

MARYLAND CRIME RESEARCH & INNOVATION CENTER

J A N U A R Y 2 0 2 5 | N E W S L E T T E R

➤ A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR: MCRIC INSIGHTS

Happy New Year,

As we look toward 2025, we reflect on another successful year of collaboration with many of you. Our ongoing partnerships continue to drive innovative strategies for crime prevention and reduction, emphasizing data-driven approaches to inform decision-making, and understanding local contexts in public safety efforts. One example of this is shared in the **Project Spotlight** below, highlighting a UMD [MCRIC](#) and Center for Substance Use Addiction & Health Research Center ([CESAR](#)) collaboration to evaluate several Maryland programs addressing the opioid epidemic.

Check out the **More News** section below for research by our UMD colleagues related to disparities in prosecutorial decision-making as well as recent releases from the Violence Reduction Center ([VRC](#)). Finally, we welcome two new embedded data analysts with the Baltimore Police Department. Learn more about the program [here](#).

As your research partners, with the grant season approaching, feel free to reach out to discuss your ideas and collaboration opportunities. NIJ recently announced a list of topics that they anticipate will be the focus of [grant opportunities for FY 2025](#). You can reach us at: MCRIC-contact@umd.edu.

Wishing you a Happy 2025,
[Bianca Bersani](#), PhD
[MCRIC](#) Director

➤ PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: MARYLAND LEAD EVALUATIONS

With support from the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention & Policy ([GOCPP](#)), [MCRIC](#) and [CESAR](#) are conducting a comprehensive evaluation of 7 Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion ([LEAD](#)) sites in Maryland. LEAD programs aim to provide assistance to individuals struggling with substance use or mental health disorders, connecting them to care rather than incarceration. The evaluation couples an analysis of program data with stakeholder interviews to generate a deeper understanding of successes, challenges, and opportunities within diversion programs. With this effort, we hope to leverage insights to inform future efforts to connect individuals in crisis to care rather than incarceration, and to equip programs with resources to track program engagement and outcomes to enhance evaluation efforts. Read more about this work [here](#).



Bianca Bersani, PhD
MCRIC Director



Joce Evens, MA
Project Manager



Pritesh Jain, MS
Data Analyst



Erin Artigiana, MA
CESAR Deputy Director of Policy



Ebonie Massey, MA
Data Analyst

➤ MORE NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Investigating Racial and Ethnic Disparity Across Prosecutorial Decision-Making Points: A Multi-Site Analysis in Maryland

[Funded by Arnold Ventures](#) and utilizing research-practitioner partnerships, Dr. [Brian Johnson](#) and his research team are analyzing original data on case processing outcomes, comparing and contrasting discretionary decisions related to initial charges, diversion, charge reductions/plea bargaining, and final sentences from Baltimore City, Montgomery County, & Frederick County. The jurisdictions are led by state's attorneys committed to using data-driven approaches to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their offices, but each is also unique in its local context and population demographics. A key focus of the research is examining racial and ethnic inequalities in decisions across locales.



Brian Johnson, PhD
Professor

Violence Reduction Center: Applying What Works to Stop Gun Violence

The Violence Reduction Center ([VRC](#)), founded by [Thomas Abt](#), is a research center at UMD that focuses on evidence-based processes to reduce violence, especially gun violence, nationally and globally. The VRC convenes stakeholders, encouraging collaboration between academics, policymakers, and practitioners. Recent VRC publications include:

- [Applying 'What Works' to Stop Violence & Save Lives](#) synthesizes and translates evidence to address community gun violence in cities across the country.
- [Crime, Place, Policy, and Politics](#) examines systematic reviews of place-based anti-crime strategies, discusses the policy implications of this research, and examines the obstacles associated with sharing place-based and other research findings in an era increasingly defined by political polarization.



Thomas Abt, JD
Founding Director, VRC



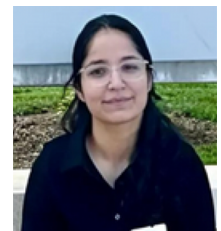
Grace Magori, BA
Program Manager, VRC

Welcoming New MCRIC Embedded Analysts at the Baltimore Police Dept.

BreAna Bell-Freeman is a current Criminology & Criminal Justice Master's student. Her research interests include youth's experiences in the juvenile justice system, implicit bias and discretion, the pre-carceral lives of individuals with maternal or paternal incarceration, & reintegrative programs for repeat offenders. Simran Gawri is a Master's student in Computer Science. Her research interests are generative AI, computer vision, data analytics & database management, and data visualization.



BreAna Bell-Freeman



Simran Gawri

[Meet the full Maryland Crime Research & Innovation Center \(MCRIC\) Team](#)