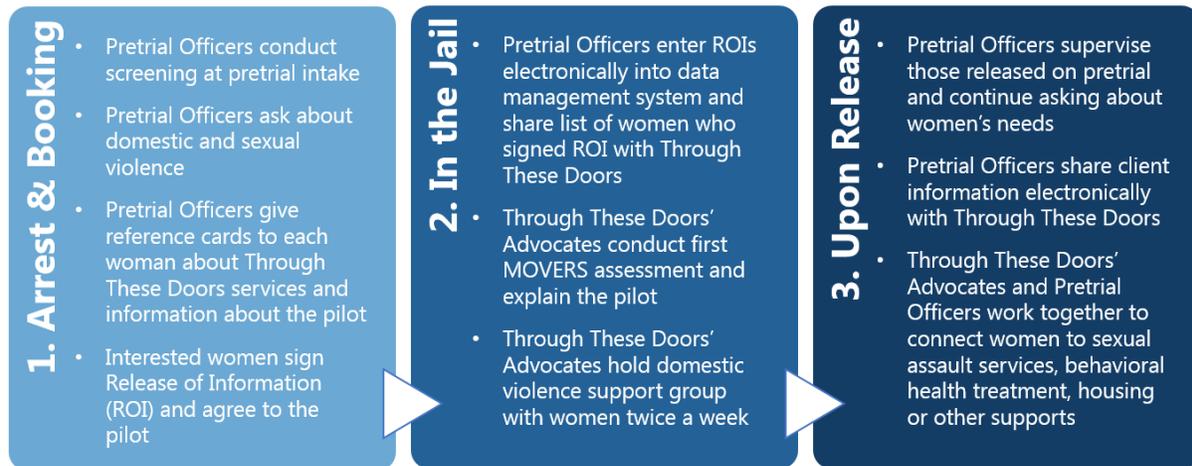
## What Is Project Safe Release?

In 2018, Cumberland County, Maine, piloted Project Safe Release to better identify women who need trauma services and to enhance service coordination for women who are incarcerated and those released on pretrial supervision. Two agencies are spearheading the pilot: [Through These Doors](#), a Portland-area domestic violence service provider, and [Maine Pretrial Services](#), a nonprofit that screens people incarcerated in Cumberland County for pretrial release, prepares court reports, and supervises people released from jail. Though these agencies have long partnered on domestic violence issues, they had never formally collaborated to address victimization and trauma among women incarcerated in Cumberland County Jail. To better coordinate their work, the agencies cross-trained staff on each other's operations, trained staff to better address women's unique needs, and enhanced the pretrial data-management system to track and exchange information.

Project Safe Release represents a unique opportunity to enhance services for women during and after incarceration. As figure 1 shows, the pilot established a process to better screen women who are incarcerated and ask them about victimization experiences more delicately; connect eligible women with [Through These Doors](#) faster on the inside; assess women's experiences using a new comprehensive domestic violence assessment (the Measure of Victim Empowerment Related to Safety, or "MOVERS"); and coordinate services for women who have served their sentences or are released on pretrial supervision. The agencies have quickly learned more about the needs and complex victimization histories of women in Cumberland County Jail and about each other's operations and challenges.

FIGURE 1

**Process Map for Project Safe Release**



Source: Urban's observations, interviews with Cumberland County stakeholders, and monthly technical assistance calls.

## What Prompted Project Safe Release?

Researchers and practitioners have recognized that many justice-involved women have complex histories of victimization and trauma. Yet most jails and justice agencies lack experience with or are not equipped to serve such women. Some 32 percent of justice-involved women suffer from serious mental illness, more than six times the rate of women overall (Swavola, Riley, and Subramanian 2016). Additionally, about 66 percent of justice-involved women have histories of mental health disorders, compared with 35 percent of justice-involved men (Bronson and Berzofsky 2017). Justice-involved women also suffer much higher rates of victimization: a recent study found that 68 percent of women in four urban and rural jails witnessed violence as children, and 67 percent experienced violence by an intimate partner, compared with 36 percent of all US women (Smith et al. 2018).<sup>2</sup>

Consistent with national trends, women incarcerated in Maine have been victimized at alarming rates. In 2003, researchers in Maine analyzed Through These Doors client records and interviewed 100 women who were incarcerated and receiving services from Through These Doors. They found that 93 had experienced violence before their involvement with the justice system (Kurzmann 2003).<sup>3</sup> Despite knowledge of high national and local victimization rates, justice agencies still struggle to properly screen women, assess their histories, and incorporate findings into case management plans. To address this gap in service provision, Through These Doors and Maine Pretrial Services solicited input from local justice agencies and service providers to conceptualize and implement Project Safe Release.

Support from local justice and government agencies and other community-based organizations made Project Safe Release possible. This support was easy for Cumberland County to garner because these stakeholders were already collaborating on other issues. For example, like many localities, Cumberland County created resources to help its community during the opioid crisis, including two Portland-based programs to help people with behavioral health issues. The county's [Project Reentry](#)—a Second Chance Act program funded by the Office of Justice Programs—addresses recidivism among people with behavioral health disorders, and the [Law Enforcement Addiction Advocacy Program](#) uses a harm-reduction model to divert people from the justice system before arrest by sending trained advocates (with law enforcement) to respond to people in crisis. Justice and nonjustice agencies in Cumberland County are accustomed to collaborating through this community infrastructure, which made creating a new program easier. Furthermore, these agencies' experience addressing substance use disorders has helped Project Safe Release serve women with unaddressed substance use needs.

Cumberland County agencies and organizations had also been collaboratively serving women who had experienced domestic violence, providing additional groundwork for Project Safe Release. In 1997, Through These Doors and Maine Pretrial Services founded the [Violence Intervention Partnership](#) with support from the district attorney's office, the sheriff's office, the probation department, law enforcement, and the Immigrant Resource Center of Maine.<sup>4</sup> The partnership still supports a domestic violence case manager within Maine Pretrial Services who serves clients incarcerated on domestic violence charges. This case manager also connects with Through These Doors to ensure victims remain safe and that their needs are met.<sup>5</sup> This direct collaboration helped Maine Pretrial Services and Through These Doors build their relationship and reach a common understanding of the needs of people experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault.

Furthermore, Maine Pretrial Services, Through These Doors, the district attorney's office, law enforcement, and the Cumberland County Jail meet monthly to discuss people who are incarcerated and who have complex needs that make them the most likely to cycle through the justice system. These meetings are intended to help agencies share information and to determine how to keep victims safe when releasing people into the community.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in 2009, Cumberland County began the [Enhanced Police Intervention Collaboration](#), which places Through These Doors staff as domestic violence advocates within police departments to train law enforcement to work with victims of domestic violence and to directly connect people in crisis with victims' advocates. This program has given Maine Pretrial Services' case managers the option to electronically monitor people with domestic violence charges in the community, and has helped them better understand domestic violence cases.<sup>7</sup>

These initiatives also helped Through These Doors and Maine Pretrial Services address gaps in service provision for the county's most vulnerable women.

Maine Pretrial Services and Through These Doors also have long histories working inside the Cumberland County Jail, and their staffs understand the jail's culture and operations. Maine Pretrial Services regularly meets with and screens clients eligible for pretrial release and prepares status reports for the court, and Through These Doors regularly hosts domestic violence support groups for women in the jail who are seeking assistance. Thus, although the agencies had not previously partnered to serve women in the jail, they each had experience that informed their approach to Project Safe Release.

Strong relationships among law enforcement, the pretrial agency, service providers, and victims' advocates, and their experience addressing issues like domestic violence, made Project Safe Release a logical next step. Fully aware of gaps in services for women, Cumberland County partners conceptualized Project Safe Release, and the Safety and Justice Challenge selected it as an Innovation Fund site in 2018.

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## BOX 2

### Case Study Methods

Urban Institute researchers conducted eight in-person and telephone interviews with 15 people who partnered to launch Project Safe Release. These included pretrial staff, domestic violence case managers, jail reentry staff, Violence Intervention Partnership representatives, law enforcement, and prosecutors. During semistructured interviews, researchers asked about why Cumberland County developed Project Safe Release; how the data management system for tracking pilot cases was developed; how the MOVERS assessment was chosen, adopted, and applied; how case management policies were instituted; and the pilot's benefits and challenges. Researchers analyzed interview transcripts for common themes and recommendations and observed the jail's intake process, a Through These Doors domestic violence support group in the jail, and one pretrial supervision meeting with a pilot participant. These activities allowed researchers to identify themes and understand the pilot's operations, strengths, and challenges.

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# How Project Safe Release Was Implemented

Project Safe Release was largely intended to change Maine Pretrial Services' and Through These Doors' policies for interacting with justice-involved women and coordinating referrals to community services. Both agencies have done so and are collaborating more formally and systematically with area service providers.

## Cross-Trainings and Knowledge Transfer

Before launching the pilot, Maine Pretrial Services and Through These Doors cross-trained staff on each other's operations and on how to best serve women who are incarcerated. Through These Doors trained Maine Pretrial Services staff on the complexity and unpredictability of domestic violence, highlighting common challenges of working with affected women. The training emphasized that some women who have experienced domestic violence may not identify themselves as victims, and that it often takes time to build rapport and for women to open up and seek help. Meanwhile, Maine Pretrial Services trained Through These Doors staff on its operations, how to conduct intake and prepare court reports, and the complexity of pretrial release and supervision.

## Pretrial Process Changes: Intake Screening and Ongoing Supervision

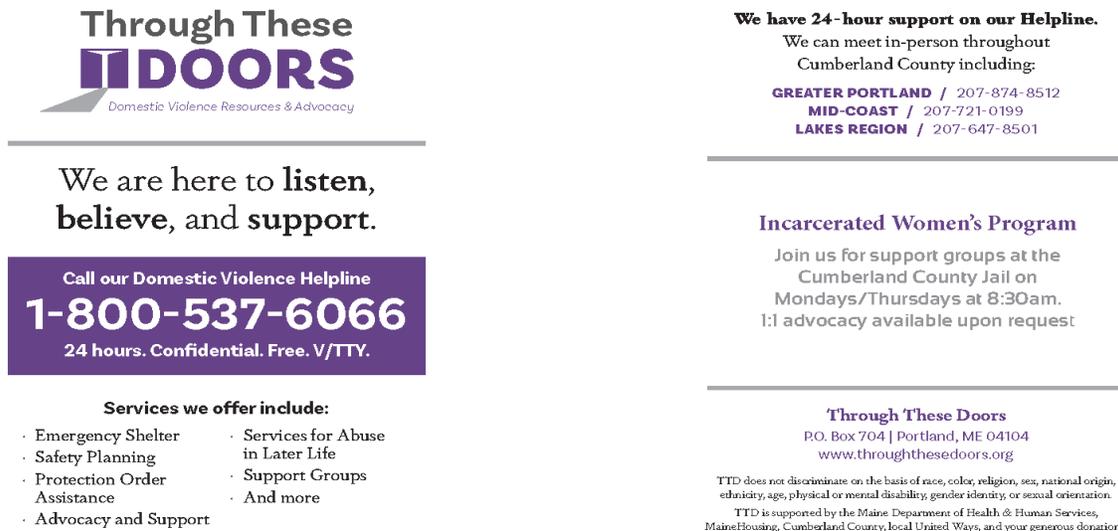
To identify women's needs earlier, Maine Pretrial Services changed its pretrial intake screening process, which it administers within three days of booking someone in jail. Before Project Safe Release, its staff conducted intake the same way for justice-involved women and men and only sent clients to service providers (such as Through These Doors) if they showed obvious signs of crisis or explicitly requested services. When a woman reported sexual assault or domestic violence, Maine Pretrial Services' policy was to recommend that they speak with their lawyer rather than relay specifics of their case to the pretrial officer; only occasionally would they connect them with Through These Doors.

For the pilot, Maine Pretrial Services revised its policy and protocol for asking clients about domestic violence (and other forms of victimization) during pretrial intake screening by adding four items to its intake form (figure 2). Pretrial workers use the form as a guide for asking questions, and they record answers on a paper version before logging them in the electronic data management system. Through These Doors trained Maine Pretrial Services staff to ask about domestic and sexual violence, personalize screening, and know what questions are suitable for a client. Urban found through interviews and observations of intake that pretrial workers use judgment to decide whether a client is



FIGURE 3

### Referral Cards Given to Women upon Booking



**Source:** Through These Doors provided these referral card images to Urban staff.

**Notes:** Figure shows front (left) and back (right) of referral cards.

Finally, Maine Pretrial Services revised intake by asking women who answer “yes” to the questions in figure 2 whether they are interested in Project Safe Release. Interested clients then sign the release of information (ROI), and pretrial workers key ROIs into the new section of the pretrial data management system. Electronic ROIs are shared with Through These Doors staff, who conduct additional assessments and offer women various domestic violence and sexual assault supports.

### Accepting Women for the Pilot and Providing Services in Jail

Among other changes to its internal processes, Through These Doors’ victim advocates started regularly reviewing relevant sections of Maine Pretrial Services’ data management system to identify women who signed ROIs and introduce them to Project Safe Release during one-on-one meetings at the jail. Advocates typically use these meetings to further inform clients about the pilot, Through These Doors, and other services and supports. Through These Doors staff also initiate case planning for each client by conducting the MOVERS assessment.

Through These Doors offers women in the jail a violence support group held twice a week. Although it held regular domestic violence support groups during the 15 years before Project Safe Release, it lacked a direct connection to women who did not attend them or who were released quickly. Moreover,

because it had no connection with Maine Pretrial Services (which was collecting additional information on women in the jail), Through These Doors often knew very little about women's justice system involvement when it connected with them in jail. Project Safe Release helped Through These Doors connect with more women and learn more about their victimization and criminal histories.

## **Supervising Women on Pretrial Release**

Gathering better information up front and maintaining contact with Through These Doors helped pretrial workers better supervise women on pretrial release. Workers are more aware of their clients' challenges, and if women are not ready to disclose information during intake or early in their relationship with Through These Doors, workers try to learn about their histories and needs during ongoing supervision visits. The pilot has shown that giving women time and attempting to develop relationships help pretrial workers connect with their clients.

Since the pilot launched, Through These Doors' victim advocates and Maine Pretrial Services' pretrial workers have regularly communicated, electronically exchanged valuable data about justice-involved women, and troubleshooted specific cases together. This process has formalized coordination between the two agencies, freed clients from having to directly connect with the agencies themselves, and made pretrial workers more comfortable calling Through These Doors advocates and asking them to talk to clients immediately. Exchanging information is particularly important for agencies working with victims of domestic violence (and other kinds of victimization) because clients may not recognize that they need support or feel comfortable repeatedly recalling traumatic experiences.

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### **BOX 3**

#### **One Woman's Story in Project Safe Release**

One pregnant woman admitted to the Cumberland County Jail for probation revocation was identified as high risk for reoffending based on her criminal history and was thus ineligible for community confinement. She was most likely going to give birth in jail, whereupon child welfare services would take the child for care. Because of ongoing concerns about domestic violence from her partner, Through These Doors and Maine Pretrial Services staff secured the woman's release with electronic monitoring and housing at Through These Doors' shelter, where she gave birth and remained with the child throughout her sentence. Interagency coordination and a concrete supervision and housing plan helped the court make a more lenient decision for a vulnerable defendant with a significant criminal history.

## Introducing the New Risk Assessment

In addition to revising the initial intake screening, Through These Doors and Maine Pretrial Services considered changing follow-up assessments to gather more comprehensive information about women's risks and needs and connect them to more appropriate services upon release. Because justice-involved women face many challenges (including high victimization rates), the agencies wanted a tool that would capture rich information. They also prioritized tools that would help advocates prompt conversations about issues such as employment instability, mental health and substance use disorders, and the challenges of being a woman in jail, which include needs related to menstrual cycles, being separated from children, and exposure to violence and male-dominated cultures.

The agencies also wanted a tool that could capture women's strengths, not just their challenges and concerns. Too often, victims of domestic violence are reminded of things they *cannot* do, rather than what they can do to become more independent. Through These Doors wanted the tool to measure women's sense of empowerment and community connection and help them understand their innate resilience and power. Moreover, it was important that staff be able to complete the tool conversationally and that women be able to complete it independently. During their search, the agencies rejected other domestic violence tools (e.g., the Danger Assessment) that focus on specific circumstances, such as fatalities or near-fatalities, or that do not emphasize women's strengths.

The agencies decided the MOVERS assessment, which emphasizes empowerment and community connection, was the most suitable tool. MOVERS was originally created by a collaboration between researchers, survivors of crime, and advocates through the Domestic Violence Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative (DVPERC) (Goodman, Thomas, and Heimerl 2015). MOVERS includes 13 questions about survivors' victimization experiences within the past two weeks (appendix). Its developers recommend that it be administered at three points: soon after initial contact, after 6 months, and after 12 months. They also recommend that practitioners use the tool to help staff provide services to survivors or to evaluate a program's success. Through These Doors leadership valued both applications because they hoped to use it for case management and to create a baseline for measuring the pilot's success.

To operationalize MOVERS, Through These Doors and Maine Pretrial Services received consultation from the developers about applying the tool and interpreting scores. The developers also advised Through These Doors staff about administering the initial assessment and developing a policy for conducting 6- and 12-month follow-up assessments (whichever agency was in regular contact with a client after 6 months would conduct the assessment). In practice, the tool is administered twice, once in

jail and once before a woman’s court appearance while they are on supervision. Through These Doors advocates provide ongoing consultation to Maine Pretrial Services workers about the tool.

As of this writing, MOVERS had been used for Project Safe Release for approximately five months. Of the 34 who signed an ROI, 9 women (26 percent) received the initial assessment. This suggests Through These Doors staff need to be able to access ROIs faster to engage more clients. Administering six-month follow-up assessments was a challenge: the agencies only expected to administer three follow-up assessments at the earliest six-month mark. This owes to women who bailed out of jail on monetary or nonmonetary conditions or who did not engage with Maine Pretrial Services or Through These Doors long enough to receive a follow-up assessment. Inability to follow up makes it difficult for staff to track and understand whether women do better or worse after participating in the pilot. However, Maine Pretrial Services and Through These Doors learned valuable lessons about using the MOVERS assessment tool. Its advantages include the following:

- The tool is easy for staff to use. The questions are clear, and prompts help advocates during conversations with women.
- MOVERS has built-in flexibility. It allows staff to have an authentic conversation, but women can answer its questions privately if they prefer. During the pilot, most women chose to complete the tool with staff.
- The tool is validated to be applied in practice or evaluation. According to its developers, it can be used in casework with domestic violence survivors and by program staff or researchers evaluating a program’s success.
- It has the right combination of questions about risks, safety, and strengths. It helps women think about their safety and resiliency and reflect on compromises they have to make to stay safe.
- There is a Spanish version of the tool. Through These Doors uses this version for some of its pilot clients, which they find helpful.

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*Women generally like MOVERS assessment. One question is particularly illuminating and helps women think how much they have to give up in order to stay safe. As women answer that question, they reflect on how if they have to give up too much, then they may choose to go back or stay in an abusive relationship. Those are important considerations not only for women but for staff who work with them.*

*—Through These Doors advocate*

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The two agencies also encountered the following challenges using the MOVERS tool:

- Administering the initial assessment at the jail remains a challenge for Through These Doors. Because only 26 percent of women who signed ROIs received the assessment, it is difficult for staff to comprehensively understand women's needs and connect them with appropriate services in jail and upon release.
- The tool's designed 6- and 12-month follow-up assessments are also incompatible with the pilot's time frames and target population. Women involved in the pilot enter and leave jail at different phases, and many leave the jail soon after being booked without reconnecting with Maine Pretrial Services or Through These Doors, making it difficult to conduct 6-month follow-ups. This also makes it difficult to understand whether pilot activities and services benefit women in the long term.
- As of this writing, only one Through These Doors staff member had been trained to use MOVERS and received consultation from its developers. This person conducted all initial assessments and assessed everyone who signed the ROI and was willing to participate in the pilot. If more clients participate, one trained staff member might be insufficient. Through These Doors has plans for this person to train other staff if demand increases.

## Data System Improvements

Maine Pretrial Services worked with Through These Doors to change its pretrial data management system to capture women's victimization histories and better track new protocols and policies established through Project Safe Release. The system was revised to collect information relevant to the supervision and release of justice-involved women, including information on cases and needs, services Through These Doors provided to them in jail and after release, and the date and results of the administered MOVERS assessment (table 1 offers a full list of data elements tracked). The revisions have helped both agencies better track cases and report on certain outputs to pilot stakeholders.

TABLE 1

Revised Data Elements in Maine Pretrial MIS System for Project Safe Release

Recorded questions and answers	
<b>Data category</b>	
General information	Participant name and identification; date of birth; date screened; self-identified as victim/survivor; location; pocket card received; release of information provided; released to Maine Pretrial Services; Maine Pretrial Risk Assessment Instrument score; substance abuse indicated; <sup>a</sup> mental health disorder indicated; <sup>a</sup> trauma indicated; <sup>a</sup> give resource guide
Discharge status	Discharge date
MOVERS assessment	Assessment date
Through These Doors services provided (yes/no response)	Child advocacy; civil justice advocacy: family law; protection from abuse/protection from harm; consultation with case manager; consultation with mental health providers; child protective services facilitated family meeting; criminal justice advocacy; emotional support; housing advocacy; immigration assistance; information about criminal justice process; information about victims' rights; one-to-one advocacy; referrals/linkages; safety planning; sex trafficking advocacy; residential services; outreach advocacy; support groups
Through These Doors community services provided (yes/no response)	Child advocacy; civil justice advocacy: family law; protection from abuse/protection from harm; consultation with case manager; consultation with mental health providers; child protective services facilitated family meeting; criminal justice advocacy; emotional support; housing advocacy; immigration assistance; information about criminal justice process; information about victims' rights; one-to-one advocacy; referrals/linkages; safety planning; sex trafficking advocacy; residential services; outreach advocacy; support groups
Violation information	Violation date; discharge status; discharge date; formal revocation
Violation reason	New criminal conduct; failure to appear; not reporting; contact with domestic violence victim; positive urine analysis; technical/other; technical/other description
MOVERS assessment	Uploaded assessment with answers to 13 questions

Source: Maine Pretrial Services shared screenshots from their MIS system with Urban in August 2019.

<sup>a</sup> Because of HIPAA regulations, assessment items cannot be shared with Through These Doors if the client did not sign a release statement.

To exchange information efficiently, Maine Pretrial Services made all data elements available to Through These Doors, except questions about substance use, mental health, and trauma (table 1). Through These Doors staff are inputting information about clients' MOVERS assessments and services clients receive in custody and in the community. User permissions were created to give Through These Doors access to the data elements shown in table 1; the court requires Maine Pretrial Services workers to track other information, which they use to track clients' success (this information is unavailable to Through These Doors). Changes to how pretrial and victim service providers exchange information electronically can be difficult for jurisdictions to implement, and agencies are sometimes reluctant to exchange information because of legal restrictions or apprehension from local stakeholders. However, Project Safe Release shows such changes are possible when agencies trust each other and leaders are willing to exchange data to improve service coordination.

# Lessons Learned

Project Safe Release changed the way Cumberland County supports women who are on pretrial release or are incarcerated while waiting for their cases to be resolved. Maine Pretrial Services and Through These Doors had to change how they managed cases and exchanged information because asking women about victimization-related needs during pretrial release is sensitive and complex. Between December 1, 2018, and October 31, 2019, pretrial workers screened 130 women at the jail; 59 voluntarily accepted written service information about Through These Doors, and 34 signed ROIs to participate in Project Safe Release and receive services inside and outside the jail. Forty-six women screened were placed on pretrial supervision. Regarding prior experience, 74 women self-identified as survivors of domestic or sexual violence, 55 indicated substance use disorders, 58 indicated mental health issues, and 70 indicated past trauma. Project Safe Release helped provide services such as shelter, safety planning, assistance with protection orders, and other supports with 36 women identified in the jail and 17 identified in the community. Cumberland County’s early successes and ongoing challenges could inform other jurisdictions considering improving connections for women experiencing victimization, trauma, and other unaddressed needs.

**TABLE 2**  
**Screened Women’s Service Uptake and Prior Experiences**

	Women Screened	
	#	%
<b>Service uptake</b>		
Accepted TTD referral card	59	45
Signed release of information for services	34	26
Placed on pretrial supervision	46	35
<b>Prior experiences</b>		
Survivor of domestic or sexual violence	74	57
Substance use	55	42
Mental health	58	45
Trauma	70	54

**Notes:** Table shows the proportion of women screened by pretrial services who received particular services or possessed particular social histories. Project Safe Release has screened 130 women.

## Early Outcomes and Indicators

***Pretrial staff have a more nuanced understanding of women's victimization experiences.*** Maine Pretrial Services workers report that they better understand the needs of justice-involved women with histories of domestic violence and sexual assault. The revised questionnaire and training have helped workers slow down and humanize clients. Workers also attempt to tailor interactions to clients' needs during intake or supervision meetings. They also engage with clients more intentionally by maintaining eye contact and treating answers as more than mere responses to the screening questionnaire.

***Agencies have assumed the burden of connecting clients with services.*** Building relationships between the two agencies and enhancing their capacity for exchanging information electronically have spared clients from having to retell their stories, which can be retraumatizing. Moreover, offering women multiple opportunities to hear about available supports increases the chances they will engage with services and receive needed help.

***Barriers to pretrial release have been reduced.*** Project Safe Release positively impacted Cumberland County's approach to women's pretrial release, which extends to court officials and attorneys. Providing services for women and strengthening working relationships between pretrial and support services have made judges and attorneys more willing to agree to pretrial release. This has increased buy-in and support for the program throughout the county's court system.

***Calls to the Through These Doors hotline have increased.*** Through These Doors staff report that more people are calling their hotline for help after receiving referral cards in jail. This is one part of Project Safe Release's effort to make it easier for women to connect with pretrial services and support agencies.

***Service coordination and case management have improved.*** According to interviews, Through These Doors staff encouraged Maine Pretrial Services workers to refer women to service providers other than Through These Doors. In some cases, workers personally walked women in crisis to Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine.

***Lead agencies are exchanging electronic data more effectively.*** Enhancing Maine Pretrial Services' data management system and making Project Safe Release sections accessible to Through These Doors expedited information exchanges and made staff connecting with women more informed. Cumberland County's experience shows that willing leaders and cultures that encourage data sharing can help jurisdictions struggling to exchange sensitive data.

## Ongoing Challenges

**Screening and (re)assessing needs and risks in a timely manner is difficult.** Although Maine Pretrial Services can now ask about women’s histories of domestic violence and sexual assault more consistently, staff still face time constraints finishing the intake form, entering results in the data management system, and sharing information with Through These Doors. This delays Through These Door advocates who schedule initial meetings with potential clients. This delay may explain why only 34 of the 130 screened women signed ROIs, and why only 9 of those 34 received the initial MOVERS assessment. Staff reported that many women may either bail out or be released on other conditions before Through These Doors can reach them.

**Staff continue to struggle to gather comprehensive information on women’s needs without making them retell the same story to different agencies.** Though the pilot has helped the agencies coordinate information collection, room for improvement remains. For example, correctional staff could gather information from women in their custody (although the jail’s intake process is not optimal for this). Moreover, although women in Cumberland County Jail can indicate providers they want to speak with (including Through These Doors and the jail reentry coordinator) through a request slip, there is no electronic system for tracking these requests or a protocol for correctional staff to address them.

**Some women are apprehensive about participating in the pilot.** Project Safe Release is still new, and work remains to ease apprehensions about participating. According to interviews, some women remain guarded and unwilling to disclose personal information at intake. Only one-quarter of women who completed intake with Maine Pretrial Services workers signed ROIs and agreed to participate in the pilot. Awareness about the pilot and its services needs to be raised. Participating women may also start spreading the word about available services to their peers. Finally, Maine Pretrial Services workers are still learning to consistently inform all women about the pilot at intake.

**Gaps in jail service provision and gender responsivity remain.** Like many US jails, Cumberland County Jail is trying to be more aware of and oriented toward women’s unique needs. Interviewees specifically mentioned training for correctional officers—particularly training on trauma-informed care and practices—as a key need. The jail also generally lacks gender-responsive programming and operations, and its social workers are burdened because they focus on crisis care.

**Staff struggle to link women to supportive community services.** Interviewees indicated that pilot staff are still experiencing challenges connecting with women and having enough time to establish relationships that would help them make better connections and referrals to community services. Many women cycle in and out of jail or have their pretrial supervision status changed quickly. These challenges make it difficult for Maine Pretrial Services and Through These Doors to help their clients remain engaged in the pilot.

# Conclusion

Being admitted to jail can be daunting for anyone, and women face additional difficulties that complicate their experiences. For example, many women in jail still report being unable to meet basic needs (such as caring for menstrual cycles), and many face bigger issues like separation from children, histories of personal trauma, or fear of exposure to additional abuse in jail. Though many correctional facilities are addressing these issues, many still have cultures that disregard women's needs and traumas or simply cannot make needed changes quickly enough.

Fully aware that women in Cumberland County Jail were facing these challenges, Maine Pretrial Services and Through These Doors developed a more nuanced approach to serving women who enter and exit jail. To lay the foundation for the pilot's success, pretrial workers and Through These Doors advocates were trained on when and how to ask sensitive questions, learned about each agency's operations, and were taught to enter new information into a revised electronic database. After the pilot launched, pretrial workers focused on better screening women for domestic violence and sexual assault, improving their conversations with women released on pretrial supervision, and communicating with Through These Doors advocates about clients' progress. Moreover, Through These Doors advocates are more aware of pretrial processes and court requirements, are offering consulting to pretrial workers about domestic violence, and are attempting to connect women to community services and supports based on risks and needs identified through the new assessment tool.

Project Safe Release's early successes depended on the lead agencies' ability to coordinate and to enhance their operations. Its first year was also successful because of existing collaborations among the court, jail, county government, and community services providers. Of the lessons those who initiated Project Safe Release learned, one is of chief importance: any pilot addressing complex trauma and victimization histories cannot be designed or promoted within a single agency.

# Appendix. MOVERS Assessment

FIGURE A. 1  
MOVERS Assessment

## YOUR SAFETY

You may be facing a variety of different challenges to safety. When we use the word safety in the next set of questions, we mean safety from physical or emotional abuse by another person. Please circle the number that best describes how you think about your and your family's safety right now. When you are responding to these questions, it is fine to think about your family's safety along with your own if that is what you usually do.

	Never true	Sometimes true	Half the time true	Mostly true	Always true
	0	1	2	3	4
1. I can cope with whatever challenges come at me as I work to keep safe.	0	1	2	3	4
2. I have to give up too much to keep safe.	0	1	2	3	4
3. I know what to do in response to threats to my safety.	0	1	2	3	4
4. I have a good idea about what kinds of support for safety that I can get from people in my community (friends, family, neighbors, people in my faith community, etc.).	0	1	2	3	4
5. I know what my next steps are on the path to keeping safe.	0	1	2	3	4
6. Working to keep safe creates (or will create) new problems for me.	0	1	2	3	4
7. When something doesn't work to keep safe, I can try something else.	0	1	2	3	4
8. I feel comfortable asking for help to keep safe.	0	1	2	3	4
9. When I think about keeping safe, I have a clear sense of my goals for the next few years.	0	1	2	3	4
10. Working to keep safe creates (or will create) new problems for people I care about.	0	1	2	3	4
11. I feel confident in the decisions I make to keep safe.	0	1	2	3	4
12. I have a good idea about what kinds of support for safety I can get from community programs and services.	0	1	2	3	4
13. Community programs and services provide support I need to keep safe.	0	1	2	3	4

Source: Goodman, Thomas, and Heimerl (2015).

# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Estimates vary and depend on studies' methodologies; Gina Fedock, "Number of Women in Jails and Prisons Soars," *School of Social Service Administration Magazine*, The University of Chicago, Spring 2018, [https://ssa.uchicago.edu/ssa\\_magazine/number-women-jails-and-prisons-soars](https://ssa.uchicago.edu/ssa_magazine/number-women-jails-and-prisons-soars).
- <sup>2</sup> Shannon Lynch, "Hit, Hurt, and Distressed: How Violence and Trauma Put Women at Risk of Incarceration," *Psychology Benefits Society* (blog), July 24, 2018, <https://psychologybenefits.org/2018/07/24/hit-hurt-and-distressed-how-violence-and-trauma-put-women-at-risk-of-incarceration/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Through These Doors had a different name "Family Crisis Services" in 2003 as a domestic violence service provider. The name changed in 2017.
- <sup>4</sup> Phone call with Cumberland County criminal justice stakeholders, March 7, 2019. This call included representatives from the Violence Intervention Partnership, Through These Doors, Enhances Police Intervention Collaboration, Maine Pretrial Services, Cumberland County problem-solving courts, Co-Occurring Collaborative Serving Maine, Project Reentry, Law Enforcement Addiction Advocacy Program, Portland Police Department, and the Cumberland County Jail. The Urban Institute asked each representative questions to better understand Cumberland County's broader criminal justice system. This call was not conducted in explicit conjunction with this case study; however, the Urban team used insights from the call to inform data collection and writing.
- <sup>5</sup> Phone call with Cumberland County criminal justice stakeholders, March 7, 2019.
- <sup>6</sup> Phone call with Cumberland County criminal justice stakeholders, March 7, 2019.
- <sup>7</sup> Phone call with Cumberland County criminal justice stakeholders, March 7, 2019.

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