

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT INITIATIVE (JRI)

Montana

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Between FY 2008 and FY 2015, Montana’s prison population increased 11 percent and was projected to grow another 13 percent by FY 2023 at a minimum cost of \$51 million. The statewide jail population also grew 69 percent between 2011 and 2013. Struggling with prisons and jails that were at or above capacity, Montana enacted nine justice reinvestment bills in May 2017 with technical assistance through JRI to reduce recidivism, increase public safety, and prioritize prison and community supervision resources for people at greatest risk of reoffending.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through 2017 JRI legislation, Montana:

Focused Prison Space on Serious and Violent Offenses by Decreasing Penalties for Less Serious Crimes and Increasing Opportunities for Parole

Created a tiered sentencing structure which reduced penalties and increased thresholds for various property crimes (e.g., theft, forgery, and identity theft) and reduced penalties for some drug offenses (e.g., criminal possession and distribution of marijuana).

Created new parole board processes that increased opportunities for qualified, parole-ready people to be released before the end of their sentence.

Adopted Evidence-Based Practices Across Justice System Decision Points

Montana’s Department of Corrections standardized a process to adopt evidence-based programming in facilities and conduct ongoing quality assurance.

The Montana Supreme Court adopted the Arnold Foundation’s Public Safety (pretrial) Assessment and has piloted it in seven counties representing 70 percent of felony cases statewide; more than 7,000 assessments were completed by February 2020.

Invested in Strategies to Reduce Recidivism

Updated sanctions and incentives guidelines to better hold people supervised in the community accountable and reduce recidivism, contributing to a 5.7 percent increase in successful releases from supervision between FY 2017-18.

Created a professional behavioral health peer support specialist certification with rigorous application and training requirements to improve access to quality behavioral health treatment for justice-involved people in rural areas.

LASTING IMPACT OF JRI

Through JRI, Montana has **piloted a program to remove barriers to housing for people who are justice-involved and expanded Medicaid coverage to include behavioral health peer support services.**

Under S.B. 65 (one of several JRI bills), the Montana Board of Crime Control established and invested more than \$390,000 in a pilot program to support local efforts to remove barriers to housing for people with current or prior justice system involvement. The first round of grants was awarded to three counties that used the funding to hire local program coordinators and housing specialists and conduct outreach to landlords and property managers. The state program also provided assistance to qualifying participants seeking affordable housing and employment. In 2019, Montana’s state legislature authorized behavioral health peer support services to be reimbursed by Medicaid and appropriated \$7.1 million to support those services. This policy change was recommended by the State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee, tasked during JRI with addressing challenges specific to Native Americans in the state justice system to increase access to tribal resources and improve reentry for Native Americans who are justice-involved.

SAVINGS/REINVESTMENT

Savings/averted costs	State JRI investment
Unknown	\$3,765,724

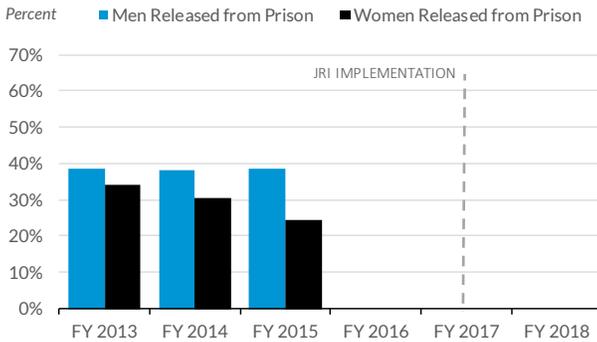
Violent and Property Crime Rates, 2008–18



Source: FBI, Uniform Crime Reporting Program (2008–2018).

- Violent crime was increasing before JRI and was steady after reform.
- Property crime was steady before JRI and decreased after reform.

Recidivism: Reincarceration Within Three Years

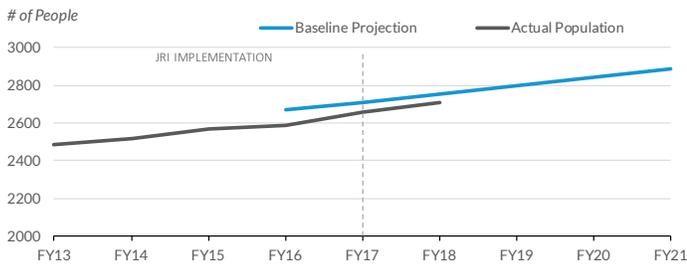


Source: Montana Department of Corrections 2019 Biennial Report.

Note: Three-year rates are not yet available for people released from prison after 2015.

- Recidivism rates remained steady for men but decreased for women released from prison between 2013 and 2015.

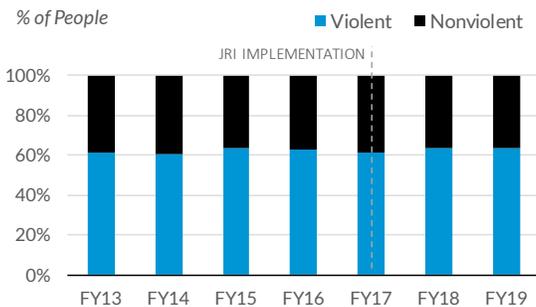
Prison Population



Source: Montana Department of Corrections monthly justice reinvestment tracking spreadsheet, December 2019; unavailable online.

- In 2018, there were approximately 43 fewer people in Montana prisons than projected pre-reform.

Prison Composition



Source: Data provided by the Montana Department of Corrections (unavailable online).

- In FY 2019, 64 percent of people in prison were there for a violent offense, compared with 62 percent in FY 2013.

*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 urbn.is/JRI to see detailed sources for information in this fact sheet.