

Justice Reinvestment Programs: A Congressional Commitment to Smarter Public Safety

The bipartisan Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) was created by Congress in 2010 to enhance public safety through targeted work with states and criminal justice agencies. Justice Reinvestment Initiatives include agency-spanning data analysis; development and implementation of data-driven, tailored solutions to address complicated criminal justice challenges; and coordination with states and criminal justice agencies to maximize resources to achieve stronger and safer communities.

Congressional champions include U.S. Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), and Adam Schiff (D-CA) along with Representatives Carol Miller (R-WV) and Lucy McBath (D-GA).

Breaking Through Tough Criminal Justice Challenges in States

Assistance to States JRI provides small grants to help states harness the power of data to confront urgent challenges head-on, from grappling with rising crime and recidivism rates, to an unprecedented surge in overdose deaths and addiction, growing demands on overstretched law enforcement agencies, and critical staffing shortages in jails and prisons. The initiative empowers states to implement evidence-based policies, invest in what works, and allocate resources effectively—ultimately reducing crime, addressing behavioral health needs, and enhancing public safety for all.

States that have used JRI saw, on average, a **38 percent drop in crime rates** between 2008 and 2023 and a **10 percent decrease in recidivism** between 2008 and 2019.

- In 2023, **Arkansas** lawmakers created the Recidivism Reduction Task Force to reduce recidivism and crime by improving community supervision and behavioral health resources. Through JRI, state leaders developed data-driven policy options focused on fostering safer communities by investing in treatment, strengthening community supervision, and improving data collection to track outcomes.
- In **Kentucky**, 43 percent of crimes against people involve domestic violence (DV). Using JRI, state leaders analyzed data to identify gaps and challenges in how DV is reported and addressed. With this information, lawmakers can focus on enhancing victim services, improving responses to people who commit DV, and reducing violent crime and recidivism.
- In **New Hampshire**, JRI analysis showed that people who frequently cycle through jails, characterized by their significant behavioral health needs and their high rates of homelessness,

lower-level offenses, and supervision violations, contributed to a 3-year incarceration cost of \$123 million. Policymakers can now target behavioral health and reentry responses and improve data collection to strengthen public safety statewide.

Providing Better Data on Safety and Justice Everywhere

Justice Counts Whereas JRI goes deep in a few states, Justice Counts goes broad by helping every agency deliver better data on the metrics that matter most. Justice Counts is a national initiative to improve the accessibility and usability of criminal justice data. Decision-makers often lack even the most basic data on criminal justice patterns and trends to inform their decisions—decisions that have lasting effects on public safety and the effective functioning of the criminal justice system.

It should be easy for law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, court administrators, defense attorneys, jail administrators, and corrections directors to share key data about their work and achievements. It should be clear how local criminal justice decision-makers can use that data to make informed decisions that enhance public safety, improve system efficiency, and ensure accountability. Justice Counts provides tools, resources, and support to help agencies achieve this vision to protect communities and strengthen the justice system.

- Leaders in Cass County, **Indiana**, are using Justice Counts to highlight local criminal justice data related to funding, expenditures, daily population trends, and other critical metrics to showcase successes, identify challenges, and provide insights into resource allocation and potential gaps. Howard County is using Justice Counts data to demonstrate its work release program's high success rates and recidivism reductions, which can help secure further support and enhance the program's effectiveness.

- Prosecutors in **Missouri** currently lack uniformity in tracking open and closed cases, leading to inconsistent funding rates, incomplete reports, and limited insight into the sector's operations. Thirty-eight percent of the state's prosecution sector has adopted Justice Counts to standardize prosecution data and will implement a comprehensive system to track and measure open and closed cases in 2025.

Building the Analytic Capacity of State Corrections Agencies

Resident Corrections Analysts Initiative Every agency needs better data, but state-level corrections agencies, which are responsible for over a million people and drive significant costs for state budgets, face particularly urgent challenges. Despite the high stakes—including public safety and the well-being of staff and incarcerated people—data capacity remains severely underdeveloped. JRI efforts have repeatedly highlighted how under-resourced most corrections research and data teams are, limiting their ability to drive informed decision-making. While corrections agencies invest substantial time and resources in data collection and management, many lack the staff and tools necessary to transform this data into meaningful insights that improve safety, operational efficiency, and workforce performance.

This program embeds skilled data analysts within state departments of correction (DOCs), integrating them into research or IT teams to address agency-specific challenges. Resident corrections analysts (RCAs) help build essential data analysis capabilities, enabling leaders to make informed decisions that improve operations, reduce recidivism, and promote safer communities. Additionally, analysts create user-friendly data visualization tools and establish routines for data-driven performance monitoring, empowering the corrections workforce to operate more efficiently and effectively.

- In 2023, four corrections analysts were embedded in four DOCs—**California, Louisiana, West Virginia, and Wyoming**—to enhance data quality and analysis. Selected from 27 state applications, these analysts received extensive training and mentoring to strengthen the DOCs' data-driven decision-making. Their work helped agencies improve data infrastructure, integrate analysis tools, and refine reporting processes.

* In **California**, the RCA enhanced a dashboard on county-level justice outcomes for individuals with behavioral health needs.

* **Louisiana's** RCA developed dashboard prototypes to track release timeliness.

* In **West Virginia** and **Wyoming**, RCAs built dashboards to monitor key performance indicators for corrections workforce and risk assessments.

Virtual Academy To achieve their rehabilitative and public safety goals, corrections agencies must have a clear understanding of operations within their facilities and across the system, while also anticipating the impact of external changes. This program establishes standards for data analysis and enhances analytical capacity, empowering agencies to make informed decisions and plan more effectively at both the agency and state levels. By building data literacy and strengthening analytical skills among DOC analysts and leadership, the program equips corrections professionals with the tools and knowledge needed to interpret and use their own data to improve outcomes, ensure safety, and enhance workforce efficiency.

- Since 2022, this initiative has launched a community forum with 169 corrections professionals from 43 states and DC, a seminar series with 209 attendees across 2 sessions, and office hours attended by 49 professionals from 22 states. The Virtual Academy website serves as a central hub for resources, including a report repository with contributions from 20 states and a model code repository to enhance data analytics. In mid-2025, a learning management system featuring 16 online courses, methodological standards, and cross-system data-sharing and privacy guidance will launch.

National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment

Risk and needs assessment results are often overlooked in case decision-making and management. The National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment, developed by a national panel of researchers, assessment developers, practitioners, and leaders, offers clear direction and emphasizes the importance of accurate application of these assessments.

- The **Arizona** Supreme Court – Adult Probation Division has requested technical assistance to revalidate the Offender Screening Tool and Field Reassessment Offender Screening Tool, improve interrater reliability, and formalize training and booster programs. These efforts enhance data quality, strengthen how assessments are integrated into case planning, and develop tools for probation and reentry assessments.

- **Massachusetts** Probation Services is revalidating the Ohio Risk Assessment System, updating administrative standards to enhance transparency, developing a strategy for implementation post-revalidation, and creating a communication plan to inform staff about the improvements.

- The **Montana** Department of Corrections is enhancing its continuous quality improvement process by strengthening training, improving interrater reliability, and integrating assessment results into case management.