

New Jersey

The project selected New Jersey to receive intensive, nonpartisan research, analysis, and expertise. Among other factors, its leaders have demonstrated both a bipartisan commitment to explore meaningful policy change and a dedication to collecting and using criminal justice data as a basis for sound reforms.

Progress Update »

On April 21, 2008, Governor Jon Corzine signed Senate Bill S-233/504 into law, which amends a special probation statute to increase participation in the drug court program. Due in large part to the state's sentencing laws, New Jersey incarcerates more drug offenders than any other state in the nation. 32 percent of the prison population is incarcerated for drug-related offenses, contributing to a total prison population of over 27,000 that cost the state more than \$1 billion in 2006.

The new law expands the eligibility criteria to allow for persons with two or more previous third degree felony convictions to be eligible for drug court, subject to a prosecutor's veto. It also replaces the requirement that persons in drug court be sentenced to six months of inpatient treatment with judicial discretion to determine whether placement should be residential or non-residential. In addition, the law allows for early release from five years of special probation if the person makes exemplary progress and has completed the treatment program, served at least two years of probation, has not committed a substantial violation of the term of probation, and is not likely to commit an offense if supervision ceases. Under the expanded eligibility criteria outlined in the new law, about 400 more people will be able to participate in the drug court program each year, increasing the number of new offenders served each year by the program from 1,200 to 1,600.

These changes in drug court policy are in line with the recommendations of the governor's Sentencing/Corrections Task Force, created in October 2007 in response to a \$2.5 billion budget deficit and still-rising corrections costs. An arm of Corzine's Government Efficiency and Reform (GEAR) Commission chaired by retired Supreme Court Chief Justice Deborah Poritz, the Task Force was charged with examining corrections and sentencing practice and policy in New Jersey, with a particular focus on assessing the extent to which they contribute to recidivism reduction and represent cost-effective state spending. It made three recommendations in its inaugural year: expand use of drug courts, expand intensive supervision probation, and establish residential assessment centers for parole technical violators to reduce returns to prison. The Vera Institute of Justice, a partner of the Public Safety Performance Project, is providing technical assistance to the Task Force, which will continue its work through 2008.

Other efforts also suggest the state is moving toward more cost-effective policies. A bill to reduce the state's drug free school zones law, widely criticized for disproportionately targeting minorities, failed to pass in 2007, but was supported by the Governor, all of the state's county prosecutors, the attorney general, advocates and others. Supporters of reform are expected to continue efforts to reduce the law's harsh sentences and unbalanced impact on minorities.

State Profile »

A profile of New Jersey that provides statistical and analytical data about its sentencing and corrections systems, describes factors shaping those systems, and highlights opportunities for reform.

[Download New Jersey state profile.](#) (PDF) [Adobe Reader®](#) required.

News

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- **Top lawmakers expect revision of drug-free zone law—Support grows to give courts more options**
- *The Star-Ledger*
- May 29, 2008

Top lawmakers expect revision of drug-free zone law Two prominent state lawmakers yesterday predicted passage by next month of a bill to give judges some flexibility in sentencing people arrested for nonviolent drug crimes near schools.

To read the full article, visit the [Star-Ledger Web site](#).

- **A smart new investment in crime prevention**

- *The Star-Ledger*

- May 12, 2008

New Jersey is about to make a new public safety investment that promises to put more law enforcement officers on the streets while providing an estimated net savings of \$16.2 million over the next two fiscal years. As a lifelong law enforcement professional, I see this plan as long overdue and a sound investment in preventing crimes and ensuring the safety of families and communities.

To read the full article, visit the [Star-Ledger Web site](#).

- **Drug courts given flexibility on admission and sentencing**

- *New Jersey Law Journal*

- April 28, 2008

New Jersey has a new law that expands eligibility for admission into the state's **drug courts** and allows judges to tailor sentences to fit defendants' needs.

To read the full article, visit the [New Jersey Law Journal Web site](#).