



Recent and Projected Growth in the Vermont Prison Population

Governor Douglas, legislative leaders, and the chief justice requested assistance from the Council of State Governments Justice Center to analyze the factors currently driving the projected growth in the state prison population and to identify policy options that can increase public safety and reduce spending on corrections in Vermont.

The Justice Center contracted with nationally-recognized experts at the JFA Institute, a Washington DC-based criminal justice research firm that has produced prison population forecasts for more than 30 states. Utilizing data from the Department of Corrections, JFA experts employed a computerized simulation model which mimics the admissions and releases of people in prison over a ten-year period, to produce a data-driven projection of the prison population.

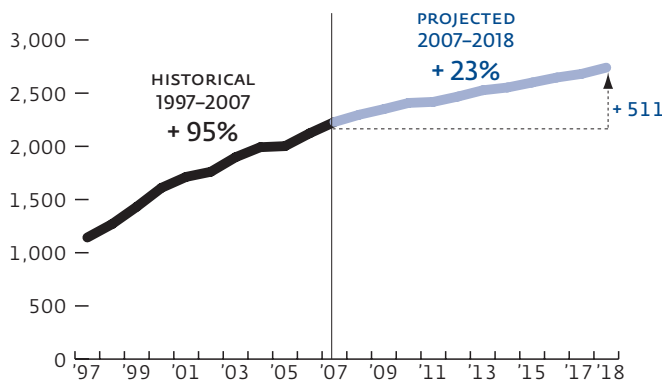
VERMONT'S PRISON POPULATION HAS INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY IN RECENT YEARS.

- The prison population doubled between 1996 and 2006, from 1,058 to 2,123, while crime rates did not increase.¹
- During this ten year period, Vermont's incarceration rate (as a percent of population) increased 80 percent. Nationally, the incarceration rate increased 18 percent.²
- Vermont's spending on corrections increased 129 percent, from \$48 million in FY1996 to \$130 million in FY2008.³

VERMONT'S PRISON POPULATION IS PROJECTED TO CONTINUE TO GROW SIGNIFICANTLY.

- If current trends continue, the state prison population will increase 23 percent by 2018, adding an additional 511 persons to the Vermont Department of Corrections's incarcerated population.⁴
- Vermont's prison population is projected to grow faster over a five-year period than several other states in the Northeast including Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island.⁵
- The projected growth in the prison population reflects an 11 percent increase in the number of pretrial detainees and a 25 percent increase in the number of people sentenced to prison by 2018.⁶
- Vermont's prison population is projected to grow approximately 3 times faster over the next ten years than the projected growth in the resident population.⁷

Vermont Prison Population Projection



UNLESS POLICYMAKERS ACT, THE STATE WILL NEED TO APPROPRIATE AN ADDITIONAL \$82–\$206 MILLION OVER TEN YEARS TO ACCOMMODATE THE GROWTH IN THE PRISON POPULATION.⁸

- State policymakers will need to contract for an additional 511 beds out-of-state by 2018 or build additional facilities in-state to house the growing population.
- The estimated cost of accommodating the growth projected in the prison population using out of state beds is an additional \$82 million over the next 10 years. This estimate is conservative, as it assumes that current out of state housing costs will hold steady over the next ten years, although they are subject to change.
- If the Department of Correction constructs and operates additional beds, costs will likely exceed \$206 million over the next ten years. This estimate, however, is based on the current annual per person cost of Vermont correctional facilities and will vary dependent on whether and how state policymakers might decide to build additional correctional facilities.

HIGH RATES OF RECIDIVISM ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROJECTED INCREASE IN THE PRISON POPULATION.

- 50 percent of those released from prison in Vermont in 2003 were reconvicted within three years.
- The number of people released from correctional facilities in Vermont increased 23 percent from 2001–2006.
- If trends in prison admissions from the past two years remain constant, the prison system will experience a modest increase in prison admissions each year of 0.8 percent, contributing to the increase in the prison population.

1. Vermont Department of Corrections, *Facts and Figures 2006*, 2006.

2. William J. Sabol, Todd D. Minton, and Paige M. Harrison, *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2006*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, January 2007; Darrell K. Gilliard and Allen J. Beck, *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 1996*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, January 1997.

3. Ibid, Vermont Department of Corrections.

4. JFA Institute, *Vermont Prison Population Projection 2008–2018*, November 2007.

5. Public Safety Performance Project, *Public Safety, Public Spending: Forecasting America's Prison Population 2007–2011*, Washington, D.C.: Public Safety

Performance Project, The Pew Charitable Trusts, February 2007.

6. JFA Institute, *Vermont Prison Population Projection 2008–2018*, November 2007.

7. U.S. Census Bureau, *U.S. Census Bureau: Interim Projections of the Total Population for the United States and States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2030*, April 2005.

8. JFA Institute, *Vermont Prison Population Projection 2008–2018*, November 2007. Vermont Department of Corrections.

About this Report

The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus driven strategies, informed by available evidence, to increase public safety and strengthen communities.

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sentencing and corrections systems, providing nonpartisan research, analysis and expertise to help states identify data-driven, fiscally responsible options for protecting public safety, holding offenders accountable, and controlling corrections costs.

Methodology

This prison population forecast was generated by the JFA Institute, a Washington DC-based consulting firm. Under the direction of Dr. James Austin, JFA experts utilized the Wizard 2000 model, a computerized simulation model which mimics the admissions and releases of people in prison over a ten-year period based on the current state sentencing structure, recent inmate population trends, and computer-extracted files provided by the Vermont Department of Corrections. To produce the projections, the Wizard 2000 model takes into account external (demographic, socio-economic, and crime trends) and internal factors (the criminal justice system's authority to release, recommit, and offer programs that may reduce recidivism).

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