

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Public Safety Performance Project?

The Public Safety Performance Project helps states advance fiscally sound, data-driven policies and practices in the criminal and juvenile justice systems that protect public safety, hold offenders accountable and control corrections costs. An initiative of The Pew Center on the States, the project launched its adult corrections work in 2006 and its juvenile work in 2012.

What does the project do?

The project supports efforts in select states that want a better public safety return on their corrections spending. Along with our partners, we identify drivers of cost and growth and conduct system assessments to identify options for reform, drawing on solid research, promising approaches and best practices in states. The project also helps state officials, practitioners and others across the country share state-of-the-art knowledge and innovative ideas through national research and publications; policy evaluations; public opinion surveys; national, regional, multi-state, and state-level policy forums; and online information about what works.

What does it mean for a state to participate in the Public Safety Performance Project?

The project collaborates with a small number of states each year that demonstrate commitment to a data-driven “justice reinvestment” process. Selected states receive intensive nonpartisan research, analysis and assistance from Pew staff and other respected experts in the field, including the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The project does not advocate predetermined solutions to a state’s problems, but rather works in partnership with its leaders to pinpoint the state’s particular challenges, draw on the best research and lessons learned from other states, and tailor cost-effective, data-driven policy options.

What does that assistance look like?

Technical assistance is matched to each state’s circumstances, but generally is provided in three phases:

- 1. Data Analysis/System Assessment:** To ensure that policy deliberations are grounded in objective facts, independent experts assess the state’s corrections population and costs, identifying what specific factors have contributed to growth and projecting what the numbers will be in 5 to 10 years without policy reform. National experts also evaluate key components of the corrections system to assess how well the state is implementing evidence-based practices to reduce recidivism.
- 2. Policy Development/Stakeholder Engagement:** Once state-specific data is collected and verified, staff facilitates the development of consensus on a set of policy options with an interbranch, bipartisan working group of state leaders. Key criminal justice system stakeholders, including prosecutors, crime victim advocates, police, sheriffs and other county officials, are integrally involved throughout the process, participating in open working group meetings and roundtables or contact groups designed to ensure all policy options are transparent and thoroughly vetted.
- 3. Public Awareness and Education:** Following the achievement of consensus on a policy reform package, the project helps the state working group ensure its recommendations are adopted, raising public awareness through publications, communications with policy makers and the media, and other activities.

In some states, technical assistance also is supported by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) within the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs. BJA also supports implementation by providing assistance to states that have adopted criminal sentencing and corrections reforms.

What are some examples of the project's work in states?

A few examples of our state successes in the criminal justice system include:

Arkansas (2011)

- *Action:* The omnibus Public Safety Improvement Act passed the Senate unanimously and the House 79-14 in March 2011. The law, produced from recommendations crafted by a bipartisan, interbranch working group, will concentrate prison space on violent and career offenders and reduce recidivism by steering lower-level offenders into strengthened probation and parole programs.
- *Impact:* The Act is projected to save Arkansas \$875 million in prison construction and operation expenses through 2020. Some of those prison savings will be reinvested in evidence-based community supervision and programs designed to reduce recidivism and hold offenders accountable.

South Carolina (2010)

- *Action:* The Omnibus Crime Reduction and Sentencing Reform Act changes numerous criminal penalties, increasing prison terms for some high-risk offenders, while reducing it for lower-risk non-violent offenders. It focuses probation and parole supervision resources on high-risk offenders and improves the transition of lower-risk offenders back into the community. The bill was developed by a legislative commission.
- *Impact:* The law is projected to save the state up to \$241 million over five years.

Texas (2007)

- *Action:* In 2007, Texas was facing a \$2 billion prison expansion but instead the legislature approved an historic investment of over \$241 million in alternative sentencing and residential treatment programs. The state also boosted its parole grant rate.
- *Impact:* The new strategy has saved Texas nearly all of the projected \$2 billion. Since the enactment of the reforms, parole revocations are down 25%, and the crime rate in Texas has fallen to its lowest level since the early 1970s.

What are some examples of the project's research?

The project has produced groundbreaking research on the size and cost of America's corrections system (*1 in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, *1 in 31: The Long Reach of American Corrections*, and *Prison Count 2010*), trends in national and state recidivism rates (*State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of American Corrections*), and trends in length of stay in prison (*Time Served: The High Cost, Low Return of Longer Prison Terms*).

Project-sponsored public opinion research has revealed overwhelming bipartisan support for a variety of policy changes that shift many non-violent offenders from prison to more effective, less expensive alternatives. Other project publications highlight the perspectives of business leaders, corrections directors, and survivors of crime.

For links to these documents and more information about the project, visit www.pewstates.org/publicsafety.

Pew Center on the States

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