

RURAL JAILS RESEARCH HUB

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

Sarah Shannon, MSW, PhD, Department of Sociology | Beverly Johnson, EdD, Carl Vinson Institute of Government | Orion Mowbray, PhD, School of Social Work
 Holly Lynde, MSc, Carl Vinson Institute of Government | Amairini Sanchez, PhD Candidate | Oluwayomi Paseda, PhD Candidate
 Guthrie Armstrong, Anthony Potts, and Caroline Schneider, Undergraduates

“Unique to UGA’s team is the public service and outreach component. It was evident to the selection committee that UGA, through its public service and outreach mission, had a unique connection with all 159 counties. This connection, along with the representation of other experienced faculty and staff on the team, resulted in the selection of UGA as one of two research hubs.”

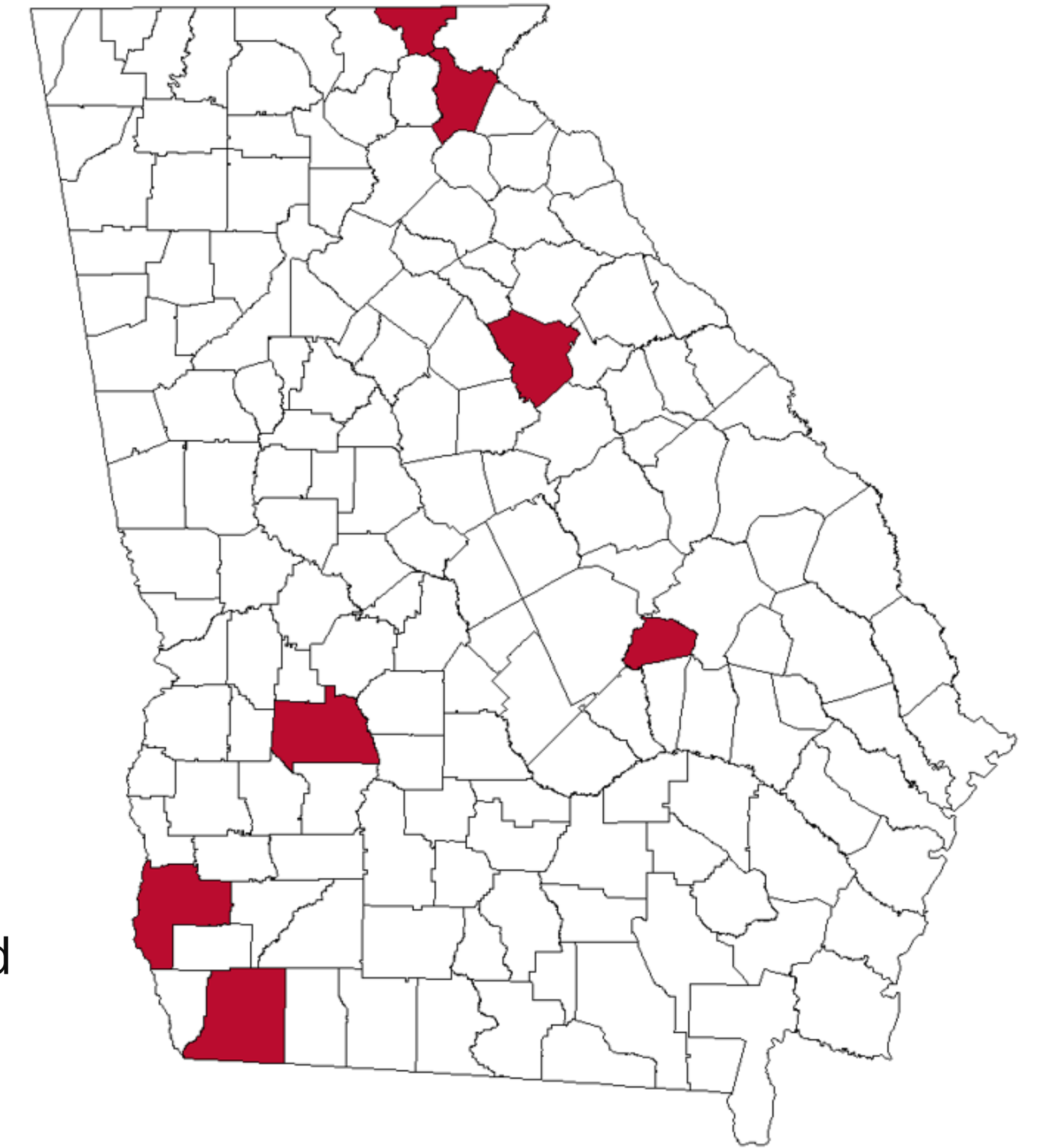
Nancy Fishman | Vera Institute of Justice Project Director

WHAT IS THE RURAL JAILS RESEARCH HUB?

The Rural Jails Research Hub is a collaboration of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the Department of Sociology, and the School of Social Work. In 2019, the Vera Institute of Justice awarded the University of Georgia a \$235,000 grant, funded by Arnold Ventures, to create a pilot “hub” site to better document and understand rural incarceration rates. The Vera Institute selected two universities as hubs to conduct the research – Washington State University received the other grant.

The project had several goals:

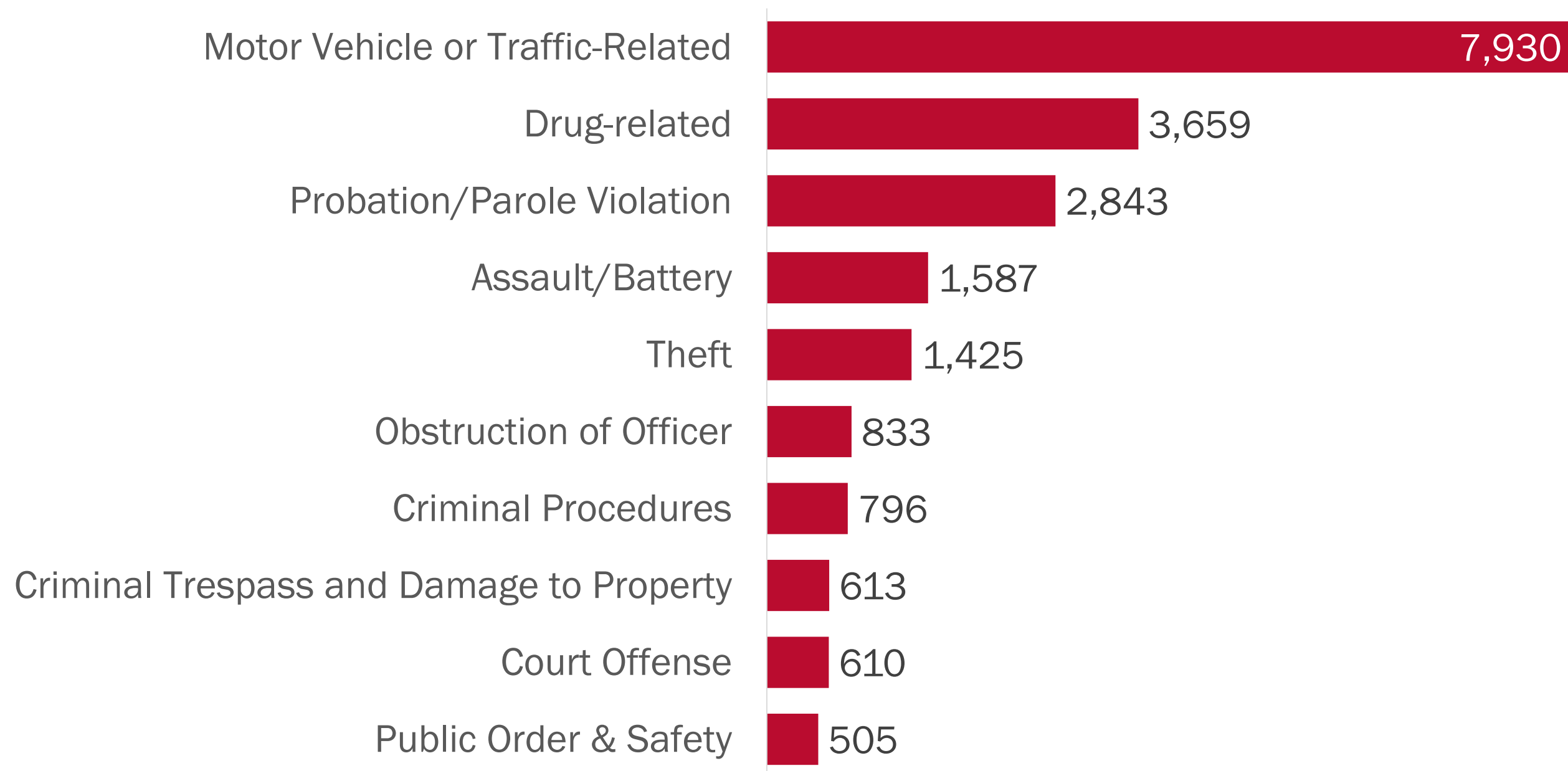
- Gather and analyze administrative jail data from select rural counties throughout Georgia.
- Build knowledge of specific local criminal justice issues – especially factors affecting jail population trends – rural counties face through data analysis and conversations with local prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, law enforcement, and other county representatives.
- Share lessons from research and data analysis with local representatives and stakeholders.
- Convene representatives from rural counties for roundtable discussions.
- Demonstrate a realistic, inclusive process for data-driven reform that other rural counties can follow.
- Establish a national network of researchers that will share findings and replicate successful programs and processes.



Sheriff’s offices in **Decatur, Early, Habersham, Greene, Sumter, Towns, and Treutlen** counties shared jail data from January 2019 to June 2020.

FINDINGS

Top 10 Most Frequent Charges



Of the charges between January 2019 and June 2020, 38% were for motor vehicle or traffic-related offenses while 18% were for drug-related offenses.

Most Frequent Charges

- Motor vehicle or traffic-related charges, drug-related charges, and probation violations were the most frequent charges for 5 counties.
- Theft was among the top 5 most frequent charges for 5 counties.
- Assault/battery was among the top 5 most frequent charges for 4 counties.
- Early County’s third most frequent charge was a tie between education (failure to enroll children ages 6 to 16 in or attend school) and probation violation. Each made up about 10% of all charges.
- Sumter County’s third most frequent charge was assault/battery (11% of all charges), which is a violent offense whether it is a felony or misdemeanor.
- “Criminal procedure” or “court offense” was among the top 5 most frequent charges for Habersham, Towns, and Treutlen counties, though the percentages were small (3–5% of all charges).

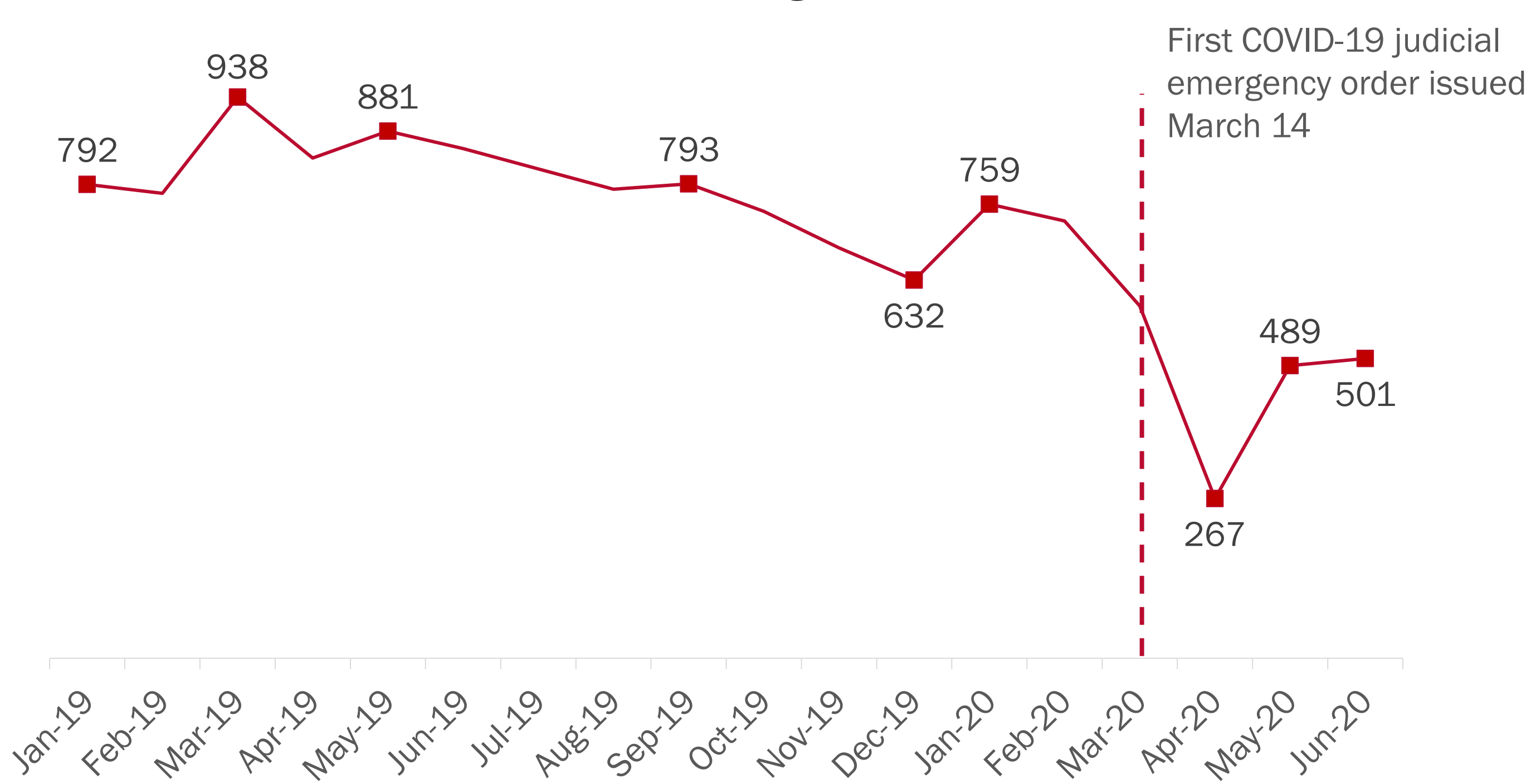
Lessons Learned

- Data are not consistent. This includes charge language, data elements, electronic record management systems, and mental health/substance use disorder information.
- Making generalizations across rural counties is nearly impossible.
- Sheriffs must champion the collection and use of data for decision making.



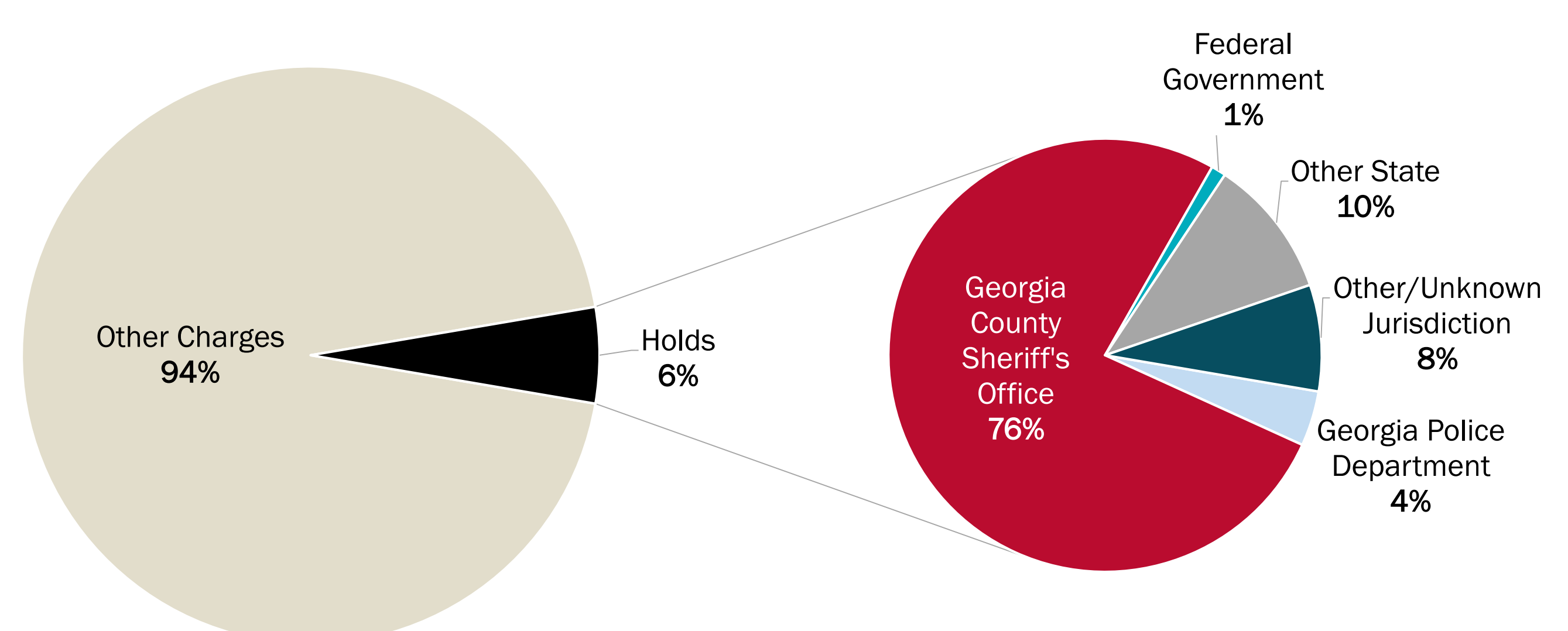
* Data do not include Early or Habersham counties.

All Bookings



In an average month in 2019, 114 people were booked into jails in the seven participating counties. During the first six months of 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, bookings dropped by 30%, to 79 bookings on average per month. In April 2020, there were only 267 total bookings in all seven counties, a 66% decrease from January 2019.

Holds for Other Agencies



Of people booked between January 2019 and June 2020, 6% were held for another jurisdiction. Of those, 76% were held for another Georgia county Sheriff’s office. A “hold” refers to a person detained in a local county jail under the jurisdiction of another agency, such as another county, state corrections agency, or federal agency.