

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT INITIATIVE (JRI)

Alaska

Leah Sakala and Samantha Harvell

Between 2005 and 2014, the number of people incarcerated in Alaska's unified corrections system rose by 27 percent, nearly three times the rate of the state's total population. The state predicted its prison system would continue growing and would require 1,416 additional beds by 2024. With technical assistance through JRI, Alaska enacted SB 91 in 2016 to address this growth, improve public safety, and make its justice system more efficient. The Alaska Legislature subsequently passed SB 54 in 2017, HB 312 in 2018, and HB 49 in 2019, bills that rolled back nearly all JRI reforms.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through SB 91, Alaska:

Improved Pretrial Practices

Created a new Pretrial Enforcement Division within the Department of Corrections to oversee pretrial practices, and adopted a validated risk assessment tool to guide pretrial release decisionmaking.

Strengthened Probation and Parole Supervision

Effectively targeted supervision resources by decreasing the proportion of people on supervision at low or medium risk of reoffending and decreasing average probation and parole officer caseloads from 46 to 37 between fiscal years 2017 and 2019.

Increased the rate of successful probation and parole discharges from 66 to 88 percent between 2016 and 2018.

Decreased the share of people in prison for a probation violation from 21 to 12 percent between fiscal years 2015 and 2019.

Invested In Strategies to Reduce Recidivism

Alaska invested \$18 million in a range of strategies to promote successful implementation and reduce recidivism. These included expanding and strengthening behavioral health treatment programming in prisons and the community and improving victims' services and violence prevention.

LASTING IMPACT OF JRI

Alaska transformed its approach to pretrial services through JRI, but has since reversed most key changes.

Through JRI, Alaska overhauled its approach to pretrial services to employ evidence-based practices and reduce unnecessary detention. Data showed the pretrial detention population had increased 81 percent between 2005 and 2014, and that half of those detained had nonviolent charges. Alaska's JRI legislation created and invested \$3 million in a Pretrial Enforcement Division within the Department of Corrections. As part of this initiative, Alaska adopted a validated pretrial risk assessment tool to support pretrial decisionmaking based on risk, required new pretrial staff to create individual pretrial reports, and required courts to send court date reminders to released defendants to increase appearance rates. However, subsequent legislation reversed nearly all JRI reforms, including those related to pretrial decisionmaking. The Pretrial Enforcement Division still exists and is calculating risk assessment scores and supervising people released pretrial, but judges are no longer required to make release decisions in accordance with defendants' risk scores as required under SB 91. Time will tell how these policy changes impact case processing but the program represents a significant shift in the state's approach to pretrial supervision.

SAVINGS/REINVESTMENT

Savings/averted costs	State JRI investment
\$18,000,000	\$43,254,700

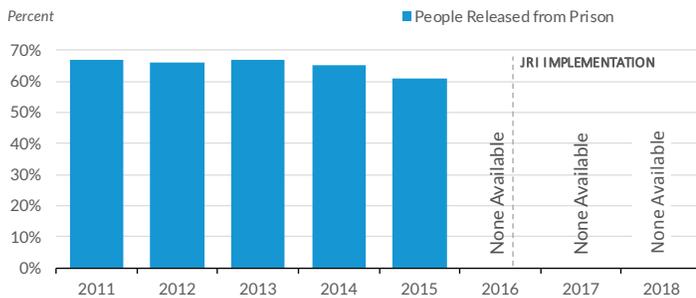
Violent and Property Crime Rates, 2007–18



Source: FBI, Uniform Crime Reporting Program (2007–2018).

- ↑ Violent crime rates were increasing before JRI and continued to increase after reform.
- ↑ Property crime rates were increasing before JRI and continued to increase after reform.

Recidivism Rate: Reincarceration within Three Years

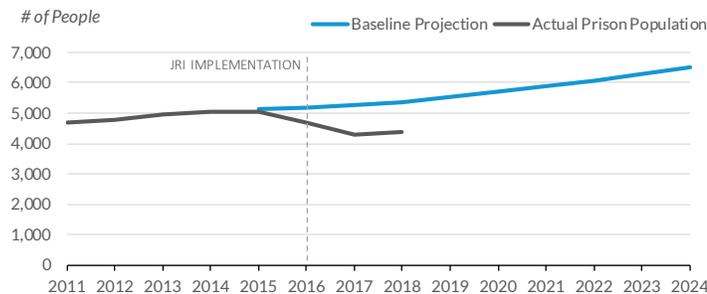


Source: Alaska DOC presentation to ACJC, March 2019.

Note: Includes people imprisoned on a felony conviction, released in each calendar year, and reincarcerated on any offense (including misdemeanor or felony offense or supervision violation) within three years.

- ↓ Between 2011 and 2015, recidivism rates declined for people released from prison.

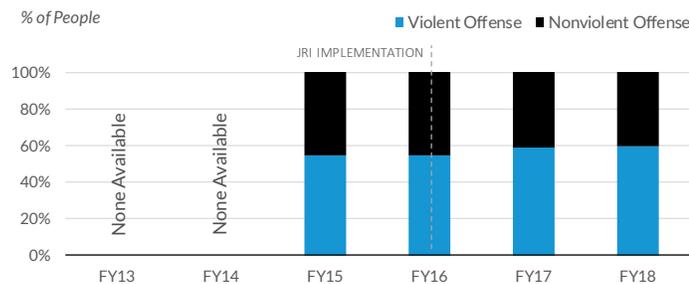
Prison Population



Source: Alaska Department of Corrections DOC Population, 2010-18 (actual), 2019-24 (projected).

- ↓ In 2018, there were approximately 1,000 fewer people in Alaska prisons than projected before reform.

Prison Composition



Source: Alaska Criminal Justice Commission, 2018 Annual Report.

- ▬ In 2018, 60 percent of people in prison were there for a violent offense, compared with 55 percent in 2015.

*The data in this summary describe trends and provide additional context on system changes pre- and post-reform. Indicators shown here track high-level changes in state justice systems and do not necessarily demonstrate the impact of any specific reform, including JRI policy and practice changes. Visit urban.is/jri to see detailed sources for information in this fact sheet.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-ZB-BX-K005 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.