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**NORTH AMERICA**  
**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**  
July 2023

Good afternoon,

Before J-PAL North America, I spent years working on criminal justice reform, first by helping prisoners in California in accessing basic health care and then by supporting the lowest-income New Yorkers on criminal cases. Although we felt great satisfaction when we helped our clients win their legal cases, too often the same clients would return to our doors within the span of several months. Despite my best intentions and frequent 12-hour workdays, I often wondered, “Is my work ultimately making a difference?”

This on-the-ground experience revealed to me the ways in which structures and systems often trap low-income Americans. It also underscored the importance of going beyond good intentions and lifting up solutions proven to make a difference in people’s lives—the ethos of evidence-based policymaking.

At J-PAL North America, we catalyze rigorous research to help identify solutions that foster fairness and equity within the criminal-legal system and support those at-risk of involvement in the system. This month we are highlighting an evidence review synthesizing findings about approaches to reduce court nonappearance, new research on access to effective legal representation, and an editorial about how cities can utilize summer youth employment programs to strengthen communities. By lifting up these solutions, we can help secure a better future for many low-income Americans who might otherwise be trapped by a broken criminal-legal system.

For those interested in learning more, please visit the [J-PAL Crime, Violence, and Conflict](#) page and read the exciting new pieces featured in this newsletter.

Vincent Quan  
Co-Executive Director, J-PAL North America

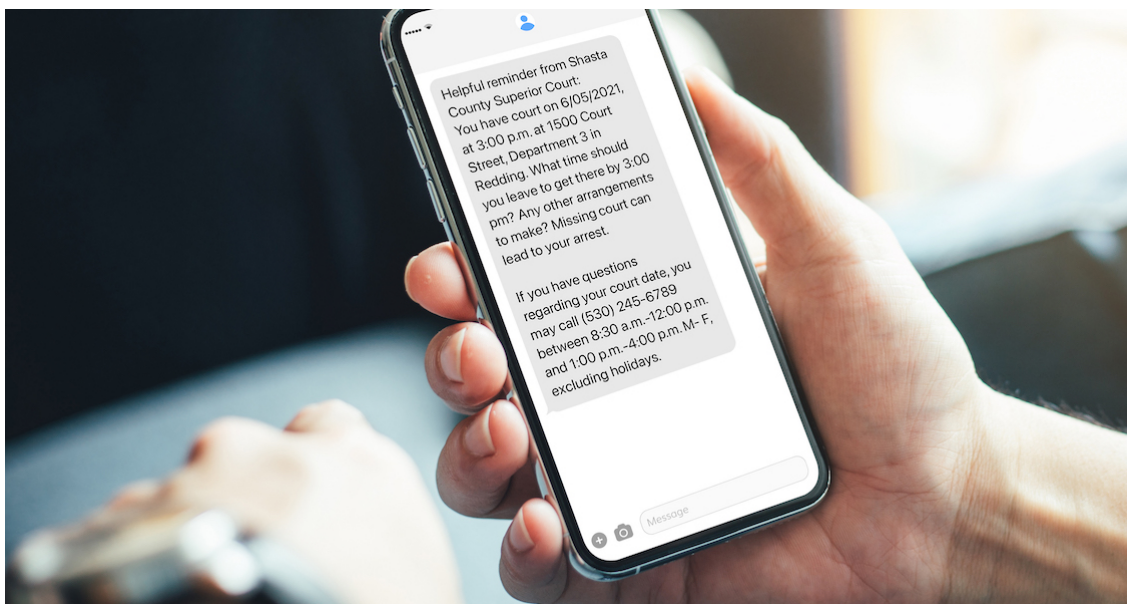


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## Policy Insight: Evidence from randomized evaluations of low-cost nudges on reducing court nonappearance for people awaiting arraignment

Our recently published policy insight synthesizes evidence from twelve randomized evaluations on the impact of low-cost behavioral nudges on reducing court nonappearance of people awaiting arraignment. Court nonappearance is criminalized in 46 US states, can carry penalties not associated with an individual's original charge, including arrest warrants, and can increase courts' personnel costs. The insight finds evidence that nudge interventions—simplified summons forms, phone calls, mail, text messages and/or in-person reminders providing key information about the summons—can increase court appearances and reduce costs for jurisdictions. [Read more about the evidence and implementation recommendations >>](#)



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### Research Results: Providing earlier legal counsel by public defenders reduced jail time and improved case outcomes

Pre-trial detention imposes legal, social, and economic costs on people who are arrested and cannot afford to post bail or hire a private attorney to negotiate release. People who cannot afford a lawyer are appointed a public defender typically at their first arraignment hearing, which may not occur until

several days after arrest. A recent J-PAL funded [study](#) tested the impact of a pilot program in Santa Clara County, CA that shifted legal representation by public defenders to begin immediately after arrest. Faster access to legal counsel significantly reduced jail time, pre-trial detention, and convictions. The opportunity to meet with clients earlier in the process can allow attorneys to spend more time collecting evidence in support of their case, advocate for their client's release from jail, and connect the client with other service providers. For more information, please visit the [California Policy Lab website](#).

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## Washington Post: How to revitalize summers for teens and young adults

The Washington Post Editorial Board cites an extensive body of rigorous research in a [new opinion piece](#) arguing for increased investment in summer youth employment programs. Referencing [J-PAL's evidence review](#) and studies by J-PAL affiliates in New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, the piece discusses the consistent ability of summer jobs programs to reduce violence and involvement in the criminal-legal system among young people. By expanding summer jobs programs, cities can also test innovative models to strengthen their impacts on employment and education outcomes, where their track record is mixed.

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## FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY

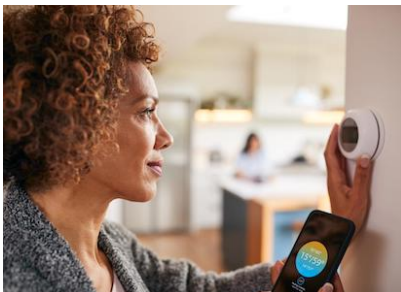


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## Information and price variations to reduce residential energy use in the United States

Conserving household electricity usage is critical in curbing climate change but customers are historically unresponsive to price changes aimed at decreasing demand. Researchers [evaluated](#) the effects of providing real-time information about electricity usage

alongside price increases during peak periods to residential customers in the United States. The study found that households that received live feedback about usage reduced consumption and individuals were more responsive to price increases when they had advance notice. These results suggest that small habit changes sustained over time could lead to meaningful reductions in carbon dioxide emissions.

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## FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE

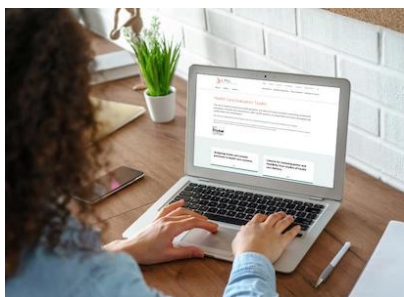


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### **Navigating hospital Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)**

Social scientists seeking to partner with hospitals to conduct research on health care delivery may find it daunting working with a hospital IRB more accustomed to reviewing medical trials. [This resource](#) provides guidance for how to carefully explain study procedures and impacts on important hospital stakeholders like patients and providers, as well as guidance on how to approach IRB review when a project spans multiple institutions or subject areas.

*This resource is part of our "Health Care Evaluation Toolkit," supported by the MIT Roybal Center and the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health.*

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## MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

[How to bake data-based evaluations into relief programs](#)

Stephanie Kanowitz, Route Fifty

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