

ORLEANS PARISH MARCH-MAY COVID-19 ARREST AND INMATE POPULATION TRENDS

Metropolitan Crime Commission

June 4, 2020



Orleans Parish Arrest and Inmate Population Trends

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This series of reports documents changes in arrests made by the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) and inmates in custody of the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office (OPSO) during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent city/statewide shutdowns. Comparing arrest practices before and during the pandemic response provides confirmation of the relationship between felony arrests and the pretrial inmate population.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The New Orleans criminal justice system has seen transitions in arrests and inmate population as direct outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown.

Arrests and inmate populations plummeted in the early weeks after stay-at-home orders were issued. In mid-April, the number of arrests began to gradually increase, and, as a result, the inmate population is also rising. However, both arrests and inmate population numbers remain lower than they were prior to the start of the shutdown.

The trends presented in this report indicate police adopted a post-pandemic strategy of heightened enforcement of violent crime, which is a driving force behind the changes in inmate population. This pattern is evidenced by increases in domestic violence arrests and a greater number of violent felony offenders in custody.

The gradual increase in arrests and inmate population signal a return to more normal operations as COVID-19 pandemic shutdown restrictions are slowly lifting and citizens are beginning to resume activities outside of their homes.

Key Points:

Violent Felony Arrests Driving Changes in Inmate Population

ARRESTS

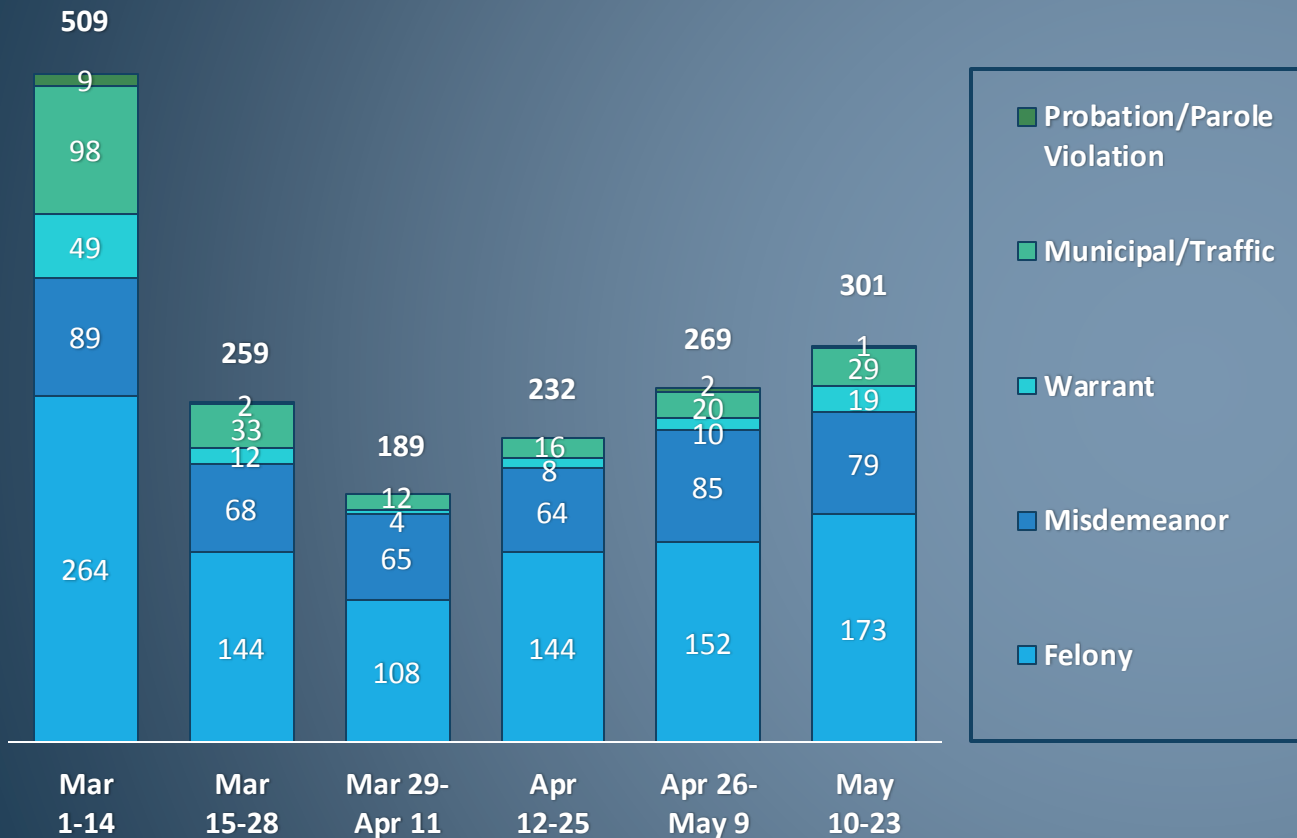
- Arrests by the NOPD have steadily increased over the past 6 weeks (**see Exhibit 1**)
- Violent felony arrests returned to pre-pandemic levels as of May 23 (**see Exhibit 2**)
- Drug felony arrests remain substantially (77%) lower than pre-pandemic levels (**see Exhibit 2**)
- Felony domestic battery arrests increased during the pandemic shutdown (**see Exhibit 3**)
- Misdemeanor arrests-nearly all of which are related to domestic violence- returned to near pre-pandemic levels over the past 4 weeks (**see Exhibit 4**)

INMATE POPULATION

- The OPSO inmate population initially declined when the pandemic shutdown began which was followed by an increase in inmates as police made more arrests (**see Exhibit 5**)
- The population remains 22% lower than it was prior to the start of the pandemic (**see Exhibit 5**)
- Felony pretrial inmates in custody account for a growing segment of the inmate population during the pandemic shutdown (**see Exhibit 6**)
- Inmates with pending violent felony charges make up a 56% majority of inmates (**see Exhibit 6**)

Biweekly Orleans Parish Arrests from March 1st – May 23rd, 2020

Exhibit 1. Biweekly Orleans Parish Arrests by Most Serious Charge



City/statewide shutdown orders issued

(May 16) Phase One reopening began; stay-at-home order lifted

Arrests fell sharply at the start of the pandemic shutdown (March 15-April 11) and then consistently increased over the next six weeks

Arrests declined 63% from 509 in the 2 weeks prior to official shutdown orders to their lowest point of 189 March 29-April 11

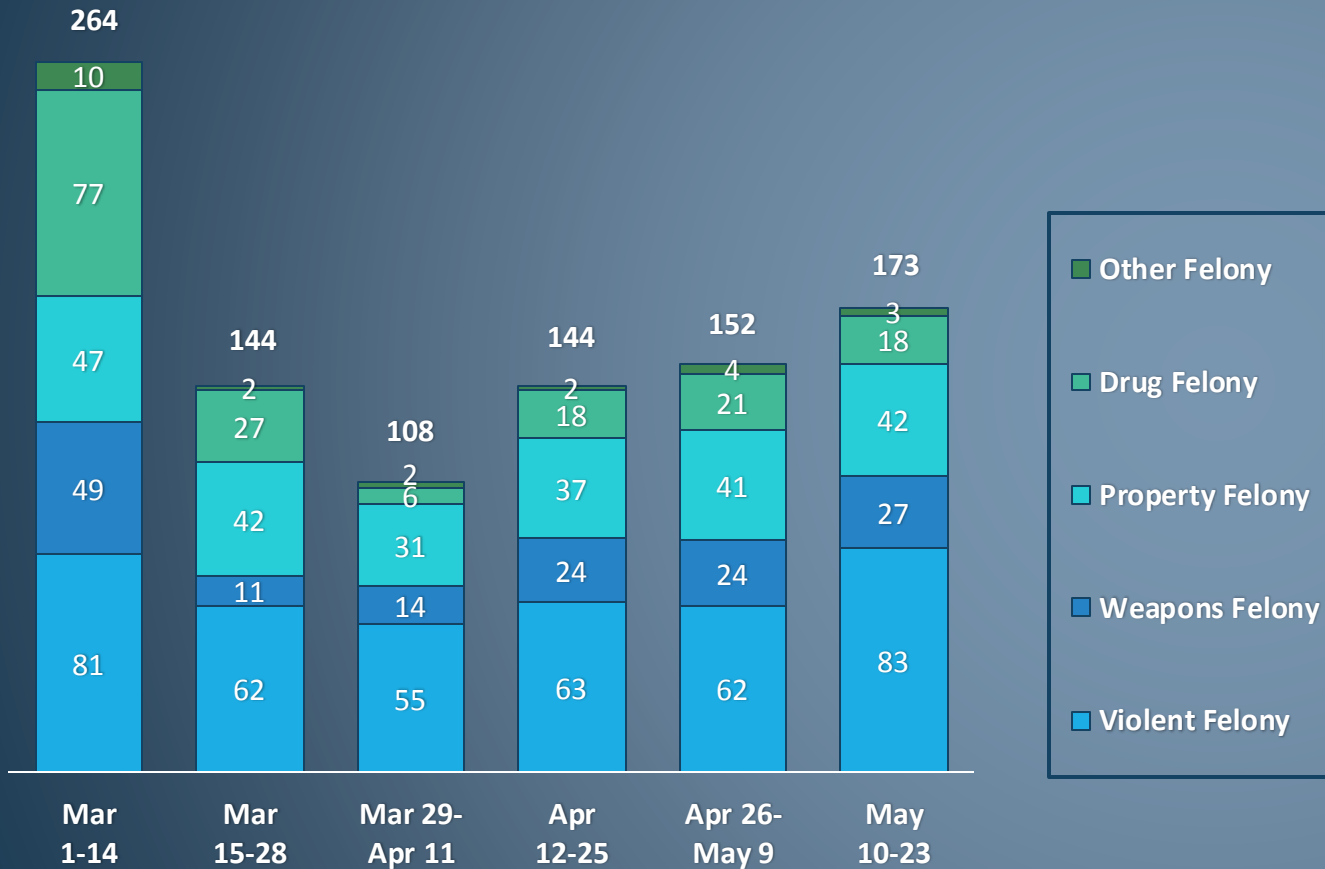
- Warrant and municipal/traffic offense arrests showed the steepest declines, dropping 92% and 88%, respectively
- Probation/parole violation arrests dropped to zero
- Misdemeanor arrests had the smallest decline, dropping 27%

From the low point of 189 arrests in the wake of the shutdown, there was a steady increase to 301 arrests as of May 10-23

- The biggest increases were in felony and misdemeanor arrests
- Warrant and municipal/traffic arrests remained well below pre-shutdown levels
- There continued to be very few arrests for probation/parole violations
 - From March 29-May 23, there were only 3 arrests with probation/parole violations as the standalone charge

Biweekly Orleans Parish Felony Arrests from March 1st – May 23rd, 2020

Exhibit 2. Biweekly Orleans Parish Felony Arrests by Type



City/statewide
shutdown
orders issued

(May 16) Phase One
reopening began; stay-
at-home order lifted

Felony arrests had the same trend as overall arrests, falling in the early weeks of the shutdown and then steadily increasing

Felony arrests fell 60% from 264 in the two weeks before the pandemic shutdown to a low of 108 from March 29-April 11

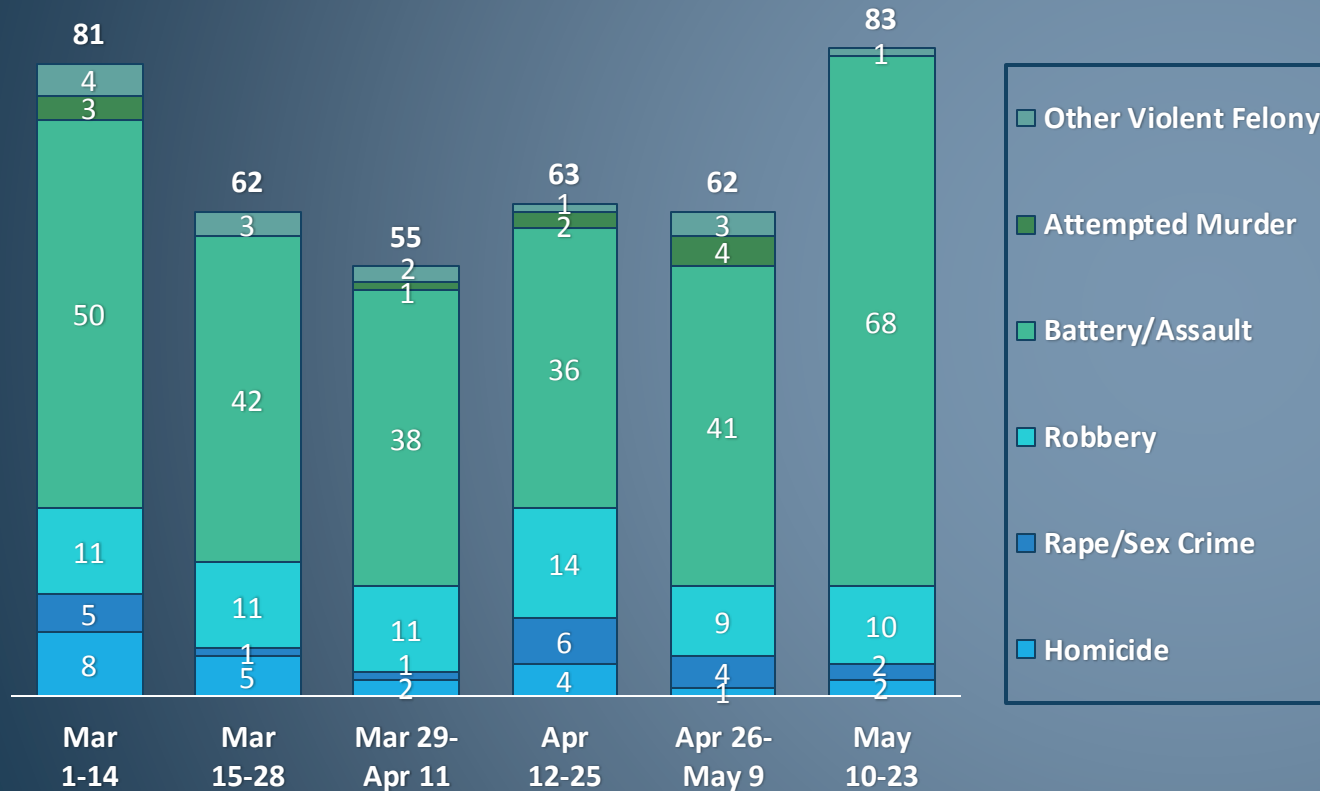
- Drug-related felony arrests had the steepest drop from 77 arrests in the two weeks before the shutdown to 6 arrests from March 29-April 11, a 92% reduction
- Violent felony arrests had the smallest (32%) decline, dropping from 81 before the shutdown to 55 arrests March 29-April 11
- Weapons felony arrests dropped 71%, from 49 pre-shutdown to 14 arrests March 29-April 11

Since the low point of 108 felony arrests March 29-April 11, there was a steady increase to 173 felony arrests as of May 10-23

- The biggest increase was in violent felony arrests, which returned to pre-shutdown levels as of May 10-23
- Arrests for property felonies increased to near pre-pandemic shutdown levels
- Drug felony arrests remained a fraction of what was seen before the pandemic shutdown

Biweekly Orleans Parish Violent Felony Arrests from March 1st – May 23rd, 2020

Exhibit 3. Biweekly Orleans Parish Violent Felony Arrests



City/statewide
shutdown
orders issued

(May 16) Phase One
reopening began; stay-
at-home order lifted

Violent felony arrests dipped to their lowest point during the two week period immediately following city/statewide shutdown orders (March 29-April 11) before returning to pre-pandemic levels

Felony battery/assault arrests had an overall 36% increase from 50 in the two weeks before the pandemic shutdown to 68 from May 10-23

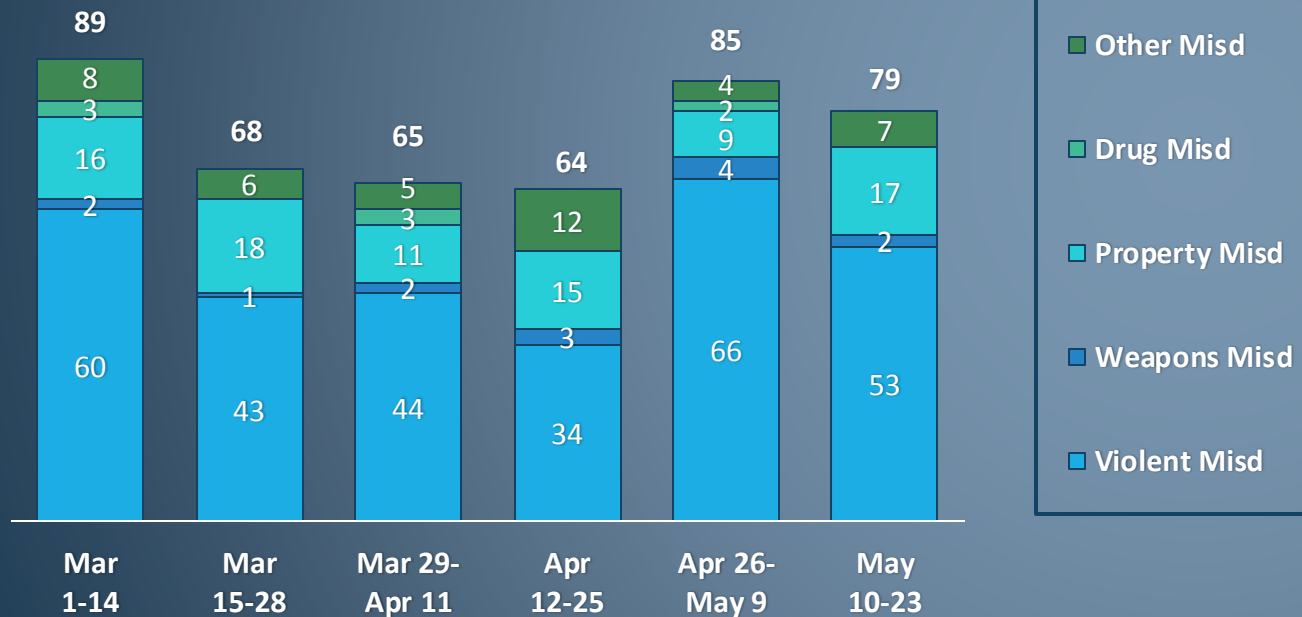
- Felony domestic battery/assault arrests increased since the beginning of the shutdown, from 30 arrests March 1-14 to 43 arrests May 10-23

Robbery arrests consistently ranged from 9 to 14 every two weeks since before the pandemic shutdown

Homicide and rape/sex crime arrests decreased since the pandemic shutdown

Biweekly Misdemeanor Arrests from March 1st – May 23rd, 2020

Exhibit 4. Biweekly Orleans Parish Misdemeanor Arrests



City/statewide
shutdown
orders issued

(May 16) Phase One
reopening began;
stay-at-home order
lifted

Violent misdemeanor arrests fell at the onset of the pandemic shutdown but have increased to near pre-pandemic levels over the past four weeks

- There were 89 misdemeanor arrests in the two weeks before the shutdown, which fell to 68 in the two weeks after the shutdown began
- Misdemeanor arrests rose back up to 85 by April 26-May 9 and remained high, with 79 misdemeanor arrests May 10-23

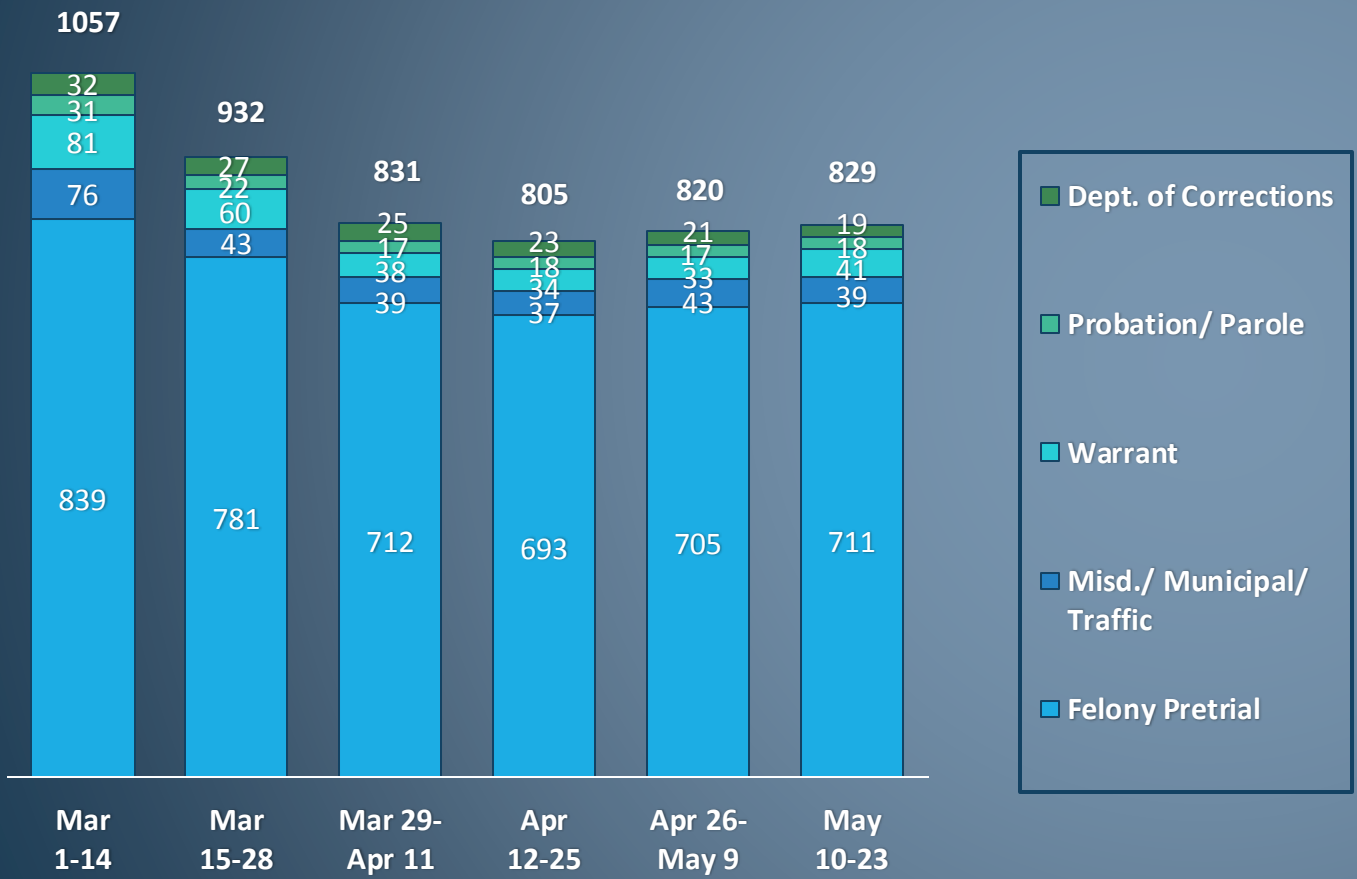
Violent misdemeanor arrests accounted for 67% of all misdemeanor arrests

- 87% of violent misdemeanor arrests included at least one domestic violence charge
- Misdemeanor domestic violence arrests across the past four weeks were similar to what was seen pre-shutdown
 - There were 45 misdemeanor domestic violence arrests March 1-14 compared to 56 arrests April 26-May 9 and 39 arrests May 10-23

Very few misdemeanor arrests are for drug charges (< 1%)

Average OPSO Inmate Population from March 1st – May 23rd, 2020

Exhibit 5. Average Biweekly OPSO Inmate Population



City/statewide shutdown orders issued

(May 16) Phase One reopening began; stay-at-home order lifted

A 95% majority of inmates were in custody for felony offenses

The inmate population steadily decreased over the first six weeks of the shutdown before beginning to increase over the past four weeks

- From 1,057 inmates per day before the pandemic, the inmate population gradually fell 23% to a low of 805 average inmates per day from April 12-25
 - This reduction in inmates occurred as arrests fell by 63% at the onset of the shutdown (see Exhibit 1)

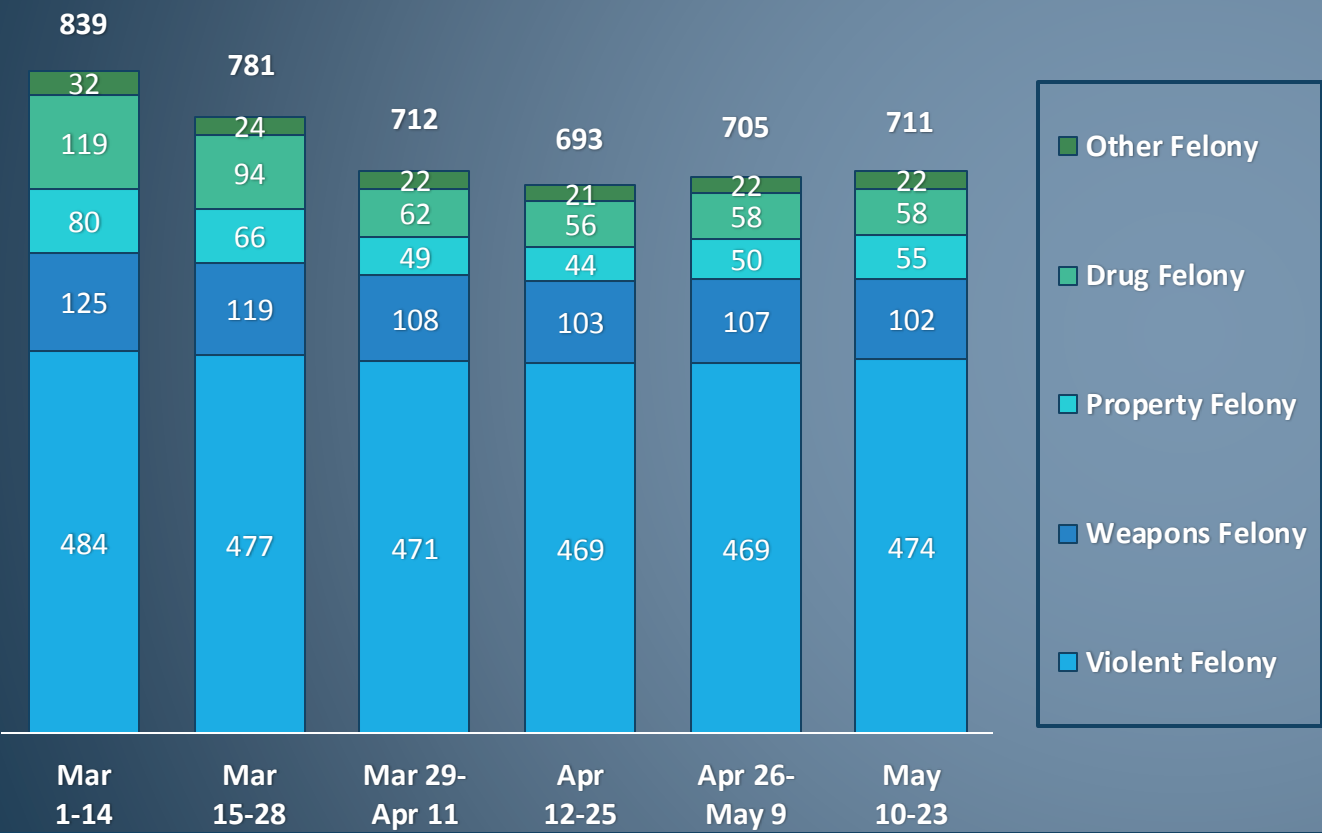
Since the low of 805 inmates from April 12-25, the population increased gradually to 829 per day as of May 10-23

Inmates held for warrants decreased 49%, from an average of 81 per day pre-shutdown to 41 per day May 10-23

- Warrant arrests fell 92% during the same time (see Exhibit 1)
- Inmates in custody for misdemeanor, municipal, and traffic offenses since March 15-28 decreased 47%, from 76 to a post-shutdown average of 40 per day
 - An average of 28 inmates per day were held for violent misdemeanors, nearly all of which were domestic violence charges
 - An average of less than 1 inmate per day were in jail for municipal or traffic charges
 - On average, there was 1 inmate per day for misdemeanor drug possession throughout the study period

OPSO Felony Pretrial Inmate Population from March 1st – May 23rd, 2020

Exhibit 6. Biweekly OPSO Felony Pretrial Inmate Population



City/statewide
shutdown
orders issued

(May 16) Phase One
reopening began; stay-
at-home order lifted

Felony pretrial inmates went from accounting for 79% of the inmate population prior to the shutdown (March 1-14) to 86% of the population as of May 10-23

- Felony pretrial inmates decreased 17%, from an average of 839 per day March 1-14 before the pandemic to a low of 693 from April 12-25

Since the low of 693 felony pretrial inmates April 12-25, there has been a small (3%) increase to an average of 711 felony pretrial inmates from May 10-23

- On average, 56% of inmates are held for violent felony charges
- Inmates held for murder charges increased from 132 pre-shutdown to 142 from May 10-23
- Inmates held for drug felonies fell by more than half, from 119 pre-shutdown to 56-58 since April 12-25
 - Since April 12-25, drug distribution charges accounted for 75% of inmates held for felony drug offenses