

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT INITIATIVE (JRI)

Pennsylvania

Leah Sakala and Samantha Harvell

Between 2000 and 2011, Pennsylvania’s prison population grew 40 percent (exceeding system capacity by 13 percent) while spending on corrections climbed 76 percent. With technical assistance through JRI, it enacted H.B. 135 and S.B. 100 in 2012 to address prison growth, improve public safety, and reduce costs. Still facing the highest incarceration rates in the Northeast, in part because nearly one-third of its prison beds were occupied by people serving time for probation or parole violations, Pennsylvania engaged in JRI again in 2016, passing S.B. 500 (Act 114) and S.B. 501 (Act 115) in 2019 to expand recidivism reduction practices in county probation, implement alternatives to incarceration for people with substance use disorders, and update sentencing guidelines.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through H.B. 135 and S.B. 100 (2012) and S.B. 500 and S.B. 501 (2019), Pennsylvania:

Expanded Diversion Opportunities and Alternatives to Revocation and Streamlined Parole to Focus Prison Space on More Serious Offenses

Provided prosecutor’s discretion (with victim input) to recommend diversion with intensive probation supervision as an alternative to prison. A 2017 study found that people released to diversion recidivated at a significantly lower rate than a matched comparison group: 26 percent of people were rearrested within three years, compared with 35 percent in a matched group.

Authorized short confinement stays for people with technical parole violations who would otherwise be revoked to prison and capped the length of stay in prison for people who were revoked on technical violations.

Created a presumptive parole policy for people convicted of nonviolent offenses with short prison sentences.

Invested in Strategies to Reduce Recidivism and Improve Victim Services

Granted more than \$5 million to county probation departments to support equipment upgrades, implementation of evidence-based practices, and improved information sharing with law enforcement.

Invested nearly \$8.5 million in grants to law enforcement to support technology upgrades, crisis intervention training, community relationship building, and efforts to prevent opioid overdose deaths.

Invested more than \$3.7 million in victim services to increase access to crime victim compensation.

LASTING IMPACT OF JRI

Through JRI, Pennsylvania initiated a transformation in its approach to contracting, shifting to a performance-based model tying contracts to public safety results.

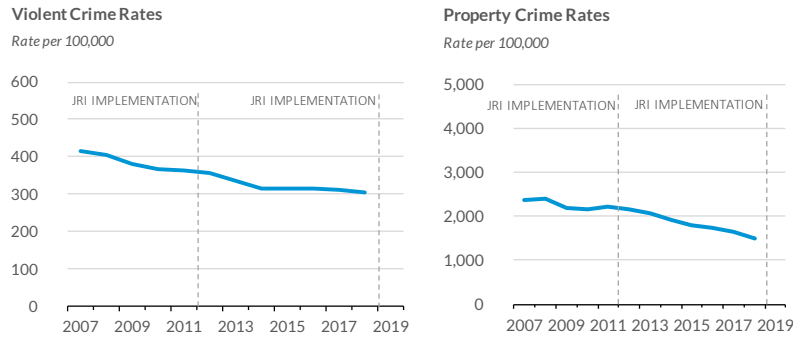
In Pennsylvania, JRI ushered in a new era of data-driven decisionmaking and the use of performance-based contracting in community corrections. A 2009 study found that people released from prison to one of the state’s community corrections centers—often called halfway houses in other jurisdictions—actually had higher recidivism rates than a matched group released directly to the community. Improving the community corrections center system was a main focus of Pennsylvania’s 2012 JRI legislation, and a key component was the implementation of performance-based contracting. In 2013, the state recompeted all community correction center contracts and tied performance assessments to baseline recidivism rates. Contractors not meeting targets over two consecutive review periods could be terminated, and those who overperformed could earn an incentive bonus. Results have been impressive—recidivism across all community corrections centers decreased 11 percent and was estimated to prevent victimization of 122 people between 2014 and 2015 alone. Furthermore, the state department of corrections has adopted this approach as a new way of doing business across the agency, tying contracts to results and ensuring that people leave prison better off than they arrived and that taxpayers get a better return on their investment.

SAVINGS/REINVESTMENT

Savings/averted costs	State JRI investment
\$96.4 million	\$24.9 million

DATA TRENDS *

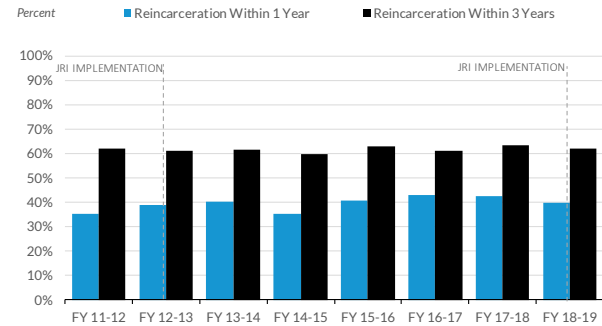
Violent and Property Crime Rates, 2008–18



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

- Violent crime rates were decreasing before the 2012 JRI reforms and continued decreasing after reform.
- Property crime rates were decreasing before the 2012 JRI reforms and continued decreasing after reform.

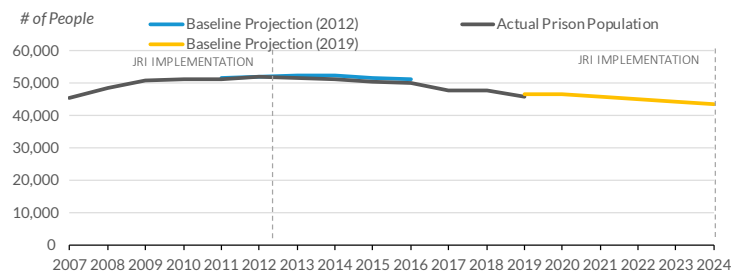
Recidivism Rate: Reincarceration within Three Years



Source: Wetzel FY 2019–20 Budget.
Note: Recidivism rates capture reincarceration of people released from prison within one or three years, respectively.

- Prison recidivism rates remained steady between FY 2011–12 and FY 2018–19.

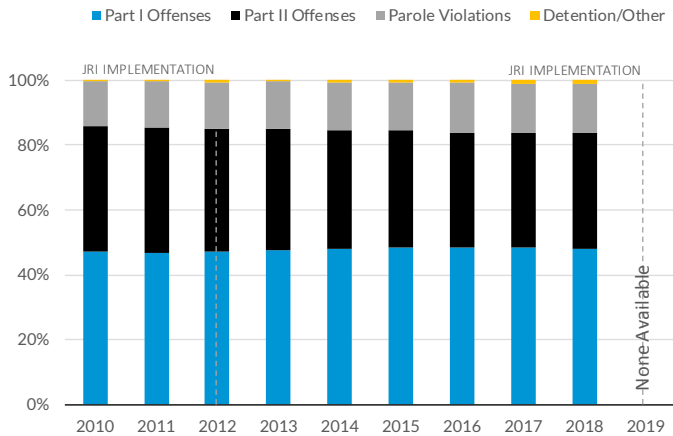
Prison Population



Source: Actual Prison Population counts are from the Department of Corrections' Monthly Population Reports and reflect the number on June 30 of each year. Projection data were provided by the Department of Corrections (not available online).
Note: Prison population counts for 2009–15 are from the Pennsylvania Justice System Joint Performance Measures dashboard and reflect the count from June of each year. Pennsylvania Department of Corrections calculated the baseline prison population projection (not available online).

- In 2016, there were approximately 1,238 fewer people in Pennsylvania prisons than was projected prereform.

Prison Composition



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Annual Statistical Report 2010–18.
Note: 2015–2018 are year-end data. 2019 data are as of June 30, 2019.

- In 2018, 48 percent of people in prison were there for one of the most serious crimes, compared with 47 percent in 2010.

*The data in this summary describe trends and provide additional context on system changes pre- and postreform. 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.