

## 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 »**

New Jersey's prison population of over 27,000 cost the state more than \$1 billion in 2006. 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.

Faced with a \$2.5 billion budget deficit and rising corrections costs, Governor Corzine in October 2007 announced that his Government Efficiency and Reform (GEAR) Commission would form a Sentencing/Corrections Task Force. He charged the group with examining the state's sentencing and corrections policies and programs to determine whether limited state resources are being used cost effectively to reduce recidivism and increase public safety.

The Task Force has made three recommendations to date: 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 disproportionate impact on minorities. Finally, the Senate Appropriations Committee early in 2008 approved a bill to expand access to drug courts as a community-based sentencing option for eligible offenders, and the measure was pending before the full Senate.