



Sonoma County Pretrial Electronic Monitoring Evaluation

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Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to understand how pretrial EM is currently used, the outcomes associated with its use, and whether monitoring could be used more strategically while maintaining public safety and court appearance.

Why This Evaluation Is Needed

Electronic monitoring (EM) is one tool within a larger, interconnected pretrial release system — not a standalone solution. The Public Safety Assessment (PSA) informs risk but does **not** determine whether EM should be imposed. That distinction matters greatly for how resources are allocated and how individuals are supervised.

Who Receives EM?

Sonoma County needs local evidence on who currently receives EM, under what circumstances, and whether patterns of use align with risk, case circumstances, and intended monitoring purposes.

How Long Do They Stay?

Duration of EM placement is a key policy question — are individuals monitored longer than necessary, and are structured review points built into the process?

Is Step-Down Appropriate?

A structured step-down process may reduce monitoring burden while maintaining public safety outcomes, but only if supported by local data and clear policy.

What the Literature Shows

The evidence is mixed and context-dependent.

No single finding on electronic monitoring applies universally. Outcomes vary significantly based on local implementation conditions and policy choices. What works in one county may not translate to another.

Population Served

Risk level, charge type, and individual circumstances all shape whether EM produces positive or neutral outcomes.

Monitoring Technology

GPS, alcohol monitoring, and passive vs. active tracking differ in intrusiveness, accuracy, and operational demands.

EM vs. Jail Placement

Whether EM replaces pre-trial detention or adds a new supervision layer has profound implications for outcomes, equity and cost (Belur et al., 2020; County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors Management Audit Division, 2026).

Local Policies & Practices

How violations are defined, verified, and responded to varies widely — and this variation affects measured outcomes.

Potential Benefits of Electronic Monitoring

Research suggests EM can produce meaningful benefits — but only when used **strategically and with clear intent**.

Community Release Support

EM can facilitate release for individuals who might otherwise remain in pretrial detention, preserving employment, housing, and family ties.

Reduced Custody Reliance

When used appropriately, EM may reduce reliance on jail in cases where detention is not necessary for public safety.

Support for Court Appearance

Monitoring and structured supervision may support court appearance for some populations and under some implementation conditions.

Less Restrictive Option

EM offers a graduated response between unsupervised release and detention — an important middle ground in a proportional pretrial system.

Benefits depend heavily on **who is being monitored, why, and how** — local evaluation is essential to determine whether these benefits are being realized in Sonoma County.

Risks and Limitations of Pre-Trial EM

Without careful implementation and policy guardrails, EM can widen the net of supervision and create significant burdens on participants, particularly lower risk ones and operational demands for agencies.

System-Level Risks

- Increased technical violations unrelated to new criminal activity
- Net-widening: expanding supervision to those who may not need it
- Unclear cost savings if EM does not replace jail beds
- Inconsistent staff responses to device alerts
- Misalignment with PSA scoring and risk

Participant-Level Burdens

- **Employment:** Curfews and monitoring may conflict with work schedules
- **Health:** Device-related skin Irritation or discomfort may occur ([Sanders, 2023](#)).
- **Housing:** Stable housing required for compliance
- **Transportation:** Zone restrictions may limit access to services
- **Caregiving:** Monitoring can interfere with family responsibilities
- **Technology access:** Charging and connectivity requirements create barriers

Why Implementation Is the Deciding Factor

Electronic monitoring is not simply a device — it is a **system of decisions, practices, and human judgment**. The outcomes experienced by participants and the community are shaped at every stage of that system.

01

Eligibility & Placement

Examine how eligibility and placement decisions are made, documented, and applied across cases.

02

Alert Verification

Agencies must have clear protocols for who reviews alerts, how quickly, and what actions follow.

03

Case Review & Step-Down

Examine how cases are reviewed over time and whether structured review or step down opportunities may be appropriate.

04

Participant Circumstances

Individual housing, employment, and caregiving situations must inform both placement and ongoing review decisions.

What This Evaluation Will Examine

The evaluation is structured around five core research domains — each designed to produce actionable findings for Sonoma County's pretrial policy and practice decisions.

- 1. How is electronic monitoring utilized and administered in Sonoma County?**
2. Does the utilization and administration of electronic monitoring differ across participant or case groups, and what factors may explain those differences?
- 3. What public-safety, court-compliance, and monitoring outcomes do participants experience while on electronic monitoring?**
4. What does electronic monitoring cost Sonoma County, how are those resources used, and how do costs compare with incarceration in cases where EM serves as an alternative to custody?
- 5. Are people being monitored at the correct level based on risk of public safety and court appearance?**

Evaluation Approach: Mixed-Methods Design

A mixed-methods approach ensures the evaluation captures both **what is happening** in Sonoma County's pretrial EM system and **why those patterns may be occurring** — producing richer, more actionable findings than administrative data alone can provide.

Policy & Document Review

Systematic review of existing EM policies, procedures, and protocols to assess alignment between written policy and actual practice & comparison to best practices in the literature.

Participant Perspectives (If Feasible)

Interviews/surveys with individuals currently or recently on EM to capture lived experience, barriers to compliance, and perspectives on supervision burden.

Stakeholder Interviews

Structured interviews with pretrial staff, judges, prosecutors, defense, and other system stakeholders to understand implementation from multiple perspectives.

Administrative Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis of EM participation records, court outcomes, violation filings, and jail booking data to identify patterns, disparities, and trends between 2018 and 2025. A comparison group (pretrial release but not on EM) will be considered if feasible.

Key Data Sources



The evaluation team has identified a comprehensive set of anticipated data sources spanning the full pretrial EM process — from initial booking through case disposition and termination.

Operational & Supervision Data

- **BI EM participation records** — placement dates, device type, duration, alerts
- **PSA scores and pretrial supervision data** — risk level at placement
- **Termination records** — termination of pretrial monitoring (reasons for and timing of EM removal).
- **Sheriff's Office booking and release records** — jail utilization context and rearrest outcomes.
- **Cost information** — program expenditures and staffing

Court & Policy Data

- **Court records** — appearance rates, case outcomes, and case resolution dates.
- **Pretrial violation filings** — failure to appear warrants, revocations and removals.
- **Policies and procedures** — written protocols governing EM use
- **Stakeholder interviews** — qualitative context for quantitative patterns

Data availability and limitations will be confirmed during the initial phase of the project before the full analysis plan is finalized.

Evaluation Timeline

Evaluation Phases, Timeline and Key Activities	
Phase	Key Activities
1. Policy, Data & Process Review (October 26-Jan 2027)	Review policies and procedures, confirm data sources, construct EM episodes; conduct initial interviews; finalize feasible outcome and comparison design and measures.
2. Utilization, Decision-Making & Equity (Nov 26 - March 27)	Examine who receives EM, monitoring level/type, duration, trends, decision-points, discretion, and differences across groups.
3. Outcomes, Duration & Comparison (Nov 26 - March 27)	Examine public safety, FTA, violations and custody outcomes; timing of adverse events; potential review/step-down patterns; time-to-event and comparison groups where feasible.
4. Cost & Resource Analysis (Jan 27 - April 27)	Examine EM costs, monitoring intensity and duration, resource use, and appropriate comparisons with jail costs.
5. Interviews (Jan 27 - April 27)	Throughout the evaluation interviews will be conducted to better understand application of, and decision making around, pretrial EM use. Questions may be informed by evolving data analysis.
6. Synthesis & Recommendations (April - May 2027)	Integrate findings and develop practical recommendations for policy, consistency, review/step-down, resource use, and data improvement and present to stakeholders.

Questions & Discussion

1. Does the proposed evaluation address the right questions and priorities for Sonoma County's pretrial EM system?

2. Are there outcomes that matter most when determining whether EM is working as intended?

- a. For example: court appearance, new criminal activity, violations, and/or revocation/return to custody.

3. Where is the most important discretion in the current process? Are there particular priorities, decision points or implementation issues we should pay more attention to?

4. What findings would be most useful to you for future EM policy, practice, and resource decisions?

- a. For example, clearer placement criteria, structured review points, step-down guidance, resource planning, or better ongoing data collection.

Literature Review / Landscape Scan References

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Thank you for your time and engagement!

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