

# PJI RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In 2018, PJI established the **Research Advisory Committee (RAC)** to ensure that we understand and use new research to guide our theory of change and framework for implementation. We also want an independent check on our own selection bias—the tendency to like research that confirms our own ideas and to discount research that does not. RAC also serves as a place for other researchers to discuss pretrial justice, and we hope it will inspire rising academics to engage in pretrial research as a part of their thesis or dissertation work.

PJI invited seven academics—whose backgrounds span sociology, criminology, and criminal justice—and one practitioner with over four decades of public defender experience to serve as the inaugural committee. The main commitments of RAC are to meet regularly to discuss current pretrial research, to guide PJI’s application of that research, to respond to any research requests by PJI staff, and to help PJI make research relevant to practitioners. These discussions are critical to helping PJI determine which research is relevant, which practices we should consider incorporating based on the best available research, and which research and practices we should entertain with caution.

The Research Advisory Committee has assisted PJI in other ways. For a nationwide scan of practice, RAC suggested ways to capture data accurately from jurisdictions with different demographics, as well as how to handle issues of confidentiality. RAC’s practitioner member has helped develop materials to help public defenders understand the issues around pretrial assessments. Given RAC members’ depth of experience in law-related research and its particular resources and requirements, RAC is also available to advise on strategic research issues, to suggest future areas of inquiry, and to act as a resource to other researchers.

*For more information, or to reach the RAC, please contact Sue Ferrere at [sue@pretrial.org](mailto:sue@pretrial.org).*



## Biographies



RAC Chair **Dr. Traci Schlesinger** is an associate professor of Sociology and an affiliated professor of African and Black Diaspora Studies, American Studies, and Women & Gender Studies at DePaul University. Questions about how the criminalizing and punishing systems maintain racial oppression in the contemporary United States inform her teaching, research, and activism. She teaches classes on the criminal legal system, legal theory, and racism in the post-civil rights United States. Schlesinger received her AA from Bergen Community College, her BA from Fordham College Lincoln Center, Fordham University, and her PhD from Princeton University. She is also a board member of PJI.



**Dr. Jennifer E. Copp** is an assistant professor in the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida State University. Dr. Copp received her PhD in Sociology from Bowling Green State University. Her work focuses on crime and other problem behaviors during adolescence and young adulthood, with a particular emphasis on intimate partner violence (IPV). Her recent research explores the role of anger as a mediator of the association between neighborhood disadvantage and IPV. Other work examines the complex interplay of neighborhood disadvantage, normative climates, and economically related conflicts as influences on IPV within the context of young adult relationships.

## From Classroom to Courtroom

When Bowling Green State University Professor Stephen Demuth first became involved with the Civil Rights Corps' lawsuit against Harris County, Texas, his job was to analyze the data and to determine the effect of setting money bond on the duration of the period from arrest to probable-cause hearing. The project resulted in some of the most meaningful work of Demuth's career.

Demuth became more involved with the suit as it became clear that data and evidence would refute claims set forth by the defendants. He showed that releasing people on unsecured bond did not create a public safety threat, as asserted by Harris County. He also demonstrated that people released on unsecured bonds were returning for their court dates; people who the county released on unsecured bonds had a greater percentage of their cases resolved than did those released on surety bonds<sup>1</sup>. Demuth's work has also been able to quantify the progress made under a preliminary injunction; the county released more than 11,000 people who would have been detained due to inability to pay money bail<sup>2</sup>. The system also looks dramatically different for indigent people. Before the injunction, 81% of cases were resolved by guilty pleas and 16% of cases ended in dismissal. After the injunction, 57% of cases were resolved by guilty pleas and 38% of cases ended in dismissal.

Demuth subsequently became involved in a similar suit in Alabama. While data analysis was not involved, Demuth has been able to draw upon his substantive pretrial background to testify about the research showing that people released on unsecured bonds have outcomes as good or better than people released on secured bonds.

1. <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/4532989/402/odonnell-v-harris-county-texas/> (pp. 19-20)

2. *Id.* at 18.



**Dr. Stephen Demuth** is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Bowling Green State University, where he also serves as director of graduate studies. His research focuses

on the influence of race/ethnicity, social class, and citizenship status on pretrial and sentencing decisions and outcomes. His recent work examines the joint effects of race/ethnicity and class on the pretrial detention decision-making process in the federal courts and on the disadvantages unique to Latino defendants. He teaches courses on crime and punishment and quantitative research methods at the undergraduate and graduate levels.



**Dr. Tina Freiburger** is the chair of the Criminal Justice Department and graduate coordinator for the Masters of Science in Criminal Justice at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Dr. Freiburger's primary research areas are disparities in adult and juvenile court processing, juvenile justice, and racial/ethnic issues in the criminal justice system. Dr. Freiburger has partnered with several local criminal justice agencies for studies and program evaluations on topics such as juvenile offending, improving the identification of the mental health needs of youth, police and juvenile relations, the effectiveness of hotspot policing, and racial and gender disparities in prosecutorial and judicial decision making.



**Michael Menefee** is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. Menefee is interested in crime, law, and deviance; stratification and inequality;

poverty; historical sociology; and quantitative methodology. His current research projects broadly focus on racial disparities in the criminal justice system, the collateral consequences of criminal justice involvement, and the historical relationship between racial inequality and patterns of crime. For his dissertation, Menefee is studying the relationship among urban political economies, neighborhood conditions, and violence.



**Dr. Ojmarrh Mitchell** is an associate professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of South Florida. Professor Mitchell earned his PhD in Criminal Justice and Criminology

from the University of Maryland with a doctoral minor in Measurement, Statistics, and Evaluation. He has held positions at the University of Cincinnati, University of Nevada Las Vegas, and the Urban Institute. His research interests include courts and sentencing, race and crime, drugs and crime, and meta-analysis. Dr. Mitchell is also on the U.S. Attorney General's Science Advisory Board.



Practitioner Member  
**Edward C. Monahan** was appointed by the governor of Kentucky as public advocate for two consecutive four-year terms, beginning in 2008. He led the development

of Kentucky's nationally recognized legal education program, is a charter board member of the Kentucky Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and is past president of KACDL. Monahan is a member of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and co-chairs its Subcommittee on Pretrial Release Advocacy. His publications include "Coping with Excessive Workload," co-written with James Clark. In 2013, the National Association of Pretrial Service Agencies' John C. Hendricks Pioneer Award was presented to the Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy for its commitment to public defender advocacy that resulted in an increased release of indigent people before trial.



**Rely Vilciã** joined the faculty of the Department of Criminal Justice at Temple University in 2009. Before that, she served as a definitive judge at the Court of the Fourth District of Bucharest,

Romania. She received a postgraduate judge diploma in 1998 from the National Institute of Magistrature and Ministry of Justice of Romania, and a PhD degree in 2008 from Temple's graduate program in criminal justice. Her research interests include criminal case processing and adjudication; justice decision-making, especially as it affects individual liberty; policy analysis; and comparative criminal justice.