



## Justice Reinvestment in Ohio: How Ohio Is Reducing Corrections Costs and Recidivism

In June 2011, state leaders from across the political spectrum in Ohio enacted sweeping legislation that both reduces spending on corrections and increases public safety. Using a data-driven “justice reinvestment” approach, Ohio received over 18 months of intensive technical assistance from the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, in partnership with the Pew Center on the States and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance. Ohio, with continued resources and support, is now working to effectively implement the legislation and achieve the twin goals of increasing public safety and reducing corrections spending.

### Ohio’s Justice Reinvestment Process

With Ohio’s criminal justice system facing a growing prison population, the governor, chief justice, and legislative leaders received justice reinvestment technical assistance. State prisons, with a total population exceeding 51,000 people, were operating at 33 percent over capacity—and projected to grow by 3,000 people by 2015. CSG Justice Center analyses indicated that a considerable amount of the prison population pressures were attributed to high numbers of people convicted of property and drug offenses. These individuals, many with a high likelihood of reoffending, were completing short prison terms and then being returned to the community without supervision.

Analyses also indicated that Ohio’s probation system—a patchwork of 187 independent agencies—lacked consistent policies and minimum standards to ensure effective practices, such as requiring the use of risk assessment instruments to assign probationers to appropriate levels of supervision and mandating minimum lengths of officer training. Moreover, the state lacked a unified probation data collection system, depriving policymakers of information concerning the number of people on probation per county.

Community correction programs, despite the state’s significant investment, were not proving effective at lowering offender recidivism. Research conducted by the University of Cincinnati showed that some programs were actually increasing recidivism rates because they did not filter out those participants who would not benefit from the intensive programming.

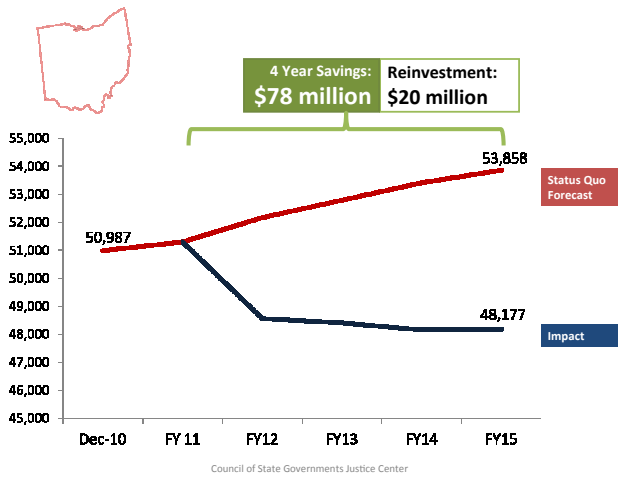
Presented with these key findings, a bipartisan, inter-branch working group partnered with CSG Justice Center staff to design a 13-point policy framework that members later approved and



recommended to the General Assembly. The framework addresses three core objectives. First, it holds first-time property and drug offenders accountable in more meaningful ways by requiring them to serve probation terms and attend treatment. Second, it adopts statewide admission criteria for community correction programs that prioritize placement for people who would benefit most from intensive supervision and treatment. Third, it establishes statewide standards for probation to ensure greater consistency from county to county.

The framework was incorporated into House Bill 86, which was co-sponsored by Sen. Bill Seitz (R-Green Township), Rep. Louis Blessing (R-Cincinnati), Sen. Shirley Smith (D-Cleveland), and Rep. Tracy Maxwell Heard (D-Columbus). The Ohio General Assembly approved the legislation with sweeping bipartisan majorities, and Governor John Kasich signed it into law on June 29, 2011.

State leaders estimate that the new law will enable Ohio to avert the prison population growth projected through 2015, thereby helping the state avoid an estimated half-billion dollars in additional spending. Furthermore, the new statute will ease prison



crowding as the population gradually declines to levels last seen in 2007, generating \$78 million in marginal cost savings by 2015.

Most importantly, the law will significantly enhance public safety. Community supervision and treatment resources will produce the greatest public safety benefits, as they will be focused on high-risk offenders identified by a statewide risk assessment system. The state will also reinvest \$20 million over four years to improve felony probation supervision—funding that will be tied to agencies’ demonstrated reductions in recidivism.

## Looking Ahead

Ohio’s efforts to reduce recidivism and corrections spending do not stop with the enactment of these policies. State officials are now working to translate the legislation into practice, thereby ensuring that these investments realize the projected outcomes. To enhance the state’s capacity to implement the legislation, Ohio is receiving technical assistance from the CSG Justice Center and funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance that will provide training, education, and upgrades to data systems.



The Pew Center on the States is a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts that identifies and advances effective solutions to critical issues facing states. Pew is a nonprofit organization that applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life. Launched in 2006, The Public Safety Performance

Project helps states advance fiscally sound, data-driven policies and practices in sentencing and corrections that protect public safety, hold offenders accountable, and control corrections costs. For more information, visit [www.pewcenteronthestates.org](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.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.*

*The CSG Justice Center’s Justice Reinvestment Initiative to address corrections spending and public safety is a partnership with the Public Safety Performance Project of the Pew Center on the States and the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice. These efforts have provided data-driven analyses and policy options to state leaders in 14 states.*

*For additional information about Justice Reinvestment in Ohio, please visit [www.justicereinvestment.org](http://www.justicereinvestment.org).*