

Pennsylvania

The project selected Pennsylvania 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 »

Pennsylvania's state prison population has increased 24 percent since 1999 to more than 45,000 prisoners. The state faces an 11,000-bed shortfall by 2011 if current policies remain in place. Overcrowding in county jails pushes more sentenced offenders into the state prison system, and the number of people whose parole supervision is revoked now makes up 33 percent of prison admissions.

In prison, inmates often serve longer terms because they can't access the vocational, educational, and substance abuse treatment programs that the parole board requires them to complete before being eligible for release. The state Department of Corrections has requested nearly \$700 million for prison construction, but with current sentencing and release practices, even that may not eliminate the projected shortfall.

Policymakers convened a rare joint hearing of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees on June 4, 2007 to study the issues and consider various options. Representatives of the Council of State Governments Justice Center testified at the hearing, offering policy options for lawmakers to increase public safety while controlling corrections costs. Options include making better use of existing diversion programs, establishing a risk reduction credit for offenders who successfully complete educational, vocational, and substance abuse and mental health treatment programs while in prison, and reducing parole violations by expanding intermediate sanction facilities. A partner of the Public Safety Performance Project, the Justice Center predicts that these options would help the state save 3,000 beds over the next six years, and avoid an estimated \$95 million in operational costs. But the Justice Center analysis also indicated that the state would need to take additional steps, such as exploring changes to sentencing laws, in order to avoid significant prison crowding and spending.

State Research & Analysis »

Increasing Public Safety and Generating Savings: Options for Pennsylvania Policy Makers

The Council of State Governments Justice Center, a Public Safety Performance Project partner, prepared this analysis of Pennsylvania's prison population, its drivers and costs, and the projected prison bed and spending impacts of several policy reform packages.

[Download Pennsylvania policy options](#)

Justice Reinvestment: Increasing Public Safety and Managing the Growth of Pennsylvania's Prison Population

Two presentations prepared by Public Safety Performance Project partner the Council of State Governments Justice Center. The first (pages 1-22) explores the current strains on Pennsylvania's criminal justice system and provides prison bed and cost projections for several policy reform options. The second (pages 23-34) describes the challenges posed by inmates with mental illness, reviews the research on effective interventions, and identifies two policy options.

[Download Pennsylvania Justice Reinvestment](#)

News

Select news clips »

- **Is PA prison growth locked in?**
- *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

- June 4, 2007

When it opened in 1882, Western Penitentiary was a model of the future. Today, despite a \$32 million renovation to get the state's oldest functioning prison out of "mothball" status and ready for its second opening this week, the penitentiary looks more like a relic...

To read the full article, visit the [Pittsburgh Tribune-Review's Web site](#).

- **No black and white answers to graying of state prisons**
- *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*
- April 23, 2007

If a judge sends Marilyn Devine to prison, the 76-year-old Baldwin bank robber won't be the only grandmother doing time. She would join 25 other women older than 65, including Ellen Jean Handyside of Warren County, the oldest at 82, state records show. Handyside is a habitual shoplifter serving a minimum 20-month sentence for stealing painkillers...

To read the full article, please visit the [Pittsburgh Tribune-Review's Web site](#).