

Research Recap: Increasing data quality and transparency in the Shelby County criminal justice system

June 2025

On February 28, 2024, Lieutenant Governor Randy McNally sent a letter requesting that the Comptroller of the Treasury and the Administrative Office of the Courts investigate the criminal justice system in Shelby County. In his letter, the Lieutenant Governor expressed concerns about:

1

The length of time it takes to dispose of cases

2

The number of career criminals committing additional crimes while awaiting case disposition

3

The apparent discrepancy between the charges at arrest and the charges for which defendants are prosecuted

4

The final disposition of cases not meting out proportional judgment, resulting in an overall lack of deterrent to crime



To study these concerns, OREA collected data from the AOC, the Shelby County General Sessions Court Clerk, and the Shelby County Criminal Court Clerk. When possible, OREA compared these charges to felony charges filed in the 10 other most populated counties in Tennessee over the same time period.

OREA interviewed over 70 individuals and spent over 100 hours observing court proceedings in the Shelby County Criminal Justice Center.

The special report includes additional recommendations for enhancing the transparency, accessibility, and usability of data on the operations and outcomes of the system. See the **full report** for more, including 18 recommended metrics for the system that would increase accountability and transparency.

An **executive summary** of the full report is also available.



A UNIQUE IDENTIFIER IS NEEDED TO TRACK CRIMINAL CASES

A major barrier to answering questions about the Shelby County criminal justice system, such as how long it takes to dispose of cases, is the lack of a unique identifier for tracking criminal cases. Currently, when a case leaves General Sessions Court and is transferred to Criminal Court, a new case number is entered in Criminal Court.

The Comptroller's March 2025 special report recommends the system create a unique identifier for tracking criminal cases as they progress through both courts.

To read the full report, visit the Comptroller's OREA website at tncot.cc/criminaljustice.