Public Equity and Justice System

The Problem:
In the US, systemic racial injustice disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and other minority populations. And Washington State is no exception. This inequity has often been hidden, without tools or research to measure its real-time impact. Those engaged in the criminal justice system often lack visibility to what their peers and their own agencies are doing. Prosecutors' offices don't have visibility into other jurisdictions' data, and without easy access to the information that can reveal biases and the impacts of their decisions on a wide scale, they cannot truly understand how their individual decisions might contribute to unfair disproportionality. Previously, we've had to wait years as colleges conducted lengthy studies to have an accurate comparative analysis. Many individuals, families, and communities suffer harm until these studies reveal an injustice that results in change – an injustice that might otherwise have been corrected earlier if there had been a faster way.

The Solution:
The **Public Equity and Justice System** is a database built to help all criminal justice actors, stakeholders, and the public, get up-to-date data insights on how sentencing decisions vary by judge, county, and demographic characteristics including race, ethnicity, gender, and age. Our database currently combines 20 years of Caseload Forecast Council (CFC) sentencing data as well as census and population data from Washington State.

An additional benefit is that this system could help aggregate and analyze data from our many different data warehouses or formats, potentially reducing manpower and improving accessibility for reasons even beyond the project itself.

Future planned updates include integrating more data from different points in the life of a criminal case as well as information about legal and legislative changes that affect criminal sentencing so we can get a holistic picture to help us understand the implications of these changes from beginning to end.

Why is your solution different to other solutions out there?
This system incorporates the latest technology platforms available to house and visualize data at scale. It displays that data in a format that is quickly accessible to a wide range of stakeholders – be they interested individuals, lawyers, judges, policymakers, legislators, academics, or others.

The long-term goal:
We hope that other states will adopt this type of system so that it creates a ripple effect of change throughout the entire nation. We also aspire to incorporate as much data as we can to see the full justice continuum, starting from first contact with law enforcement all the way through to ultimate resolution of the case.

We are also working to get the system rolled out and adopted by the public, as we believe increasing access to information will have positive implications far beyond the scope of our project and will help improve the fairness and equality of our criminal justice system.

What fundamentals do we have in place:
The team is led by Anthony Powers from the Seattle Clemency Project. Additionally, the project team is made up talent and expertise in technology, data, criminal justice, legislation and grant writing, and data – all passionate volunteers who have committed to seeing this system adopted. The system is hosted on Power BI.

Key Team Members:

- Anthony Powers, reentry program manager at the Seattle Clemency Project and project lead for the Public Equity and Justice System.

- Kim Gordon, owner and partner in firm that focuses exclusively on criminal defense in federal, state, and local courts, and a current member of Washington's Sentencing Guidelines Commission.

- Kate Sigafoos, a former Kitsap County Prosecuting Attorney and Pro-Tem Judge, who now works with Microsoft as an employment lawyer.

- Scott Semyan, principle cloud solution architect at Microsoft. A software developer by trade, Scott manages all the data inputs and the database.

- Jonica Couweleers, senior data analyst at Microsoft. With a data science background, Jonica is our lead data visualizer to translate the data into meaningful insights for easy interpretation.

- Belinda Cheng, product marketing manager at Microsoft focused on the government audience. She currently supports with logistics and project management, as well as developing a marketing and communications plan for roll out.

Thank you to many other Community partners, advisors, and volunteers who have helped to guide and build this system.

- Microsoft volunteers (from 2020 Summer Hackathon and after):
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