

Background

Over the past 33 years, state spending on corrections has skyrocketed nationally—from \$12 billion in 1988 to \$66.4 billion in 2021.¹ This cost puts a serious strain on many states’ criminal justice systems, often placing concerns about the bottom line in competition with public safety. Strategies tested in many states, however, show there are effective ways to address the challenge of containing rising corrections costs while also increasing public safety.

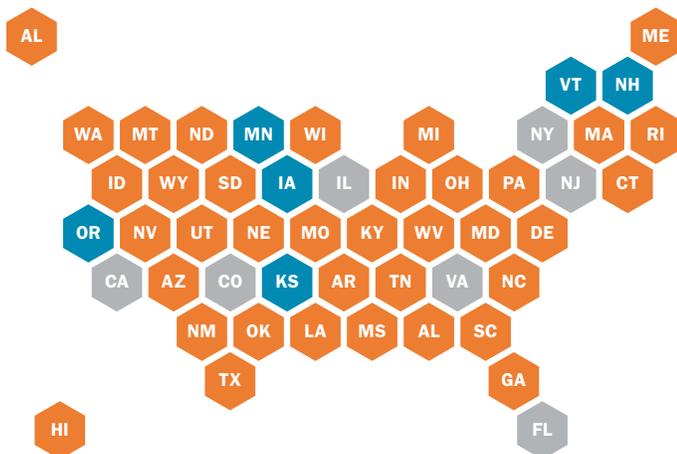
Justice Reinvestment Initiative Works

The Justice Reinvestment Initiative is a data-driven approach to reduce corrections and related criminal justice spending and reinvest savings in strategies that improve public safety. The Justice Reinvestment Initiative helps states identify the drivers of rising corrections costs and crime and develop state-specific solutions. By managing criminal justice populations more cost-effectively, states generate savings to reinvest in evidence-based strategies to increase public safety while holding people accountable. With help from technical assistance providers, states that adopt a Justice Reinvestment Initiative approach collect and analyze data on drivers of corrections costs and prison population growth, identify and implement changes to increase efficiencies, and measure the fiscal and public safety impacts of those changes.

Assisted by the federal investment in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (see sidebar), more than 35 states have used the Justice Reinvestment approach since 2010 to pursue policies to slow overall prison growth, and for some states, reduce the total prison population. Through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, cumulative averted costs and savings in these states exceed \$3.2 billion, allowing states to invest hundreds of millions in effective supervision and treatment programs to make communities safer.² It is projected that savings will grow to more than \$4 billion as a result of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

Justice Reinvestment Initiative States

■ Past States
 ■ Current States



Facts and Trends

- Despite mounting corrections spending, recidivism rates remain high. According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 49 percent of people released from state prisons were incarcerated for a probation or parole violation or an arrest for a new offense within 3 years of release.³
- A 10 percent cut in recidivism rates nationally would save states a combined \$635 million in one year of averted prison construction costs.
- Research has identified practices and programs that can effectively reduce recidivism.
- Policymakers often do not have information about which factors are driving crime, recidivism rates, and the growth of correctional populations. Most state policymakers make decisions about prison and public safety policies without comprehensive, independent analyses of their criminal justice data.

Federal Funding for the Justice Reinvestment Initiative⁴

Recognizing the early successes of a Justice Reinvestment approach, in 2010, Congress appropriated funding to the Bureau of Justice Assistance to create the Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

FY2010	\$10M	FY2017	\$25M
FY2011	\$8.3M	FY2018	\$25M
FY2012	\$6M	FY2019	\$27M
FY2013	\$5.88M	FY2020	\$28M
FY2014	\$27.5M	FY2021	\$33M
FY2015	\$27.5M	FY2022	\$35M
FY2016	\$27.5M		

Justice Reinvestment Initiative in Action: Selected Case Studies

Texas Effort Leads to Creation of JRI

With a prison population of 155,000 people in 2007, Texas state officials projected needing to build 17,000 additional prison beds at a cost of \$2 billion by 2012. Texas legislative leaders rejected plans to fund additional prison construction and instead pursued a data-driven Justice Reinvestment approach. In 2007, Texas implemented policies that increased substance use disorder and mental health treatment capacity in the prison system and expanded probation and parole diversion options that ultimately saved and averted more than \$1.6 billion in prison construction and operating costs. Texas has since closed 10 prisons and reduced recidivism, and crime rates are near historic lows. Texas's success helped spur the creation of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

Georgia

In Georgia, legislation signed in 2017 included policies to reduce lengthy probation terms and probation officer caseloads and improve responses to supervision violations. From April 2016 to June 2020, Georgia's active felony probation population declined 12 percent and contributed to a reduction in caseload size from 138 cases to approximately 93 cases per supervising officer. Georgia also increased the number of cases on unsupervised status by 68 percent between April 2016 and June 2020.

Missouri

Between 2010 and 2016, Missouri's violent crime rate increased 13 percent, while arrests for these crimes declined. At the same time, Missouri's prison population swelled, driven mostly by admissions for supervision violations. Comprehensive Justice Reinvestment Initiative legislation was signed into law in 2018 and aims to provide resources to local law enforcement to help reduce violent crime, increase community-based treatment for people in the criminal justice system who have substance use disorders and mental illnesses, and increase support for victims, among other measures. The state expects to reduce recidivism and avert \$485 million in corrections costs by 2023.

North Carolina

In 2011, North Carolina faced rising corrections costs and a prison population projected to grow 10 percent by 2020. In response, state lawmakers passed comprehensive legislation in 2011 that focuses supervision and treatment resources where they can have the biggest impact, empowers probation officers to employ swift and certain sanctions to respond to probation violations, and ensures that every individual convicted of a felony who leaves prison will receive supervision. Compared to the trends at the time of enactment, in 2021 North Carolina's probation revocations were more than 50 percent lower, total admissions to prison were 43 percent lower, and the state's prison population dropped 28 percent, allowing the state to close 11 small prisons. The state's 2020 overall crime rate was 32 percent lower than it was when Justice Reinvestment Initiative legislation was enacted. North Carolina reports saving and averting more than \$543 million and has invested more than \$47 million, largely in efforts to strengthen community supervision.

Oklahoma

In 2015, Oklahoma had the second-highest imprisonment rate in the country and the highest rate of imprisonment among women. The state prison population was projected to grow 25 percent by 2026 at a total cost of almost \$2 billion. In 2018, then-Governor Mary Fallin signed a number of bills that expanded access to alternatives to incarceration, adjusted sentences for people convicted of nonviolent offenses, and created release opportunities and improved reentry processes. Together, the bills are projected to avert 67 percent of the anticipated growth in Oklahoma's prison population over the next decade, avoiding the need for 4,800 additional prison beds and saving taxpayers more than a billion dollars in new prison construction. Governor Fallin was able to invest \$12 million in corrections and treatment programs in the 2018 budget, including substance use disorder and mental health treatment and performance incentive funding focused on improved outcomes for women in the justice system.

Pennsylvania

Between 2007 and 2011, Pennsylvania's prison population increased 12 percent, resulting in overcrowded prisons and a need to build new facilities. In 2012, policymakers enacted legislation to improve community corrections programs, divert people convicted of low-level misdemeanors from prison, and reduce parole revocations. In 2018, the state recorded the largest one-year decline in its prison population since 2007. A second round of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative began in 2015, culminating in new legislation enacted in 2019 that aims to eliminate delays in releasing people with short sentences from prison and streamline the process used to direct people into drug treatment. The legislation is expected to reduce the state prison population by more than 600 people over 5 years, saving taxpayers an estimated \$45 million in corrections costs.

South Carolina

By 2010, South Carolina's correctional population had nearly tripled during the past 25 years and was projected to grow 13 percent by 2014. In 2010, the state passed legislation that changed sentencing policies to prioritize prison space for people convicted of chronic and violent offenses, improved parole, strengthened community supervision, and ensured ongoing oversight of sentencing and corrections reforms. Between 2009 and 2016, the total prison population has decreased 14 percent, helping the state avoid nearly half a billion dollars in costs, while the crime rate has also fallen.

Tennessee

Despite incarcerating more people and spending over \$1 billion annually on corrections in the state budget, in 2021, Tennessee had the fourth highest violent crime rate in the nation and a high recidivism rate, with nearly half of individuals rearrested within three years of their release from custody. To change this, state leaders participated in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative to determine what responses are necessary. Through this effort, they passed two pieces of legislation, one focusing on creating more alternatives to incarceration by expanding eligibility to specialty courts and making changes to the pretrial process and another removing barriers to reentry through the use of revocation caps and a mandatory period of supervision prior to release. Cumulatively, the bills are estimated to save 7,000 prison beds over the next 10 years.