

The Changing Face of Corrections

Offender Trends and Potential Impacts

With more than 2.3 million people locked up, the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world. One out of 100 American adults is behind bars; while one out of 32 is on probation, parole or is incarcerated.

In Washington State, the prison population has tripled in the past two decades. This expansion is not unique to our state alone. Over the past twenty years, states throughout our nation have responded to crime by passing tougher laws and building more prisons to keep up with the expanding number of offenders sentenced to prison.

The recent economic crisis has had a significant impact on the nation. States are realizing that this level of response to crime comes at a high cost. Throughout the nation, state and local governments are facing the stark reality of having to choose between public safety and other vital services in order to balance their budgets. They are asking, "What level of response can we afford and, if we reduce our response, are we posing a risk to public safety?" Fundamentally, to lower the number of inmates in prison, you must reduce the crime rate, change local government policies, or pass legislation to adjust state sentencing and laws.

- **Crime Rate** – While the overall crime rate trend has decreased, the rate for crimes which generally receive prison sentences (e.g., assault, arson, murder, and sex crimes) have remained unchanged. This trend is evident by the number of adult arrests by crime.
- **Local Government** – Over the past twenty years, the number of superior court filings have steadily increased until 2008, after which the number has decreased for two years. This recent trend suggests that local governments have begun to shift, prioritizing their limited resources toward criminals who commit more serious crimes. Although they are referring fewer cases to the courts for prosecution, Department of Corrections continues to receive about the same number of offenders to its jurisdiction, roughly 6 offenders for every 100 reported crimes.



Facts

- The prison population in Washington State increased from 6,040 in Fiscal Year 1990 to 18,360 in Fiscal Year 2010.
- The agency has closed three prisons since 2010, leaving the state with twelve standalone facilities.
- In Fiscal Year 2010, the average cost of incarceration per offender was \$34,615.
- There are currently 16,531 who are being actively supervised in the community down from 29,051 in July 2009.

For more information

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- **State Government** – Over the past two decades, the number of prison admissions has been steadily increasing until 2008. In recent years, the number of drug and property offenders has decreased while the number of offenders in prison for assault, sexually violent offenses, and other violent crimes has increased.

The following are some recent initiatives aimed at the reduction of the number of offenders in prison:

- **The Family Offender Sentencing Alternative** – The Legislature passed a law that provides courts with a new sentencing alternative for select offenders who have dependent children. Qualified offenders will be under intensive community supervision in lieu of prison so their families will not be separated by incarceration.
- **Housing Voucher Program** – In an effort to reduce the number of offenders who are held in prison past their release date, a program was established to assist with the cost of transitional housing for up to three months after release.
- **Early Deportation of Alien Offenders** – This program, in cooperation with the Courts and Federal Government, deports eligible offenders back to their country of citizenship.

Community Supervision Facts *

Number of Offenders on Active Supervision 16,531

Risk Level Classification (Offender Risk to Reoffend)

High Violent.....	37.0%	6,115
High Non-Violent.....	28.8%	4,761
Moderate Risk.....	17.8%	2,942
Low Risk.....	15.6%	2,585
Unclassified.....	0.8%	127

Special Sentence Types

- Drug Offender Sentencing Alternative 1,737
- Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternative 729
- First Time Offender Waiver 1,402
- Family Offender Sentencing Alternative 39
- From-Out-Of-State..... 2,023

Offender location prior to supervision

- Offenders who served time in prison prior to supervision41.5%
- Offenders who came directly from jail or the courts.....58.5%

* On September 30, 2011

Impacts on Community Supervision Caseloads

In recent years the state has enacted laws that significantly reduced the number of offenders under community supervision, mostly those with a low or moderate risk to reoffend.

- In 2003, the Legislature passed a law that ended community supervision for certain low-risk offenders, offenders released from jail, as well as those offenders with only monetary obligations and resulting in a caseload reduction from more than 65,000 to fewer than 30,000 offenders.
- In 2009, a law went into effect that ended community supervision for nearly 10,000 low- and moderate-risk offenders, dropping the caseload below 20,000.
- A law that was passed in 2010 is projected to decrease the offender caseload by over 2,000 offenders.

The cumulative effect of these laws is a smaller, higher-risk offender population. Two-thirds of offenders supervised in the community today are considered high risk to reoffend. And more than half, fifty-three percent, of low- and moderate-risk offenders are supervised for violent crimes or sex offenses.

Chart 1: Change in distribution of risk level after major law changes



Inside Our State's Prisons

After decades of steady growth, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, the state's prison population has begun to level off and has remained relatively flat since. This leveling off is due in part to a shift in priorities and correctional and sentencing practices by state and local governments in response to the recent economic crisis. These decisions, as well as past decisions, have or at least the potential to have an impact on our state's prison system in the following ways:

Increased Risk

Washington State has a relatively low incarceration rate compared to other states. Based on 2009 national data, Washington State ranked 42nd for incarceration rate to prison. Our state's sentencing practices result in prison confinement only for the most serious crimes. This means that our prisons have a high proportion of high-risk, violent offenders, and consequently the safety of both staff and offenders is a concern for the Department. It also has a budget impact because higher-risk offenders often require higher levels of custody.

Capacity

The agency has closed three prisons since 2010, leaving the state with twelve stand-alone facilities. While the closures made the prison system more cost efficient, there is little bed space available to avoid overcrowding in the future. That creates potential risk because overcrowding can result in an increase in prison violence.

Gangs

DOC continues to see an increase in the number of gang members who are sentenced to prison, which has had a significant impact on prison safety. Gang-affiliated offenders – who comprise about 20 percent of the offender population – account for about 48 percent of all violent infractions. In recent years the Prisons Division has implemented strategies that have reduced gang-related violence, though it will continue to be an issue as law enforcement agencies focus on arresting violent gang members in the community.

An Aging Population

Between FY 2001 and FY 2011 the number of offenders who are age 55 or above has nearly doubled, and makes up a greater proportion of the prison population. This trend is likely to continue. Because older offenders are more likely to require expensive medical services, this creates an additional pressure on future prison costs.

Table 1: Prison population by age

	2001		2011	
Under 30	5,782	36%	5,460	32%
30-54	9,341	59%	10,410	60%
55+	723	5%	1,405	8%

Prison Facts *

Number of Prison Facilities12

Number of Work Release Facilities15

Total Offenders in Confinement.....17,867

In prison 91.5% ...16,355

In work release..... 3.8%668

Out-of-state rented beds 0%0

In-state rented beds..... 4.7%844

Percent of Population to Operational Capacity

Total Prison Confinement Percent of Operational Capacity.....99.3%

Work Release Percent of Operational Capacity.....99.1%

Average Age.....37.7

Gender

Male92.5%

Female7.5%

Commitment Types

New Admission47.0%

Readmission43.2%

Other (From Out-of-State or Violators)9.8%

Length of Sentence

Less than Two Years15.4%

Two to Five Years24.2%

Five to Ten Years20.5%

Over Ten Years24.9%

Life with the possibility of

Parole or Probation11.4%

Life without Release3.6%

Offense Types

Murder 1 and 213.1%

Manslaughter2.0%

Sex Crimes21.2%

Robbery10.8%

Assault23.4%

Property Crimes17.5%

Drug Crimes9.0%

Other3.0%

* On September 30, 2011



Charts and Tables

Chart 2: Major Sentencing Changes Impacting Community Supervision Caseloads and Prison Population; Fiscal Years 1990 - 2011

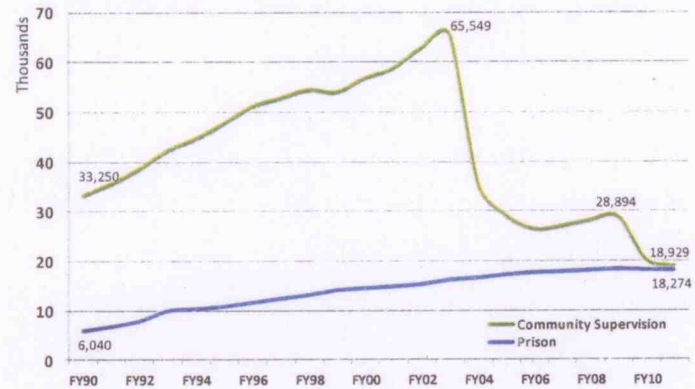


Table 2: Superior Court Filings

	1990	2000	2009
Total Superior Court Filings	26,914	39,694	34,748
Assault	2,409	4,987	6,084
Drug Crimes	7,613	13,703	9,789
Homicide	3,19	302	317
Other Felony	5,473	7,492	4,828
Property	8,514	9,949	9,862
Robbery	777	1,199	1,627
Sex Crimes	1,809	2,062	2,241

Table 3: Prison Population by Crime

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Total	8,055	11,831	15,377	17,593	17,642
Murder	11.6%	11.2%	10.9%	10.2%	10.9%
Manslaughter	2.6%	1.7%	1.5%	1.7%	1.7%
Sex Offenses	20.4%	21.8%	18.6%	16.7%	19.5%
Robbery	13.3%	9.8%	9.2%	8.5%	8.7%
Assault	8.9%	9.9%	16.2%	17.9%	19.6%
Property	21.6%	16.4%	17.0%	18.3%	19.3%
Drug	18.7%	26.6%	23.4%	22.2%	13.9%
Other	2.9%	2.7%	3.3%	4.6%	6.3%

Data Sources

[Bureau of Justice Statistics,
Prisoners in 2009](#)

[Caseload Forecast Council](#)

[CrimeStats Online on Washington
State Statistical Analysis Center](#)

[Department of Corrections](#)

[The PEW Center on the States -
Public Safety Performance](#)