

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT INITIATIVE (JRI)

Utah

Samantha Harvell

Between 2004 and 2013, Utah’s prison population grew 18 percent, reached full system capacity, and was projected to grow an additional 37 percent and require more than 2,700 new prison beds by 2033. With technical assistance through JRI, the state enacted H.B. 348 in 2015 to address prison growth, improve public safety, and reduce costs.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through H.B. 348, Utah:

Improved Behavioral Health Treatment to Reduce Recidivism

- Developed treatment standards for people who are justice-involved and required providers to be certified.

- Implemented data collection protocols to track client outcomes, including recidivism.

- Provided \$4.5 million annually to community treatment providers (and an additional \$6 million annually starting in 2017), which contributed to a 34 percent increase in the number of people who are justice-involved admitted to mental health and substance abuse treatment between fiscal years 2015 and 2019.

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

- Adjusted drug sentencing, including reclassifying first- and second-time drug possession offenses from felonies to misdemeanors and removing the tiered sentencing structure for marijuana possession offenses.

- Narrowed the “drug-free zone” sentencing enhancement trigger to better protect children.

Strengthened Parole and Probation Supervision

- Developed community supervision standards and implemented research-informed practices, including risk and needs assessment, graduated incentives and sanctions to prevent and address violations, and a system of earned credits for people who comply with the terms of supervision.

- Established an incentive grant program to support county programs proven to reduce recidivism.

LASTING IMPACT OF JRI

Utah safely reduced prison admissions for less serious drug offenses and significantly increased admissions to behavioral health treatment for people who are justice-involved.

Through JRI, Utah promoted a public health approach to substance use disorder by adjusting sentences for less serious drug offenses, boosting community treatment capacity, and increasing access for people who are justice-involved. Although the state failed to expand Medicaid as anticipated, the number of people who are justice-involved who access behavioral health care has steadily increased since JRI was implemented. In fact, total admissions of people who are justice-involved to substance use treatment increased 34 percent between FY 2015 and FY 2019. Policy changes also decreased the proportion of people in prison solely for drug possession from 5 percent in FY 2015 to 2 percent in FY 2019. These changes have not impacted public safety; recidivism rates for people convicted of drug possession have not changed compared with pre-JRI rates and remain low during the first year after release from prison or the start of probation.

SAVINGS/REINVESTMENT

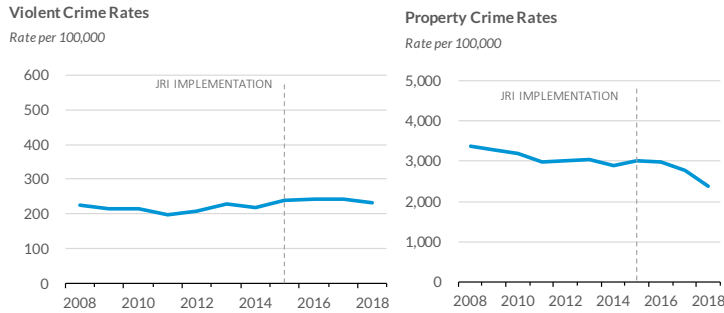
Savings/averted costs

Unknown

State JRI investment

More than \$35 million

Violent and Property Crime Rates, 2008–18

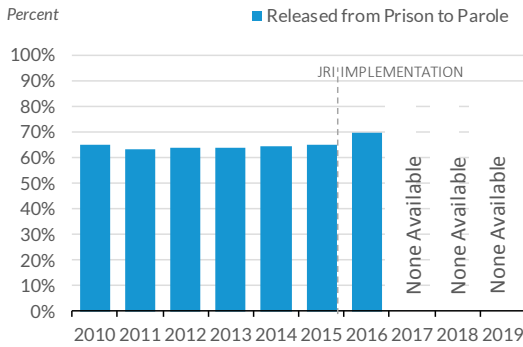


Source: FBI, Uniform Crime Reporting Program (2008–2018).

Violent crime rates were increasing before JRI and leveled out after reform.

Property crime rates were increasing before JRI and declined after reform.

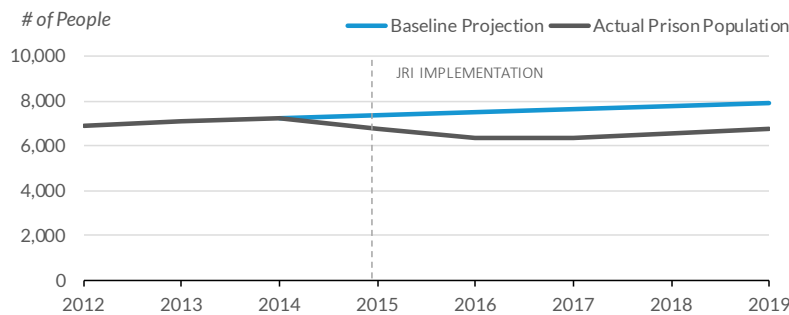
Recidivism Rate: Reincarceration within Three Years



Source: Council of State Governments Justice Center 50-State Data on Public Safety Utah Workbook, March 2018. Data from 2014-2016 were provided by the Utah District Court, are preliminary and subject to change. Note: Figure only includes rates for people released from prison to parole who returned to prison within three years. Data on the full prison population is not available.

Recidivism rates increased for people released from prison to parole between 2010 and 2016.

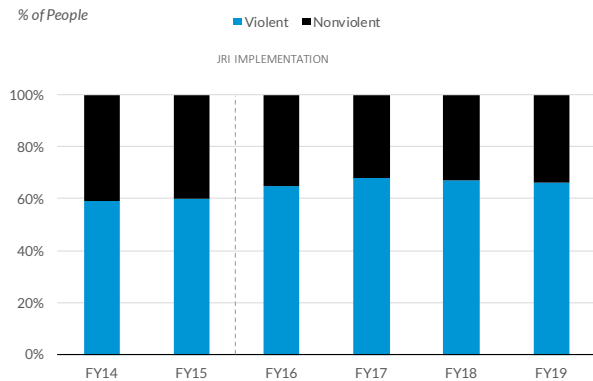
Prison Population (Sentenced Population Only)



Source: Utah Commission on Crime and Delinquency Current Criminal Justice Policies 2019 Annual Report, November 2019.

In 2019, there were nearly 1,200 fewer people in Utah prisons than projected before reform.

Prison Composition by Offense Type



Source: Utah Commission on Crime and Delinquency Current Criminal Justice Policies 2019 Annual Report, November 2019.

Utah is increasingly targeting prison beds to the most serious offenses. In 2019, 66 percent of people in prison were there for a violent offense, up from 59 percent in 2014.

*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.