Correctional Costs

A Primer for Law and Budget Writers
TWENTY YEARS OF RISING COSTS

Between fiscal years 1987 and 2007, total state general fund expenditures on corrections rose 315 percent.

![Graph showing rising costs from 1987 to 2007. The y-axis represents expenditures in billions, ranging from $10.62 billion to $44.06 billion. The x-axis represents years from 1987 to 2007. The green line represents general fund expenditures, and the green line represents inflation-adjusted expenditures. The graph shows a steady increase in expenditures over the years.](chart.png)
Correctional population \times \text{Cost per capita} = \text{Correctional cost}
Correctional population

• Not driven by
  • Crime
  • Resident population trends

• Driven by
  • Policies that affect admissions and time served
  • Both can be influenced by lawmakers

“...changes in crime trends or in... arrests per crime contributed virtually nothing to the increase in incarceration rates [from 1980-2010]. Rather, the growth can be attributed about equally to the two policy factors of prison commitments per arrest and increases in time served.”

National Academies of Science
The largest increase in prison admissions from FY17 to FY18 was new commitments followed by people entering prison due to community supervision technical violations.

Prison Admissions Types

- **New Offender Commitment**
  - FY '17: 250
  - FY '18: 300

- **Supervision Technical Violation**
  - FY '17: 600
  - FY '18: 650

- **Supervision New Conviction**
  - FY '17: 200
  - FY '18: 215

- **Returning Inmate**
  - FY '17: 100
  - FY '18: 120

**17.7% increase** in new offender commitments from FY17 to FY18 (50 additional admissions)

**4.2% increase** in supervision technical violation admissions (24 additional admissions)

Source: Montana Department of Corrections Monthly JR Tracking spreadsheet, 8-8-2018
Montana
Based on Montana data from 2019

Change in revocations

Total people in prison projected in years

Outcomes

-120
Fewer people in prison

-$505K
Reduced costs

Implementation period
9 months

Projections
5 years

-100%
266 violations resulting in incarceration

-31%
Cost per Capita

- Labor
  - CO recruitment/retention
  - Pay and work environment
- Physical plant
  - Aging facilities
  - Delayed maintenance...
  - ...to fiberoptics
- Health care
  - Aging population
  - Shortages of MH and nursing staff
  - COVID

Figure 5: The Number of Older Prisoners Grew by 264%, 1999-2015

Percentage change in sentenced prison populations by age group

Note: The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates the age distribution of prisoners using data from the Federal Justice Statistics Program and statistics that states voluntarily submit to the National Corrections Reporting Program. State participation in this program has varied, which may have caused year-to-year fluctuations in the bureau's national estimates, but this does not affect long-term trend comparisons. From 2009-13, the number of states submitting data increased substantially, which might have contributed to the year-over-year increase in the national estimate between those years.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics
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What Can Be Done?

Population
• If populations haven’t moved with crime, what policies or practices are responsible?
• Regional variation?
• Who keeps an eye on this, and are their policy recommendations valued?

Cost per capita
• Short-term hiring and referral incentives
• Long-term impact of staffing shortages?
• Facilities: retrofit, repurpose, build?
• Healthcare via external contract or brought in-house?
Discussion
Correctional population \times \text{Cost per capita} = \text{Correctional cost}
41% of prison admissions are for supervision violations

2017 Prison Admissions
30% technical total

- Violation total: 59%
- Non-violation total: 30%
- Probation total: 16%
- Parole total: 14%
- Probation new offense: 25%
- Parole new offense: 9%
- Probation technical: 9%
- Parole technical: 2%

34% of people in prison are incarcerated for supervision violations

2017 Prison Population
22% technical total

- Violation total: 66%
- Non-violation total: 25%
- Probation total: 15%
- Parole total: 7%
- Probation new offense: 34%
- Parole new offense: 9%
- Probation technical: 9%
- Parole technical: 2%

Source: https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/confined-costly/