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Justice Dept. hopes new programs will cut down on prison populations

By Phillip Swarts - The Washington Times - Monday, February 2, 2015

With the nation's prison population in decline — albeit slowly — the Justice Department is hoping they can continue the trend with an additional $217 million in funding to combat recidivism.

The nation's law enforcement branch is asking for a total of $8.8 billion for the nation's prison populations, with a $146 million increase from last year focused on preventing recidivism and helping inmates reenter society.

The agency hopes to "contain incarceration costs over the long term by facilitating inmates' transition into society in order to reduce recidivism rates, increase public safety and strength communities," a statement said.

Those efforts would include more vocational training for inmates, an increase in the number of staff focused on mental health, and efforts to support inmates reconnecting with their families before being released.

The department hopes the focus on stopping inmates from committing more crimes will help combat the overcrowding of the nation's prison population. There are currently 210,000 inmates in the U.S., according to the federal Bureau of Prisons. The U.S. is considered to have the highest prison population in the world, roughly 25 percent of all inmates.

The bureau has been focusing on preventing prison overcrowding, which this year stands at about 30 percent for prisons and 50 percent for high-security prisons.

Budget officials said that while there are no current plans to purchase or build a new prison facility, they hope that preventing inmates from reentering the system will cut down on prison populations. By the end of 2015, the bureau estimates there could be 5,100 fewer inmates the previous year.

The Justice Department budget proposal also includes about $71 million to hire new prison security guards, increase access to medical treatment for the prison system, and repair and refurbish existing prisons.

Read more: http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/feb/2/justice-dept-hopes-programs-cut-prison-populations/#ixzz3QhumJD8e
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