

Doctors, Dentists, Hairdressers, and Court Systems: Implementing Court Text Reminders to Address Failure-to-Appear

Introduction

Across the nation, more people are booked into jail for missing a court date than for any other single reason. Kansas has the **21st highest incarceration rate nationally**, exceeding that of most countries worldwide.¹ This is an especially troubling reality given the already significant strain on the state’s justice system. Yet, there is a straightforward solution gaining traction across the United States, one that most people already encounter in everyday life: appointment reminders.

Court date reminders, commonly referred to as **court text reminders (CTRs)**, have demonstrated strong potential to reduce failure-to-appear (FTA) rates, particularly when implemented using evidence-based practices. Rigorous evaluations show that CTRs reduce nonappearance by **20–40%**. In Santa Clara County, California the use of text reminders resulted in at least **20% reductions in bench warrants for nonappearance**, saving court staff time and resources.^{2 3} Reminder systems require a modest upfront investment; however, evidence shows they pay for themselves almost immediately.⁴ In jurisdictions where existing case management systems already support text reminders—as is the case in Kansas—implementation costs can be reduced even further.⁵

Opt-Out Versus Opt-In

There are some key factors that can impact the success of an implemented reminder system. **First is the frequency of reminders.** Ideas42, a non-profit leader in behavioral science research and its application to the criminal justice system, recommends a frequency in which reminders are sent seven, three, and one day(s) in advance of a scheduled court date. **Second, the content of the reminders should display necessary and helpful information in an easy-to-read format, as displayed in the example below.**⁶

¹ Widra, E. (2024, June). *States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2024*. Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2024.html>

² Fishbane, A., Ouss, A., & Shah, A. K. (2020). Behavioral nudges reduce failure to appear for court. *Science*, 370(6517), eabb6591. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abb6591>

³ Chohlas-Wood, A., Coots, M., Nudell, J., Nyarko, J., Brunskill, E., Rogers, T., & Goel, S. (2025). Automated reminders reduce incarceration for missed court dates: Evidence from a text message experiment. *Science Advances*, 11(40), eadx7483. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.adx7483>

⁴ Lear, K. (2026). *CTR Data Analysis*. Kansas Appleseed. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1JNjDNEy-0JQ2Y5VjN73hGVsW78-mgidwuoKC30pbE0/edit?usp=sharing>

⁵ Arnold-Burger, K., et al. (2020, November 6). Pretrial Justice Task Force Report to the Kansas Supreme Court. Topeka, KS; Kansas Judicial Branch. https://kscourts.gov/KSCourts/media/KsCourts/court%20administration/Pretrial_Justice_Task_Force/PJTFRreporttoKansasSupremeCourt.pdf

⁶ Hammer, S., Fishbane, A., & McAuliffe, S. (2024, April 25). *Smart Court Appearance Strategies: Court Date Reminders*. ideas42. <https://www.ideas42.org/blog/smart-court-appearance-strategies-court-date-reminders/>

request to opt out.⁸ Other states' experiences with CTRs also affirm the outcome in Colorado.

Conversely, opt-in CTR systems depend on individuals signing themselves up for the program. The effectiveness of this approach hinges on costly public education campaigns to inform people about the program and its merits, and on someone taking the necessary steps to sign up. Even for individuals who want to receive reminders, the burden of remembering and completing the sign-up process is significant, leading to lower utilization and a smaller reduction in FTA rates. This burden translates to court staff as well. It takes time and money to advertise reminder programs, to inform people about the program and encourage participation, and to provide sign-up assistance. Altogether, an opt-in CTR system is less capable of fulfilling its purpose and may, in fact, lead to greater burdens for both users and administrators.^{9 10}

Digging Into Kansas

Unfortunately, there is no clear and accessible data on Kansas' FTA rates. This impacts the state's ability to show the number of offenders who fail to appear in court, and how those figures may vary depending on specific case types. This issue persists with regard to data delineating the number of warrants issued and arrests made for failures-to-appear. Without this data, there is no solid foundation for better assessing the effectiveness of court text reminders should a system be implemented in Kansas. However, in 2020, the Pretrial Justice Task Force presented a report to the Kansas Supreme Court that included very compelling anecdotal data uncovered by a task force member. Over the course of a year, Robert Sullivan collected self-reported data from over 5,000 defendants arrested on FTA warrants in Johnson County. **The most common reason reported, at 36%, was “forgot.” Next, at 22% was “didn’t know my court date.”** Almost 10% indicated they lacked transportation as the reason for nonappearance, and 8% were incarcerated somewhere else on their court date. Sullivan estimated that **almost 59% of FTA instances could have been mitigated by a text reminder.**¹¹ Sullivan's findings refute the notion that individuals who fail to appear in court are intentionally evading justice.

Additional details from the report reveal that failing to appear in court is a ubiquitous issue. In Kansas, 63% of the jail population is pretrial, and local data show that FTAs play a substantial role.¹² For example, in Douglas County, nearly 25% of pretrial jail admissions between 2017 and

⁸ Fishbane, A., McAuliffe, S., & Li, Y. (2025, May). Improving Court Attendance: The Essential Guide to Court Reminder Programs. New York City; ideas 42. https://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/i42-1530_RemindersRpt_Final.pdf

⁹ Fishbane, A., McAuliffe, S., & Li, Y. (2025, May). Improving Court Attendance: The Essential Guide to Court Reminder Programs. New York City; ideas 42. https://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/i42-1530_RemindersRpt_Final.pdf

¹⁰ The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2025, May 12). *States Underuse Court Date Reminders*. The Pew Charitable Trusts. <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2025/05/states-underuse-court-date-reminders#:~:text=New%20Mexico%20and%20Arizona%20both,were%20enrolled%20to%20failures%20to%20receive%20reminders>

¹¹ Arnold-Burger, K., et al. (2020, November 6). Pretrial Justice Task Force Report to the Kansas Supreme Court. Topeka, KS; Kansas Judicial Branch. https://kscourts.gov/KSCourts/media/KsCourts/court%20administration/Pretrial_Justice_Task_Force/PJTFRpttoKansasSupremeCourt.pdf

¹² Vera Institute of Justice. (2024, October 16). *Kansas: Incarceration trends*. Incarceration Trends. <https://trends.vera.org/state/KS>

2021 were due solely to FTA, and in 2017, FTA was the most common charge among individuals booked into the county jail.¹³

Thankfully, the state has the capacity and the opportunity to substantially reduce its FTA rate, saving taxpayers, defendants, and the criminal justice system millions of dollars.

Potential Savings of CTR in Kansas

Kansas Appleseed contacted a total of fifteen district and municipal courts, and police and sheriff offices that serve communities of various sizes across the state. Data regarding the number of FTA warrants issued per year since 2023 was requested. Five entities responded: The Leavenworth County Sheriff’s Office, Manhattan Municipal Court, Riley County Police Department, Sedgwick County District Court, and Topeka Municipal Court (33.3% response rate). Table 1 shows the data received from the aforementioned entities.

Table 1

Number of FTA Warrants ¹⁴			
Jurisdiction	2023	2024	2025
Leavenworth County Sheriff	314	548	542
Manhattan Municipal Court	839	932	858
Riley County Police Department	829	964	1049
Sedgwick County District Court	1124	940	3893
Topeka Municipal Court	3273	3172	3368

To appraise the total cost of FTA occurrences borne by each respondent, absent an operating CTR system, we multiplied the number of FTA warrants times \$1,500 and the cumulative

¹³ Halbach-Singh, B., Minion, S., Peirce, J., Kajeepeta, S., Ng, J., & Heiss, J. (2022, December). Jail Charge Data Analysis and Jail Reduction Strategies for Douglas County, Kansas. Lawrence, KS; Douglas County Government. <https://www.dgcoks.gov/sites/default/files/media/groups/cjcc/pdf/jail-charge-data-analysis-and-jail-reduction-strategies-douglas-county-kansas.pdf>

¹⁴ Lear, K. (2026). *CTR Data Analysis*. Kansas Appleseed. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1JNjDNEy-0JQ2Y5VjN73hGVsW78-mgidwuoKC30pbE0/edit?usp=sharing>

inflation rate from 2020 to 2025 (23.5%).¹⁵ ¹⁶ The \$1,500 value comes from the Pretrial Justice Task Force’s 2020 report. The report cited an unsubstantiated estimate by the Kansas Bail Agents Association that each FTA occurrence costs approximately \$1,500, taking into account the valuation of issuing an FTA arrest warrant, apprehension, booking, jail for one day, and a hearing.¹⁷ Inflation is accounted for because the report was released over five years ago. Factoring in the cumulative inflation rate produces a reasonable estimate for how the cost of processing FTAs has changed over time.

$$y = x * 1,500 * 1.235$$

The potential cost savings of a CTR system in its first year of implementation is calculated next. We estimate a conservative 20% reduction in FTA rates, so all related costs are based on 80% of the original population ($x \times 0.8$). Each individual is assumed to receive three reminder texts following the “7-3-1” cadence recommended by Ideas42, at a cost of \$0.0075 per message.¹⁸ The model also includes fixed costs of \$125,000 for implementation and \$21,000 for annual licensing, as identified in the Pretrial Justice Task Force report. Then all costs are adjusted by the 2020-2025 cumulative inflation rate.

$$y = ((x * 0.8 * 1,500) + (x * 0.8 * 0.0075 * 3) + 125,000 + 21,000) * 1.235$$

Finally, the equation used to calculate the potential cost savings of a CTR system in the second year of application is exactly the same as the previous one, except the one-time \$125,000 fee.

$$y = ((x * 0.8 * 1,500) + (x * 0.8 * 0.0075 * 3) + 21,000) * 1.235$$

Any savings are the difference between the “No CTR” scenario and the “CTR w/ Implementation Fee” scenario or the “CTR w/o Implementation Fee” scenario. The results of plugging in the 2025 FTA numbers from Table 1 through the three formulas are displayed in Table 2.

Cells highlighted in yellow represent the potential cost savings. Positive values indicate savings, while negative values indicate heightened costs. All jurisdictions are estimated to save money in both scenarios involving a CTR system. In some places, *millions* of dollars would be saved.

Furthermore, although not calculated in this report, we project that the total savings from CTRs would be even greater for law enforcement agencies that have hired full-time employees who specifically handle FTA occurrences and processing. Chief Wendy Dedeke of the Leavenworth

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022, January 12). *Consumer Price Index, Midwest Region – December 2021* (News release 22-26-KAN). U.S. Department of Labor.

https://www.bls.gov/regions/mountain-plains/news-release/2022/consumerpriceindex_midwest_20220112.htm

¹⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2026, February 13). *Consumer Price Index, Midwest region — January 2026* (News release 26-241-KAN). U.S. Department of Labor.

https://www.bls.gov/regions/mountain-plains/news-release/consumerpriceindex_midwest.htm

¹⁷ Arnold-Burger, K., et al. (2020, November 6). Pretrial Justice Task Force Report to the Kansas Supreme Court. Topeka, KS; Kansas Judicial Branch.

https://kscourts.gov/KSCourts/media/KsCourts/court%20administration/Pretrial_Justice_Task_Force/PJTFRreporttoKansasSupremeCourt.pdf

¹⁸ Hammer, S., Fishbane, A., & McAuliffe, S. (2024, April 25). *Smart Court Appearance Strategies: Court Date Reminders*. ideas42. <https://www.ideas42.org/blog/smart-court-appearance-strategies-court-date-reminders/>

County Sheriff’s Office attests that her office has hired a clerk to manage the FTA-related workload, and she believes that counterparts across the state have made similar hiring decisions. Although the cost of FTA-specific staff is not reflected in the savings formulas, substantial reductions in FTA rates would likely prevent or mitigate the need for these positions and increase agency savings.

Table 2

2025 CTR Cost Estimates, 20% Impact					
	Leavenworth	Manhattan	Riley County	Sedgwick County	Topeka
No CTR	\$1,004,055	\$1,589,445	\$1,943,273	\$7,211,783	\$6,239,220
CTR w/ Implementation Fee	\$983,566	\$1,451,885	\$1,734,951	\$5,949,823	\$5,171,761
Savings	\$20,489	\$137,560	\$208,321	\$1,261,960	\$1,067,459
CTR w/o Implementation Fee	\$829,191	\$1,297,510	\$1,580,576	\$5,795,448	\$5,017,386
Savings	\$174,864	\$291,935	\$362,696	\$1,416,335	\$1,221,834

Feedback from Stakeholders

Interviews with Kansas justice-system stakeholders—including Judge Brenda Stoss, Judge Karen Arnold-Burger, and Leavenworth County Sheriff Andrew Dedeke—reflect broad agreement that FTAs are a persistent and costly problem, even though comprehensive statewide data are limited. All three described FTAs as a major driver of warrant issuance, delayed case resolution, increased administrative workload, and downstream costs to courts, law enforcement, and jails. Judge Stoss and Judge Arnold-Burger affirmed that many FTAs stem from logistical and cognitive barriers such as forgetfulness, transportation challenges, work and childcare conflicts, and system overload rather than intentional noncompliance, and both cited national and local experience indicating that court text reminders consistently reduce FTAs, though they do not eliminate them. Sheriff Dedeke expressed initial skepticism rooted in accountability concerns and implementation burdens but acknowledged—based on data and his office’s experience with reminder systems for offender registration—that text reminders are effective for a substantial subset of individuals. Across perspectives, stakeholders stressed that reminder systems are most effective when court-administered, designed to minimize administrative and liability burdens, and paired with clear metrics for measuring impact. Consensus held that even partial reductions in FTAs can yield meaningful efficiency and cost benefits.

Implementation in Kansas

Kansas is capable of implementing a statewide CTR system, and the policy framework already exists. Legislation introduced in the 2026 session, HB 2723, would direct the Kansas Supreme Court to develop or procure a reminder program for criminal and infraction cases, automatically enroll individuals with valid contact information, and send advance reminders and missed-appearance notifications using multiple communication methods.¹⁹ This structure reflects evidence-based practice: automatic enrollment, repeated reminders before court, and rapid follow-up after a missed date.

Successful rollout will depend primarily on consistent collection and verification of contact information across the justice process. Law enforcement agencies, correctional facilities, and courts should collect phone numbers and email addresses at every touchpoint—from citation issuance through court hearings—and securely transmit that information to the reminder system. Kansas already uses the Odyssey Case Manager system, which is capable of supporting automated messaging.²⁰ This existing infrastructure will make implementation costs modest and administrative burdens low.

To ensure effectiveness and accountability, Kansas should pair implementation with standardized message content, court-administered delivery, and statewide performance tracking. Establishing uniform metrics on failure-to-appear rates, warrant issuance, and case resolution timelines will allow courts and policymakers to measure impact across counties and refine the program over time. With existing technical capacity and a clear legislative framework, Kansas can quickly implement court text reminders and achieve meaningful reductions in missed court appearances and related system costs.

Conclusion

Failure to appear in court is not a problem of indifference or evasion; it is most often a problem of communication, complexity, and constraint.^{21 22 23} The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that missed court dates are predictable and preventable. Court text reminders address the most common reasons people fail to appear by delivering clear, timely, and actionable information in a format that people already use and trust. Jurisdictions across the country have shown that when reminders are implemented using evidence-based practices,

¹⁹ H.B. 2723. 2025 Biennium. 2026 Reg. Sess. (Kansas 2026).

https://kslegislature.gov/li/b2025_26/measures/documents/hb2723_00_0000.pdf

²⁰ Arnold-Burger, K., et al. (2020, November 6). Pretrial Justice Task Force Report to the Kansas Supreme Court. Topeka, KS; Kansas Judicial Branch.

https://kscourts.gov/KSCourts/media/KsCourts/court%20administration/Pretrial_Justice_Task_Force/PJTFRreporttoKansasSupremeCourt.pdf

²¹ Dholakia, N. (2024, February 13). *Millions of People in the U.S. Miss Their Court Date, With Dire Consequences*. Vera Institute of Justice. <https://www.vera.org/news/millions-of-people-in-the-u-s-miss-their-court-date-with-dire-consequences>

²² Corey, E., & Lo, P. (2019, January 9). *The 'Failure to Appear' Fallacy*. The Appeal. <https://theappeal.org/the-failure-to-appear-fallacy/>

²³ McAuliffe, S., Hammer, S., Fishbane, A., & Wilk, A. (2023, May). National Guide to Improving Court Appearances. New York City; ideas 42. <https://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/national-guide-improving-court-appearance.pdf>

particularly automatic enrollment and a 7-3-1 cadence, FTA rates fall substantially, warrants decline, jail admissions decrease, and court operations become more efficient.

Kansas is well-positioned to realize these benefits. An existing case management system already supports text reminders, implementation costs are modest, and early data from responding criminal justice organizations underscore the scale of the problem and the opportunity for improvement. While gaps in statewide data collection limit precise projections, available evidence strongly suggests that a comprehensive, opt-out CTR system would reduce unnecessary incarceration, lower administrative burdens on courts and law enforcement, and generate meaningful cost savings for taxpayers. More importantly, it would improve fairness and access to justice by helping Kansans meet their legal obligations without exposing them to avoidable and destabilizing consequences.²⁴ Court text reminders are not a radical reform. They are a practical, proven tool that Kansas should adopt now to strengthen the efficiency, legitimacy, and humanity of its justice system.

²⁴ McCann, S. (2023, November 29). *How "Collateral Consequences" Keep People Trapped in the Legal System*. Vera Institute of Justice. <https://www.vera.org/news/how-collateral-consequences-keep-people-trapped-in-the-legal-system>