

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT INITIATIVE (JRI)

Rhode Island

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In 2015, Rhode Island had more people on probation per capita than all but one other US state, and its prison population was projected to increase 11 percent by FY 2025 at cost of \$28 million. To address these challenges, Rhode Island began a Justice Reinvestment approach in 2015. In 2016, the Rhode Island Superior Court enacted several probation-related policy changes to rules and sentencing benchmarks. The state subsequently enacted six bills during the 2017 legislative session to further improve supervision practices, restructure sentencing for felony property crimes, and promote rehabilitation and treatment.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through JRI, Rhode Island:

Strengthened and Streamlined Probation and Parole Supervision

Focused supervision resources on people at highest risk of reoffending by limiting probation terms to three years (with some exceptions for serious offenses), and created a process to shorten probation sentences for people at low risk of recidivating who comply with supervision terms.

Required the use of risk and needs screening and assessments and behavioral health assessments to inform probation and parole decisions, including supervision intensity, case management, and treatment objectives.

Implemented evidence-based training programs for probation and parole officers, including training on recognizing symptoms of substance use and mental health needs and referring people to treatment facilities.

Focused Prison Space on Serious and Violence Offenses by Limiting Admissions for Less Serious Ones

Created a graduated penalty structure for larceny crimes and reduced the maximum penalty for all felony assaults not resulting in bodily harm from twenty years to six years.

Implemented a diversion program through Rhode Island Superior Court that provides people charged with less serious offenses and limited prior offenses with supervision and services as an alternative to traditional case processing.

Increased Accountability to and Quality of Services for Victims of Crime

Increased benefits for victims of crime by expanding the types of expenses reimbursable by the Crime Victim Compensation Program to include medical services, counseling services, and funeral services and increasing the time frame to report crimes that are eligible for reimbursement.

INNOVATION THROUGH JRI

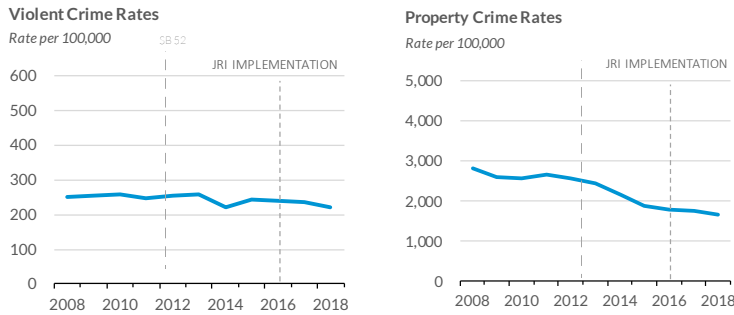
Rhode Island implemented probation changes through administrative court rules, laying the groundwork for more comprehensive JRI legislative system improvements.

Rhode Island is among the few states that enacted significant JRI policy and practice changes through administrative changes to court rules, illustrating a unique path to system improvements. Rhode Island initially embarked on JRI in 2015. When the legislature failed to pass the full JRI package during the 2016 session, the Rhode Island Superior Court passed and adopted amendments to the Supreme Court Rules of Criminal Procedures and Superior Court Sentencing Benchmarks to effectively institute several proposed JRI probation reforms. The state budget for FY 2017 reallocated \$634,000 in the Rhode Island Department of Corrections to support the policy reforms, including hiring additional probation officers and implementing evidence-based programming. Rhode Island’s probation population subsequently fell 16 percent, allowing officers to focus resources on people at greater risk of recidivating. Following these administrative changes in 2016, momentum continued to grow, and the legislature ultimately passed the remaining policy changes in 2017.

SAVINGS/REINVESTMENT

Savings/averted costs	State JRI investment
\$1,400,000	\$634,000

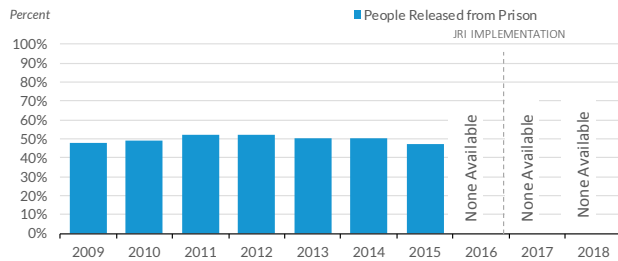
Violent and Property Crime Rates, 2008–18



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

- Violent crime was steady before JRI and remained stable after reform.
- Property crime rates were falling before JRI and continued falling after reform.

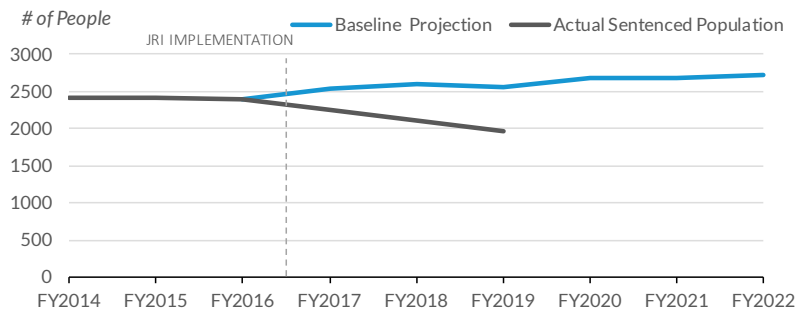
Recidivism Rate: Reconvicted, Reincarcerated, or Detained within Three Years



Source: Annual Recidivism Brief, Rhode Island Department of Corrections, August 2019.
Note: Data is not yet available to calculate three-year rates for 2016–18.

- Recidivism rates fluctuated among people released from prison between 2009 and 2015.

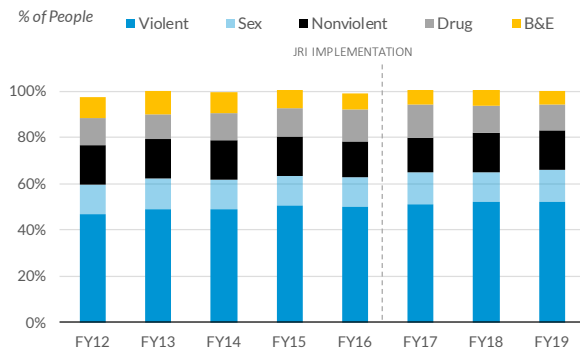
Prison Population (Sentenced Population Only)



Sources: Data provided by the Council of State Governments Justice Center.

- In 2019, there were approximately 600 fewer people in prison than projected before reform.

Prison Composition by Offense Type



Source: Data provided by the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (not available online).
Note: "B&E" = breaking and entering.

- Rhode Island is focusing prison space on people convicted of serious offenses. In 2019, 66 percent of people in prison were there for a violent or sex offense, up from 60 percent in 2012.

*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.