



Justice Reinvestment in Wisconsin

Reducing Spending on
Corrections and Reinvesting in
Strategies to Increase Public Safety



Background

In 2008, Governor James Doyle, Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson, Senate President Fred Risser, and Speaker of the House Michael Huebsch requested technical assistance from the Council of State Governments Justice Center (“Justice Center”) to help develop a statewide policy framework to reduce spending on corrections and reinvest in strategies to increase public safety in Wisconsin.

The Justice Center is a national, nonpartisan organization that works with state policymakers to analyze data and develop fiscally sound, data-driven strategies. Assistance is made possible

through funding support provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, a component of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Public Safety Performance Project of The Pew Charitable Trusts’ Center on the States, and the State of Wisconsin.

In January 2009, the Wisconsin Legislative Council established the Special Committee on Justice Reinvestment Oversight, a bipartisan, bicameral, and inter-branch advisory group, to guide the Justice Center’s analyses of the state’s criminal justice system and development of policy options.

Snapshot of Crime, Recidivism, and Corrections Trends in Wisconsin

Whereas the number of reported violent crimes has remained generally stable in the Midwest and across the nation, the number of violent crimes in Wisconsin has increased over the past seven years.

- Between 2000 and 2007, the number of reported violent crimes in Wisconsin increased by 28 percent.^{1,2}
- Over this seven-year period, aggravated assaults increased by the largest margin (32 percent) among the violent offenses listed under the FBI Uniform Crime Reports.³
- Elsewhere, however, aggravated assaults decreased: they declined three percent in the Midwest and six percent nationally.⁴

Between 2000 and 2007, Wisconsin's prison population grew 14 percent, driven largely by an increase in the number of people who failed on community supervision.⁵

- Between 2000 and 2007, the number of admissions for people who failed on community supervision increased 40 percent, while the number of admissions for people who committed new offenses decreased by 11 percent.⁶

- In 2007, more than half (55 percent) of the people occupying state prisons were incarcerated because they had failed to comply with the conditions of community supervision or because they had committed a new crime while under supervision.⁷

The state prison population is projected to continue to increase.

- From 2008 to 2019, the state prison population is projected to grow from 22,500 to 28,019, an increase of 25 percent.⁸

State spending on corrections has risen significantly in recent years; additional prison construction will be required to accommodate growth in the prison population.

- Between 1999 and 2009, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections' budget grew from approximately \$700 million to \$1.2 billion, a 71 percent increase.⁹
- Between 2009 and 2019, Wisconsin will require \$2.5 billion to reduce overcrowding in the prison system and accommodate growth in the population. This estimate includes \$1.4 billion in new construction costs and \$1.1 billion in new operating costs.¹⁰

1. Violent crime, as defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, is composed of four offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. See http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2007/offenses/violent_crime/index.html.

2. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Crime in the United States, 2000* (September 2001). Retrieved February 10, 2009, from <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/00cius.htm>; U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Crime in the United States, 2007* (September 2008). Retrieved February 10, 2009, from <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2007/index.html>.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Wisconsin Department of Corrections, "Depot Update through 2007" (as of October 16, 2008), Internal analysis by Council of State Governments Justice Center (February 2009).

6. Wisconsin Department of Corrections, "Depot Update through 2007" (as of October 16, 2008), Internal analysis by Council of State Governments Justice Center (February 2009); Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Data request submitted to the Council of State Governments Justice Center for analysis (December 2008).

7. Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Data request submitted to the Council of State Governments Justice Center for analysis (December 2008).

8. Naro Ware, Wendy, James Austin, and Roger Ocker. JFA Institute "Wisconsin Department of Corrections Ten-Year Prison Population Projections: 2009–2019." March 2009.

9. Wisconsin Department of Corrections, personal communications to the Council of State Governments Justice Center (March 6, 2009).

10. Based on Wisconsin Department of Corrections budget estimates.

The Justice Center's Three Phases of Assistance

With support from the Pew Charitable Trusts' Center on the States, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the State of Wisconsin, the Justice Center and its expert consultants will provide technical assistance to Wisconsin policymakers in three phases.

PHASE 1

Analysis and Policy Development

The Justice Center will comprehensively analyze Wisconsin's prison, community corrections, crime, and recidivism data. A system-wide examination of the prison population and strategies currently being employed by policymakers will be conducted. Policymakers, who will be provided with geographic analyses of specific neighborhoods where large number of individuals released from prison return, will be better able to improve coordination among agencies, community corrections, and law enforcement.

To help develop policy options to address rising rates of return to prison following both releases from custody and discharge to community supervision, the Justice Center will analyze at-risk populations. A health systems team will analyze programs and services for people with behavioral health needs who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Additionally, staff and expert consultants will perform an assessment of current employment programs for people under community supervision.

The Justice Center, under the guidance of the study committee, will develop consensus-driven policy options that increase public safety and address the drivers of the growth in Wisconsin's prison population and corrections expenditures.

PHASE 2

Policy Implementation

To ensure that policies are implemented effectively, the Justice Center will provide technical assistance to state agencies and perform regular assessments of implementation progress. Policymakers will therefore be able to identify necessary adjustments to policies and strategies to ensure intended goals are achieved.

In addition, the Justice Center will develop a *dashboard* tracking mechanism, or a set of indicators, to measure the impact of newly enacted policies on crime, court dispositions, jail populations, and the prison population.

PHASE 3

Accountability Strategies

Policymakers, with the assistance of regular presentations from the Justice Center, will put into effect accountability measures for the multiple agencies responsible for policy implementation. Continual monitoring of the *dashboard* and other accountability measures, including fiscal and public safety impact, will help Wisconsin ensure that gains achieved are sustained and savings generated are reinvested to foster safer and stronger communities.

To learn more about the justice reinvestment strategy
in Wisconsin and other states, please visit:
www.justicereinvestment.org

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The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven strategies, informed by available evidence, to increase public safety and strengthen communities.



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To learn more about the Bureau of Justice Assistance, please visit: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/>.



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To learn more about the Public Safety Performance Project, please visit: <http://www.pewpublicsafety.org/>.

Points of view, recommendations, or findings stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, The Pew Charitable Trusts, Council of State Governments Justice Center, or the Council of State Governments' members.

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