San Francisco has fewer pretrial detainees in jail. But at what cost? | Harvard Kennedy School

By Susan A. Hughes
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Since 2020, the number of individuals awaiting trial in San Francisco County who are required to wear an electronic monitoring (EM) device has increased by 308%. This explosion is the result of a decision in a case regarding defendants' ability to pay cash bail and non-monetary release options. While many have applauded the solution as a way to end mass incarceration and reduce jail populations, others have pointed to the costs associated with pretrial monitoring—including psychological, social, and economic ones—and described it as an alternative form of incarceration.

In new research, Sandra Susan Smith, director of the Wiener Center for Social Policy and faculty chair of the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, closely followed the experiences of a large group of defendants enrolled in the pretrial monitoring program to study the effects of the new system.

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