

PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT

October 2025

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*“PPI is one of the most imaginative
research groups **illuminating** the dark
recesses of our carceral landscape”*

—Pete Brook
Prison Photography

Executive Director's letter

Dear friends,

There is no denying that things are tough right now, both for the country and the larger movement to end mass incarceration. That's why I'm particularly proud of how the Prison Policy Initiative continues to spotlight the abuses of the criminal legal system and offer a better path forward. I'm honored to share this annual report of our work with you. Like all of our work, this report is highly skimmable, with compelling graphs, charts, and clippings from our research. And embedded within these pages is a story about how we're building on our strengths to meet the challenges of this moment, while also continuing to build for a better tomorrow.

The non-profit, non-partisan Prison Policy Initiative produces cutting edge research to expose the broader harm of mass incarceration, and then sparks advocacy campaigns to create a more just society.

Even before the presidential election, we saw the momentum shifting. So-called "progressive" states like California and Oregon, that once championed criminal legal system reforms, were joining states like Louisiana to pass punitive laws that locked more people up, in worse conditions, for longer. We used our research and messaging expertise to help advocates on the ground fight back (See pg. 18).

And after the election, it quickly became clear that things were poised to get much worse. The Trump administration was seeking to fundamentally change the criminal legal system in America, aiming to make it even larger, harsher, and more unfair as quickly as possible. Recognizing this, we sprung into action:

- In response to the President's threat to send incarcerated Americans to El Salvador, we committed to expanding our work outside of its normal bounds of state and local policy to focus more on the actions of the federal government. (See pg. 8)
- We launched the first and most comprehensive tracker that connects the dots on each of the administration's individual actions to show the big picture of its strategy to eviscerate due process, undermine proven solutions that improve community safety, and make prisons worse. (See pg. 7)
- We produced a one-of-a-kind guide that explains that state and local governments — not the president — have the most direct control over prisons and jails, and, more importantly, it shows how they can use their power to push back on the president's actions. (See pg. 7).

While responding to the new challenges, we continued to do the hard-hitting research on the hidden harms of mass incarceration that we're known for:

- We tackled two of the most consequential — but difficult to crack — issues for incarcerated people: prison healthcare and discipline policies (See pg. 5). Using a combination of deep analysis and first-hand accounts of these systems, we peeled back the curtain to show how they traumatize incarcerated people both physically and mentally.

- We exposed how probation — a program often thought of as a more lenient punishment than incarceration — regularly saddles people with dozens of unnecessary and vague rules that set participants up to fail (See pg. 5).
- We hosted a series of training webinars to help hundreds of advocates from all corners of the country push back on new jail construction, debunk the myths about recidivism, and empower incarcerated people to make their voices heard in statehouses (See pgs. 19-20).

We're doing this work at a time when the movement to end mass incarceration is under financial strain. The federal government has terminated many of its grants, and a growing number of large foundations have chosen to reduce their support of criminal legal reform. Many of our partners and allies have been forced to scale back their work, lay off staff, or even close their doors.

For now, the Prison Policy Initiative is doing okay. Thankfully, none of our funding comes from the government, and the steadfast support of our most visionary donors has made it possible to weather the reduction in foundation support.

I don't know what the next few years will look like for our movement and our nation. But I do know that, thanks to the support of friends like you, the Prison Policy Initiative will be in the fight, pushing back on bad policies and cruel practices, and driving forward towards a more just future.

Thank you for your support and for making our work and victories possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Wagner', with a stylized, cursive script.

Peter Wagner
Executive Director
October 22, 2025

Who we are

The non-profit, non-partisan Prison Policy Initiative **produces cutting edge research** to expose the **broad harm of mass incarceration**, and then sparks **advocacy campaigns** to create a more just society.

The Prison Policy Initiative was founded in 2001 to document and publicize how mass incarceration undermines our national welfare. Our team of interdisciplinary researchers and organizers shapes national reform campaigns from our remote workspaces and our headquarters in western Massachusetts.

Staff

- Wanda Bertram, *Communications Strategist*
- Regan Huston, *Digital Communications Strategist*
- Aleks Kajstura, *Legal Director*
- Jacob Kang-Brown, *Senior Researcher*
- Brian Nam-Sonenstein, *Senior Editor & Researcher*
- Emmett Sanders, *Policy & Advocacy Associate*
- Wendy Sawyer, *Research Director*
- Danielle Squillante, *Development & Communications Associate*
- Sarah Staudt, *Policy & Advocacy Director*
- Peter Wagner, *Executive Director*
- Leah Wang, *Senior Research Analyst*
- Mike Wessler, *Communications Director*
- Emily Widra, *Senior Research Analyst*

Volunteers and student interns

- Maddie Mitzner, *University of Michigan Law School*
- Stephen Raher, *Attorney and Researcher*
- Iolanthe Brooks, *Northwestern University*

Consultants

- Bill Cooper, *GIS*
- Bob Machuga, *Graphic Design*
- Jordan Miner, *Programming*
- Orion Taylor, *Jail Data Initiative, Data Analysis*

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Jefferson
- Eric Lotke, *Attorney, researcher, and author*
- Bruce Reilly, *Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People and*
Families Movement
- Brigitte Sarabi, *Founder, Partnership for Safety and Justice*
- Jason Stanley, *Professor of Philosophy, Yale University*
- Heather Ann Thompson, *Professor of History, University*
of Michigan
- Janice Thompson, *Midwest Democracy Network*
- Angela Wessels
- Brenda Wright, *NAACP Legal Defense Fund*
- Rebecca Young, *Attorney*

*Organizations for identification purposes only.

Empowering the movement with facts

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/national>

We develop powerful ways to illuminate the truth about mass incarceration, and use our data-driven analysis to make change.

With creative research strategies, engaging graphics, and highly readable reports, we give organizers, advocates, and policymakers the facts they need to reform the criminal legal system and push for the end of mass incarceration. Highlights include:

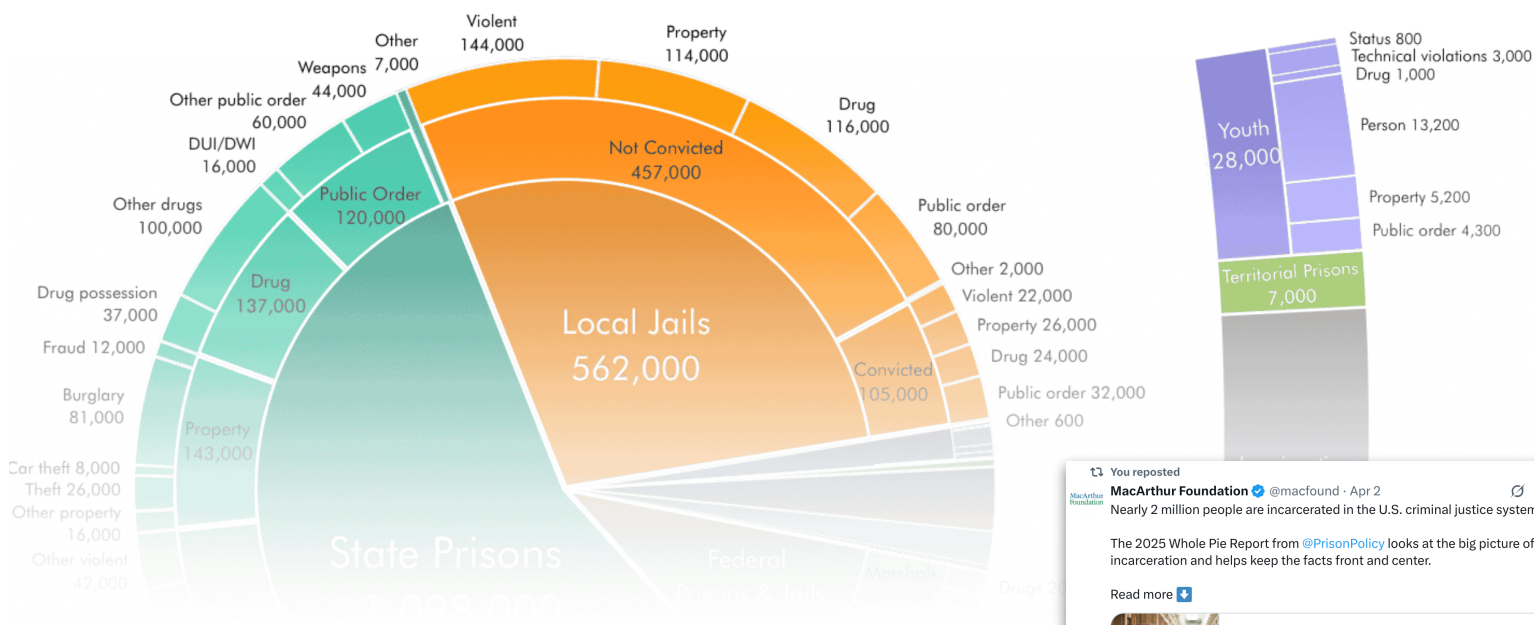
Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2025

Our flagship report offers the most comprehensive view of the nearly 2 million people incarcerated in the U.S., showing what types of facilities they are in and why. For the first time ever, the report includes a section highlighting important changes and trends in the criminal legal system, including notable year-to-year changes in state prison populations.



How many people are locked up in the United States?

The U.S. locks up more people per capita than any other independent democracy, at the staggering rate of 580 per 100,000 residents. But to end mass incarceration, we must first consider *where* and *why* nearly 2 million people are confined nationwide.



Bad Behavior: How prison disciplinary policies manufacture misconduct

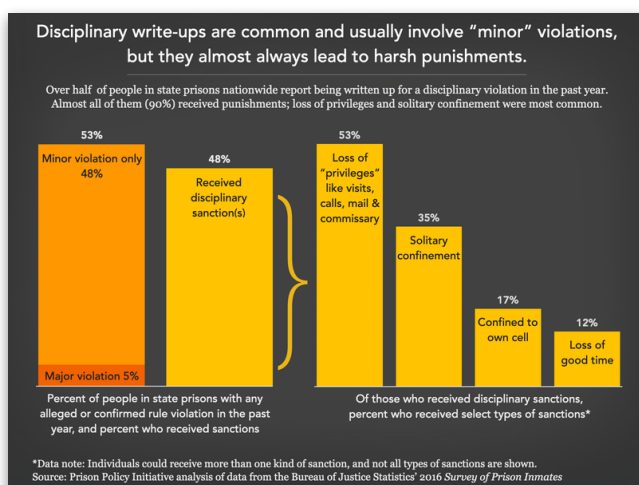
Prison disciplinary systems are supposed to provide safety, security, and the orderly operation of corrections institutions. In some cases, they're even supposed to aid in rehabilitation. However, our analysis of policies in all state prison systems and testimony from dozens of incarcerated people show these unfair and unaccountable systems are counterproductive, traumatizing, and lengthen prison stays. Additionally, we published a guide for journalists containing suggestions for finding data, advice for communicating with incarcerated sources, and other information to help jumpstart further reporting on disciplinary policies.

One Size Fits None: How 'standard conditions' of probation set people up to fail

More than 1 in 10 people admitted to state prisons every year have committed no new crime, but have simply broken one or more of the many conditions, or rules, of their probation. Unfortunately, standard probation conditions are often difficult to locate and parse, vary between jurisdictions, and use complicated and unclear language. We collected and analyzed the standard conditions for 76 jurisdictions across all 50 states and Washington, D.C., creating one of the most comprehensive and accessible compilations of these rules to date.

Cut-rate care: The systemic problems shaping 'healthcare' behind bars

In correctional healthcare systems, care is secondary to controlling costs and avoiding lawsuits. We pored over research, news investigations, government reports, and contractor documents to better understand the "big picture" relationship between healthcare providers, government agencies, and incarcerated people, and to identify system-level targets for improving care outcomes.



Why jails and prisons can't recruit their way out of the understaffing crisis

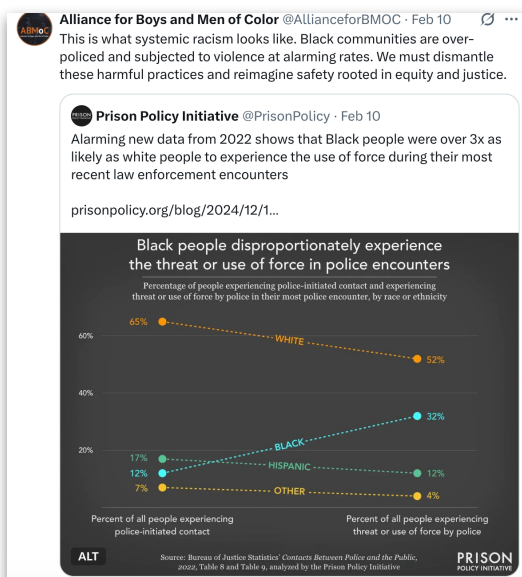
Prisons and local jails struggled with staffing well before the COVID-19 pandemic spurred a national labor shortage, and they haven't bounced back since. We looked at what's happening to the corrections workforce, how staff shortages harm incarcerated people and workers, and how corrections agencies have tried (and failed) to address staffing problems without addressing mass incarceration.

10 ways that mass incarceration is an engine of economic injustice

In this briefing, which we produced with Professor Eric Seligman of the University of Minnesota, we compiled ten examples of how mass incarceration blocks progress toward economic justice. We argue that the massive system of criminalization is not an isolated issue, nor is it someone else's problem; it is an engine of inequality that traps people in poverty, weakens worker power, and undermines political organizing toward a more prosperous future for the vast majority of people.

Despite fewer people experiencing police contact, racial disparities in arrests, police misconduct, and police use of force continue

Almost 50 million people reported contact with police in 2022, reflecting the fewest number of police encounters with the public since 2008. But data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics released in October reveals that racial disparities in police interactions, misconduct, and use of force remained pervasive in 2022.



Forbes

MONEY > PERSONAL FINANCE

Prisons Across Country Face Challenge Of Finding Workers

By **Walter Pavlo**, Contributor. [I am a consultant o...](#) [Follow Author](#)

Published Jan 11, 2025, 02:27pm EST, Updated Jan 13, 2025, 03:06pm EST

The expense of operating prisons is a national crisis and tax payers are being asked to foot the bill. According to a [recent piece by the Prison Policy Initiative](#), prison agencies have tried increasing compensation, lowering employment requirements, hiring more part-time workers, and building new facilities to attract recruits but it hasn't worked. Their conclusion, "understaffing" is an untreatable symptom of mass incarceration — not a recruitment problem.

Working in prisons can be dangerous work. According to a study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, corrections workers face workplace violence, injuries associated with responding to emergencies, exposure to infectious diseases, long and irregular hours and exposure to illicit drugs. Three people were charged last year in the death of a BOP mailroom supervisor who died after opening a letter that entered the prison that prosecutors allege was laced with fentanyl and other substances. Studies have also found that suicide rates among

Abolitionist Law Center @AbolitionistLC

Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board's [@bethanyhallam](#) asked prospective new warden about [@prisonpolicy](#) report finding only decarceration can solve widespread US carceral understaffing. Wingard agreed & said working with community to do so is critical. prisonpolicy.org/blog/2024/12/0...

Allegheny County Jail Watch @alleghenyJOB · Jan 9

Replying to @alleghenyJOB

Wingard says he "wholeheartedly agrees" that a smaller jail pop benefits everyone in the facility. says population management needs to be a constant conversation among jail staff, and "it will be" at ACJ if he becomes warden

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS, CRIMINAL JUSTICE

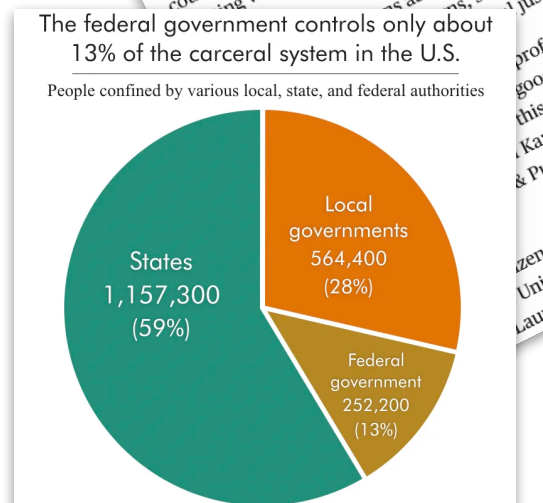
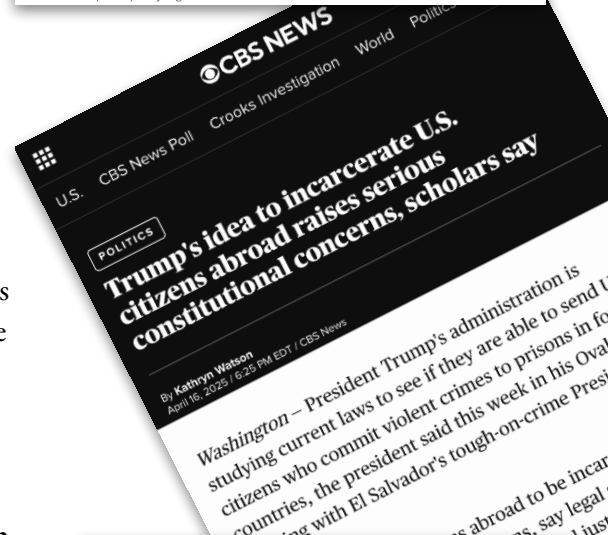
'A different standard': Native Americans still searched at far higher rates by Washington State Patrol, new data shows

Though disparities for other races improved, InvestigateWest analysis reveals Native Americans five times more likely to be searched despite ongoing scrutiny

By **Wilson Criscione** and **Melanie Henshaw**

Although the federal government controls only a small slice of the criminal legal system, the Trump administration is using its bully pulpit and control over federal spending to coerce state and local governments into making their criminal legal systems bigger and even more brutal. In response, we released a new federal tracker that connects the dots of the administration's individual actions to show its larger strategy of doubling down on the failed policies that created the nation's mass incarceration crisis in the first place.

The Trump Administration has made a lot of claims about how it will change the criminal legal system. We explained where the president and federal government have full control over the system, where they have some influence, and where their power ends. Understanding the contours of power and authority outlined in this briefing can provide clues about what to expect in the future and serve as a helpful barometer of how far actions by the administration have deviated from the standards of recent decades.



President Trump said, “home-grows are next.” Here’s our response. President Trump’s comments in April about sending Americans to a Salvadoran prison mark a new, dark turn in the fight to end mass incarceration. After these comments, we were asked by countless people to weigh in on the steadily increasing signs that Trump is working to deport and incarcerate U.S. citizens to El Salvador.

Mass incarceration is on the ballot

While presidential campaigns get most of the attention from the news media, lesser-known down-ballot races can have a more dramatic impact on criminal legal system reform in America. We put together a guide to the most common offices for which voters cast their ballots and explored how those offices can make decisions to reduce the number of people behind bars, improve conditions in prisons and jails, and help turn the page on America’s failed experiment with mass incarceration.

Candidates for office use jail and prison as “one size fits all” policy solutions. Here’s how to push back

Whether on the presidential debate stage or in races for governor, state legislatures, or city councils, candidates for elected office in 2024 fell back on an old tactic: Making spurious claims that “crime is up” and pitching more jail and prison time as solutions to social problems. We laid out facts for the broader public to oppose the bogus claims about what criminalization can achieve, whether in regard to homelessness, the fentanyl crisis, or public safety in general.

Talking turkey about the death penalty: outgoing governors and the president must use their clemency power now

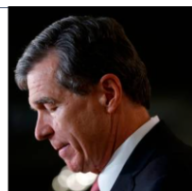
Every November, it has become a light-hearted tradition for the president and some governors to “pardon” turkeys before the Thanksgiving holiday, sparing them from the dinner table. The tactless traditions of granting relief to turkeys by powerful officials casts a harsh light on their paltry records of granting relief to people condemned to die. Fortunately, former President Joe Biden and the outgoing North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper used their commutation powers to remove people from death row.

The News & Observer

As Biden commutes death sentences, advocates hope Cooper will do the same in NC

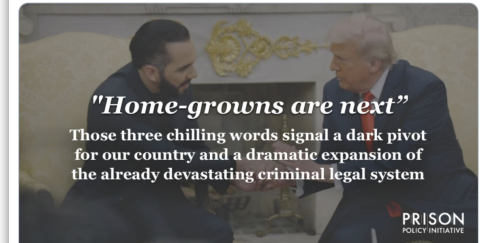
By Avi Bajpai

Updated January 6, 2025 2:11 PM



 **Kay Whitlock**
@kwhitlock.bsky.social

I donate annually to [@prisonpolicy.org](https://www.prisonpolicy.org); have for a long time. Every journalist/scholar/organizer I know who is serious about understanding the harms of a carceral society draws on their research. I have, for decades. This kind of integrity is, in part, why: www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2025/04...



President Trump said, “home-grows are next.” Here’s our response. President Trump’s recent comments about sending Americans to a Salvadoran prison mark a new, dark turn in the fight to end mass incarceration.

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Trump Is Sending People To The Camps

By Hunter Walker
April 16, 2025 7:23 p.m.

Mike Wessler, the communications director of the Prison Policy Initiative, said he and his team were “discussing” whether CECOT should be called a “prison” this morning whether another term should be applied. He pointed to the Holocaust Encyclopedia definition of “concentration” as a strong case to be made that the sorts of facilities. Prisons that define

The Guardian

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle

Activists slam Biden for pardoning turkeys, not those on federal death row

Advocates against death penalty note president has spared no one from death row but it's not too late to 'cement legacy'

Emily Swanson in New York

Tue 26 Nov 2024 06:00 EST

Federal executions **were paused** under the Biden administration. The Democratic president has separately issued **pardons to 22 people** convicted mainly on drug charges. In April 2022, he granted **clemency to 75 people**, including three pardons and 72 sentence commutations, but so far no mercy for anyone on federal death row.



Biden must Trump-proof US democracy, activists say: 'There is a sense of urgency'

 Read more

“We are worried about what will happen to people on death row in the next administration,” said Wanda Bertram, communications strategist with the Prison Policy Initiative. “That’s what makes it so urgent for President Biden, as the outgoing executive, to commute all of these sentences.”

Exposing the harmful consequences of the misuse of jails

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/jails.html>

We put the need for jail reform directly into the national conversation, helping both lawmakers and the public understand how pretrial detention unnecessarily increases jail populations and harms not just individuals in custody but entire communities.

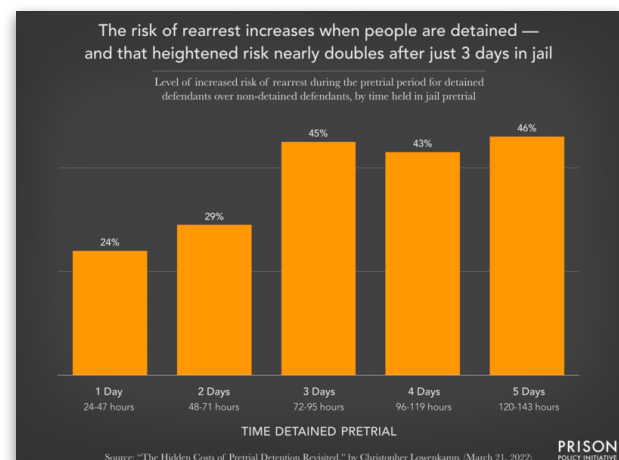
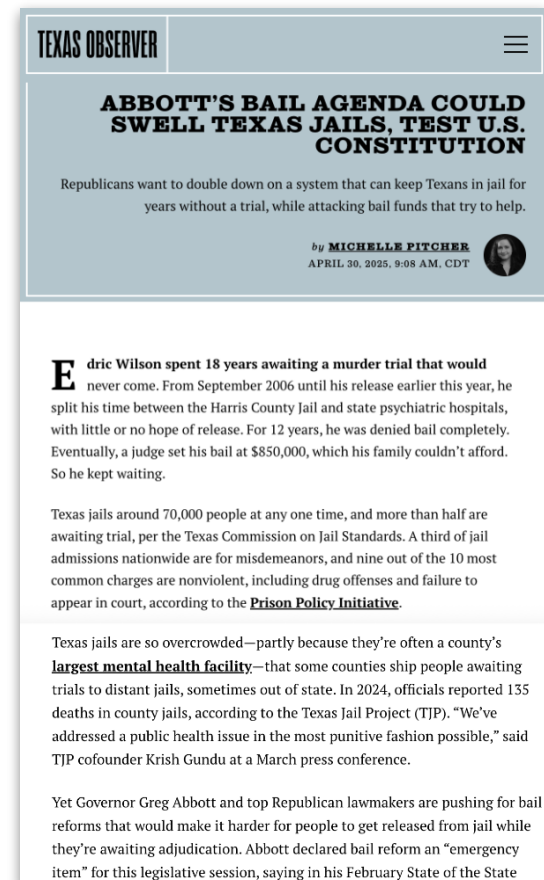
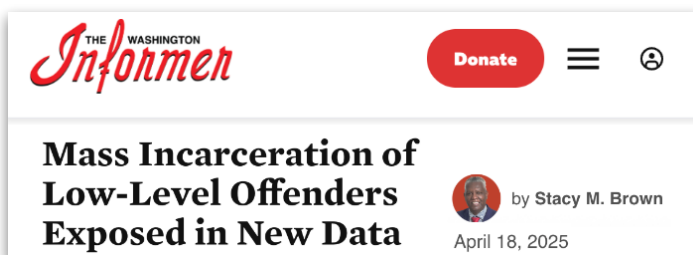
The U.S. jail population has tripled over the last 30 years, driven by an increase in pretrial detention and money bail, policies that keep legally innocent people behind bars before trial. Our work this year highlighted the harmful impact that pretrial detention has on individuals and communities, and provided vital data on who is jailed, how frequently, and for what charges, using unique datasets from our partners at the Jail Data Initiative. Highlights include:

New national data help fill 20-year data gap: Offense data for people in local jails

Millions of people are arrested and booked into jail every year, but existing national data offer very little information about the actual criminal charges for which they are detained. We worked with the Jail Data Initiative to fill that gap and provide a new “snapshot” of people in jail by offense type using the most up-to-date nationally representative sample available.

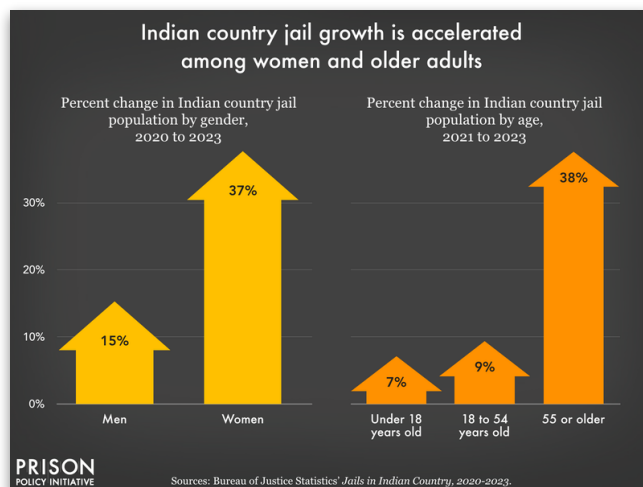
Research roundup: Evidence that a single day in jail causes immediate and long-lasting harms

We examined recent studies that measure pretrial detention’s impact on people, particularly within the first 72 hours in jail. Building on our investigations into pretrial detention’s role in destructive cycles of arrest and incarceration, the benefits of pretrial release, and the dangers of jail expansion, we find that there is no “safe” way to jail a person, nor is there an amount of time a person can be detained without escalating short- and long-term risks to themselves and their communities.



New, expanded data on Indian country jails show concerning trends extend to tribal lands

Native people are consistently overrepresented in the criminal legal system. The Bureau of Justice Statistics released new data on jails in Indian country that provides more detail on this disturbing disparity: much like other jails across the country, Indian country jail populations are quickly bouncing back from the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this growth has disproportionately impacted women and older adults.



Who is jailed, how often, and why: Our Jail Data Initiative collaboration offers a fresh look at the misuse of local jails

Millions of people are arrested and booked into jail every year, but existing national data offer very little information about who these people are, how frequently they are jailed, and why they are jailed. Using a unique dataset provided by the Jail Data Initiative, we examined the flow of individuals booked into a nationally-representative sample of jails along lines of race, ethnicity, sex, age, housing status, and type of criminal charge.

New research finds higher county jail rates have deadly consequences for entire communities

The health, social, and economic harms of incarceration extend far beyond the people behind bars to their children, families, and entire communities, as a large body of research has shown. New research from Anneliese Luck at the University of Pennsylvania adds to this evidence, finding strong links between higher county jail incarceration rates and higher county mortality (death) rates, especially for Black people and women.

WISCONSIN EXAMINER
PART OF STATES NEWSROOM

CIVIL RIGHTS **CRIMINAL JUSTICE** **INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Multi-year jail study reveals those mostly likely to be booked and rebooked

Native Americans/Indigenous people most often booked again

BY: **FRANK ZUFALL** - DECEMBER 6, 2024 5:15 AM

A recently released [Prison Policy Initiative](#) report, using data from the Jail Data Initiative, reveals that in 2023 there were 7.6 million admissions to jail, but that 1 in 4 admissions were for people previously booked in the last year, with Indigenous people/Native Americans the most likely to be booked again.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROJECT

The Wisconsin Examiner's Criminal Justice Reporting Project shines a light on incarceration, law enforcement and criminal justice issues with support from the Public Welfare Foundation

"Based on the Jail Data Initiative data, we estimate that over 5.6 million unique individuals are booked into jail annually and about 1.2 million are jailed multiple times in a given year," the report found. "Further analysis reveals patterns of bookings – and repeat bookings in particular – across the country: The jail experience disproportionately impacts Black and Indigenous people, and law enforcement continues to use jailing as a response to poverty and low-level 'public order' offenses."

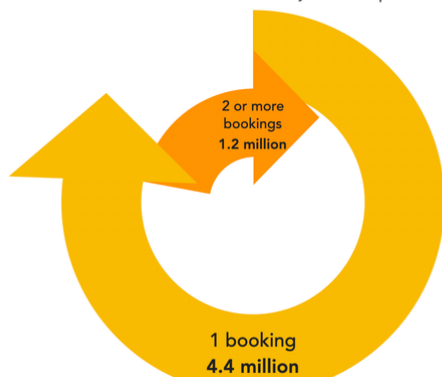
The report, prepared by Emily Widra and Wendy Sawyer, is titled "Who is jailed, how often and why: Our Jail Data Initiative collaboration offers a fresh look at the misuse of local jails."

The Jail Data Initiative gathered information from 1,000 jails in the U.S. daily that included online jail rosters. The 1,000 jails represent approximately a third of 2,850 jails in America.

Of the 1,000 jails, 648 offered jail rosters available for a two-year window (July 1, 2021-June 30, 2023) and an additional year (out to June 30, 2024) to document those who had been booked again.

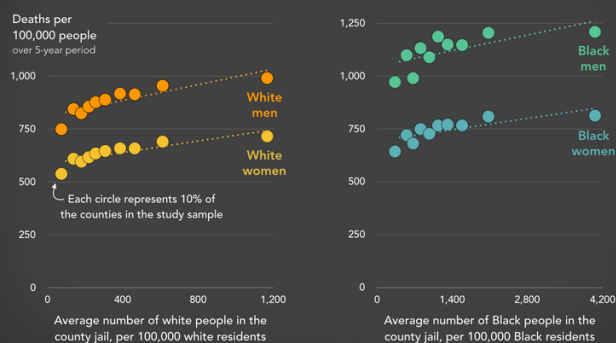
Every year, people cycle through local jails over 7 million times

Over 5.6 million individuals are jailed annually, and more than 1 in 5 of them are jailed multiple times.



As jail incarceration rates increase, so do county death rates

Higher county jail rates are correlated with higher countywide death rates. In general, mortality rates are higher among men versus women, and among Black versus white people, but the relationship between jail rates and death rates is stronger for women and for Black people.



Populations are based on people aged 15-64 for both jail and county populations. Dotted lines show linear trendlines in mortality rates. Sourcing and methodological notes: https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2025/01/30/county_mortality_jails/

PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE

Jailing the homeless: New data shed light on unhoused people in local jails

Despite jails' central role in mass incarceration, comprehensive national data about the 5.6 million people who cycle through them each year is collected infrequently, leaving even basic questions about jails unanswerable. We presented what we know about unhoused people who are booked into jails, using the best available dataset, collected from jail rosters by the Jail Data Initiative.



Gov. Abbott's bail proposals would make communities less safe, drain taxpayer dollars, and worsen racial disparities

Texas Governor Greg Abbott and conservative lawmakers tried to change the state constitution to enshrine the worst features of the state's bail system. These proposals, if enacted, would cause a rise in Texas' already bloated jail populations. Texas deserves true reform measures that seek to reduce harmful pretrial jailing, rather than so-called "tough-on-crime," anti-immigrant measures masquerading as "bail reform".

Unhoused people languish in jail more than three times as long as the typical defendant

Median length of stay, by housing status, among people booked into a sample of 175 jails that recorded unhoused status at booking

Housed or unknown housing status

4 days

Unhoused

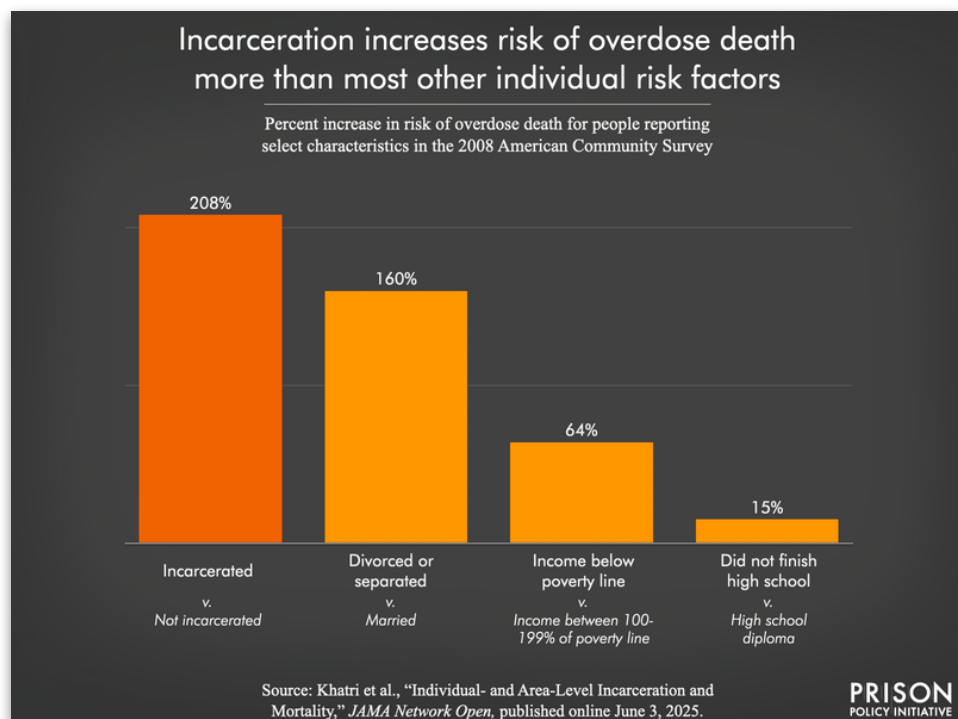
14 days

Source: Jail Data Initiative

New research: More evidence that county jail incarceration harms health, raising death rates

It is tough to get nationally-representative, individual-level data on incarceration's health impacts.

But researchers are increasingly providing evidence that the criminalization of poverty, addiction, and mental health issues has sharp, harmful consequences. A new cohort study led by Dr. Utsha Khatri helps us better understand how jails impact death rates, breaking out overdose deaths for special attention.



Protecting our democracy from mass incarceration by ending prison gerrymandering

<https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/>

When states and local governments draw political districts using Census data that counts incarcerated people in prisons, they unintentionally enhance the representation of people who live near prisons while diluting the representation of everyone else.

We launched the movement to end prison gerrymandering in 2001 and have been a national leader of this campaign ever since. Roughly half the country now lives in a place that has addressed prison gerrymandering, with more than 19 states and 200 local governments tackling the issue. Progress on this issue has been so rapid that the National Conference of State Legislatures called state efforts to end prison gerrymandering “the fastest-growing trend in redistricting.”

Federal Census policy harms democracy — but state lawmakers can end this “prison gerrymandering”

Every ten years, when the Census Bureau conducts its official tally of the nation’s population, it incorrectly counts incarcerated people as residents of prison cells rather than in their home communities. While the 2030 Census count is still years away, states need to act now to avoid prison gerrymandering the next time they redraw their districts. We released reports focused on Oklahoma, North Carolina, Louisiana, West Virginia, and Kansas that illustrate the problem and provide advocates in these states with useful messaging and data needed to take action.



A record number of city councils and county commissions tackled prison gerrymandering after the 2020 Census. Because of their relatively small size, city and county governments often experience the most distortive impacts of prison gerrymandering. So, it should come as no surprise that the movement to end prison gerrymandering started and has been most successful at the local government level, in mostly small, rural, conservative cities and counties. The 2020 redistricting cycle continued this pattern.

Resource Spotlight: Which local governments engage in or avoid prison gerrymandering?

The movement to end prison gerrymandering started with local governments. Because of their relatively small size, city and county governments often experience the most distortive impacts of the problem. We identified over 200 cities and counties that have taken action to avoid prison gerrymandering and a decreasing number of local governments that still continue to base representation on flawed Census Bureau data.

If the Census Bureau truly values accuracy, it should count incarcerated people at home

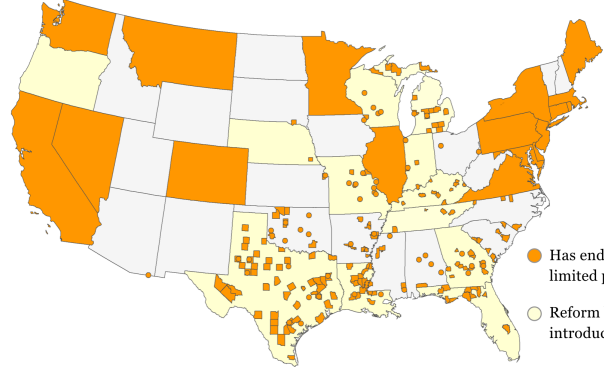
The Census Bureau's current method of counting people in prison and jail is prone to errors with sizable consequences. And the solution is clear: by counting incarcerated people as residents of their homes the Census Bureau will minimize technical inaccuracies while also ending prison gerrymandering.

Census Bureau's Report: States say Bureau not doing enough to end prison gerrymandering

In December, the Census Bureau released its "View from the States" report — a collection of states' feedback about the Bureau's 2020 redistricting data program. We broke down the 60-page report to highlight states' dissatisfaction with the Census Bureau for counting incarcerated people in the wrong place and examined the progress and backsliding in the way it publishes population data for correctional facilities.

State and local governments are rejecting prison gerrymandering

Now is the time for the Census Bureau to fix the problem it created



Roughly half of all U.S. residents now live in a city, county, or state that has ended prison gerrymandering, with more almost certain to join them before the 2030 redistricting cycle.

PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE

For more information about prison gerrymandering, see <http://www.prisonersofthecensus.org>

CITY COUNCILS AND COUNTY COMMISSIONS TACKLE PRISON GERRYMANDERING

Local governments continue to address prison gerrymandering in their own local government redistricting data, often without state support

Population equality among legislative districts enables everyone to have equal representation from elected officials. Prison gerrymandering is a problem created because the Census Bureau incorrectly counts incarcerated people as residents of their prison cells rather than their home communities. As a result, when municipalities or counties use Census data to draw new local government districts, they inadvertently give residents of districts with prisons greater political clout than all other residents in the community.

Outsize impact on local governments. Because of their smaller populations, the Census Bureau's policy of counting incarcerated people at the location has a greater impact on skewing local democracy. Putting prisons in rural areas means that a single prison can have an outsize impact on the local population counts. When drawing districts, rural communities a single prison can easily account for a full county commissioner district population.

Rural governments at the forefront of reform efforts. In addition to the 200+ local governments that avoided prison gerrymandering after the 2000 and 2010 Censuses, we identified an additional 21 local governments scattered across 10 states that started doing so after the 2020 Census:

Arkansas: Izard and Jackson Counties
Delaware: City of Wilmington
Florida: Columbia and Jefferson Counties
Georgia: Coffee, Etowah, Long, Monroe, Montgomery, and Wayne Counties
Louisiana: Allen and Catahoula Parishes
Oklahoma: Atoka and Woodward Counties
Rhode Island: City of Central Falls
North Carolina: Granville County
South Carolina: Williamsburg County
Tennessee: Hardman, Johnson, and Morgan Counties

Rural communities are at risk of being left behind in wave of reforms. Rural communities — where most prisons are located — were at the forefront of adjusting redistricting populations to avoid prison gerrymandering. But as states have started taking on reforms and realigning people to count them at home in redistricting data, rural areas of the country are now at risk of being left behind.

Not only do rural communities bear the biggest impact of prison gerrymandering, but increasingly all residents of rural states are left behind in state efforts to end prison gerrymandering. Our analysis of the ten worst prison gerrymanders in the nation show the problem is increasingly harming residents of rural states and defying some of the preconceived notions about partisan impacts — of these ten districts, six are districts controlled by Democrats, while Republicans control four.

Census needs to fix the problem it created. Roughly half of all U.S. residents now live in a city, county, or state that has ended prison gerrymandering. Even as more local governments and states address prison gerrymandering they can only partially solve the problem. Prison gerrymandering is a national problem that crosses jurisdictional boundaries. No city, county, or state can completely fix this issue on its own. Only the Census Bureau can fully solve this problem nationwide.

For more info and details, check out the full analysis at <https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/news/2024/07/30/local-2020/> 7/29/24

The Push To End 'Prison Gerrymandering' Gains Momentum

By Jack Karp | November 1, 2024, 9:17 PM EDT

Designing P.L. 94-171 Redistricting Data for the Year 2030 Census

The View from the States

By CATHY KRAVITZ, JEFF PETERSON, JAMES WILSON, and JAMES FARRINGTON

United States Census Bureau
U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau
census.gov

Shining a light on the carceral experience

Our research reveals how prisons and jails fall short of their rehabilitative commitments by dampening the benefits of positive reforms and investing in punitive policies that bring misery to incarcerated people and their loved ones.

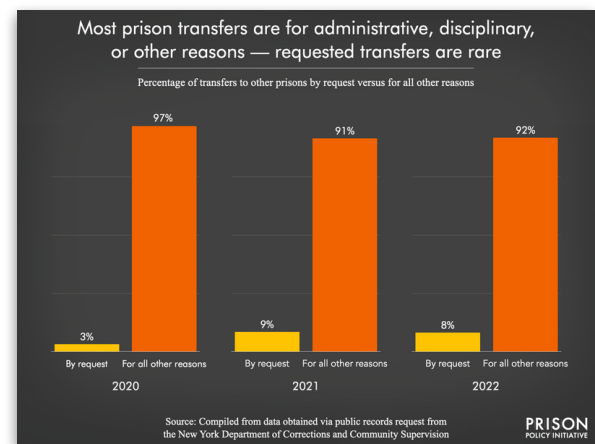
Our past work on the carceral experience examined the impact of climate change behind bars, how mail scanning affects communication between incarcerated people and their loved ones, and how prisons use repression to punish incarcerated journalists. This year, we touched on a range of issues, the highlights of which include:

“You want to be in the hell you already know”: How prison transfers regularly upend incarcerated people’s lives

Moving people between prisons can improve their access to treatment, programs, and visitation — but transfers can also be deeply traumatizing, disruptive, and destabilizing. In this briefing, we use transfer records and interviews with dozens of formerly incarcerated New Yorkers to examine how often people are moved, why they’re moved, and how this little-discussed aspect of prison life impacts them.

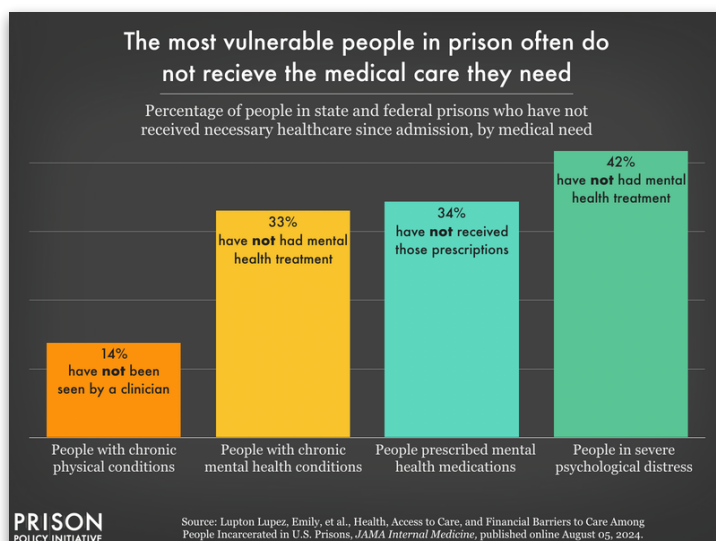
New research links medical copays to reduced healthcare access in prisons

Using our prior research on prison wages and medical copays, researchers found that higher copays obstruct access to necessary healthcare behind bars, even as prison populations face increasing rates of physical and mental health conditions.



It's designed to break you...They move you from plantation to plantation. **You lose people, you lose property. You lose so much through a transfer...** In prison because of all the violence, who'd want to get moved? **You want to be in the hell you already know, the hell that you already got comfortable in.** Now they're sending you to another man-made hell that you got to start all over [in]... No one wants that.

— Wyatt, incarcerated 29 years and transferred 9 times.



You reposted

NYSDA @NYSDefenders · 2h

This is a must-read report for policymakers, people who work in the criminal legal system, and the public, regarding the impact of prison transfers in NY.

Prison Policy Initiative @PrisonPolicy · 23h

NEW: Prison transfers are common, but that doesn't mean they're easy for incarcerated people and their loved ones.

We examined transfer records & interviews with dozens of formerly incarcerated New Yorkers to find out how transfers upend people's liv...

II GIF

Rolling back solitary confinement reforms won't make prisons safer

Thousands of New York prison guards went on strike in February to demand changes to the HALT Solitary Confinement Act. They claimed that limitations on solitary confinement have worsened working conditions. We explained why the decision to return long-term isolation to New York's prisons won't fix things.

New report reveals successes and limitations of medications for opioid use disorder in New York state prisons

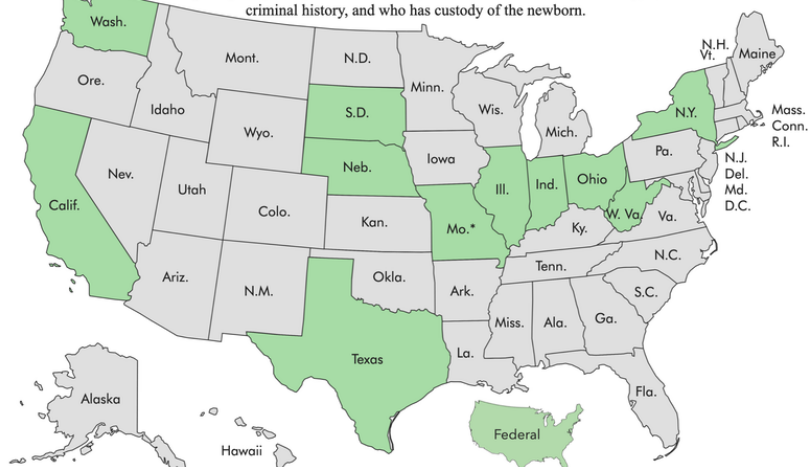
The Correctional Association of New York published a report on medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder in the state's prison system. Though the findings focus on New York, the report offers valuable insights about the need for, and challenges of, implementing medication-assisted treatment in prisons. We included a 50-state table explaining which medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) are available in state and federal prisons.

New data on pregnancy prevalence, outcomes, and programs in prisons are welcome additions, but raise new questions

Women's incarceration has grown at twice the pace of men's incarceration in recent decades, but there is often too little data to explain this growth or to elaborate on the specific effects incarceration has on women and their health, including their experience of pregnancy. We reviewed data from a new Bureau of Justice Statistics report that offers the first national data on pregnancy outcomes in prisons, but it unfortunately leaves many important questions unanswered.

Only twelve jurisdictions have residential programs allowing people to live with their newborns while incarcerated

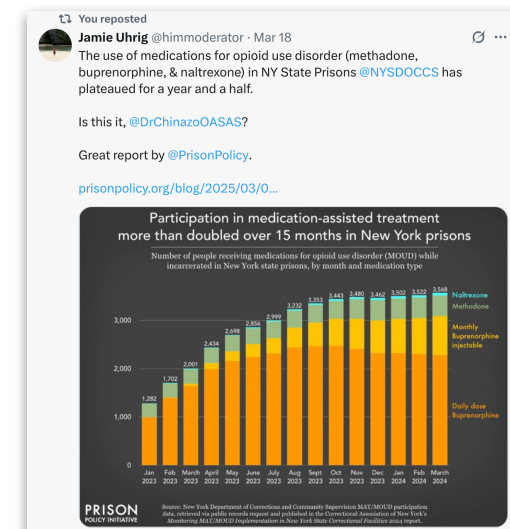
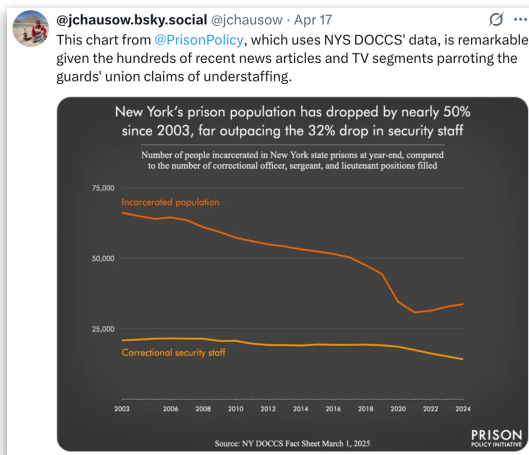
These prison "nurseries" are few and far between, frequently offered at only one facility in the state. Eligibility for participation is limited by time left on a sentence, offense type, criminal history, and who has custody of the newborn.



*Missouri's prison nursery program began in 2025.

Source and notes: Bureau of Justice Statistics' *Healthcare and Pregnancy Prevalence and Outcomes in Prison, 2023*

PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE



Governing
For the people making government work.

MAGAZINE

The Forces Finally Driving Down Deaths from Overdose

After more than 1 million deaths, opioid mortality is dropping fast.

Summer 2025 • Carl Smith

Researchers estimate that almost a third of post-incarceration deaths could be prevented if medications were made available to all inmates. Prison systems in 33 states do offer medication to addicted inmates, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, but the protocol varies. Twenty-one states continue to provide medication to inmates who were being treated prior to admission. Another 14 states will initiate treatment only in the weeks prior to release. A National Institutes of Health survey of more than a thousand jails found that just over 40 percent offered medication for opioid use disorder.

Some states have passed laws requiring a review of administrative protocols to determine what might be done to expand access, says Samantha Harris, a health policy researcher at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Some have implemented pilot programs. So far, momentum is being driven largely by blue states, Harris says. In some parts of the country, there can be stigma about providing addiction medication to any population. Incarcerated individuals can face even greater barriers to access.

Bringing to light how the carceral system exploits incarcerated people

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/exploitation.html>

Incarcerated people and their families are literally a captive market that private companies and carceral systems are all too eager to exploit. We bring these practices to light and provide the data needed to fight back.

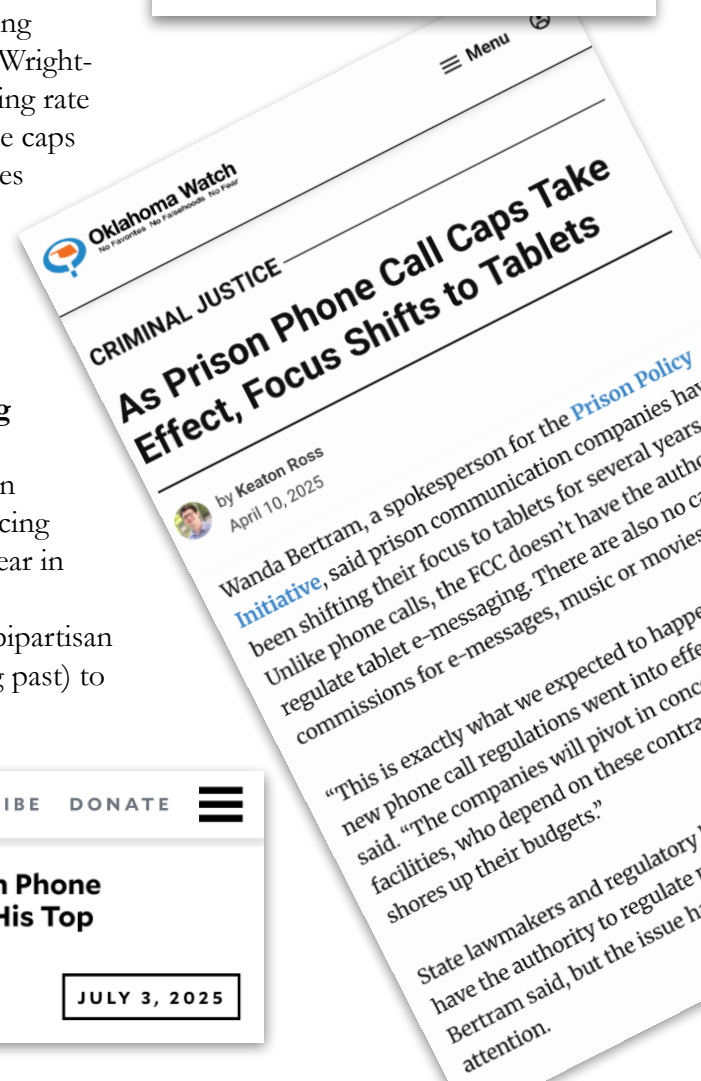
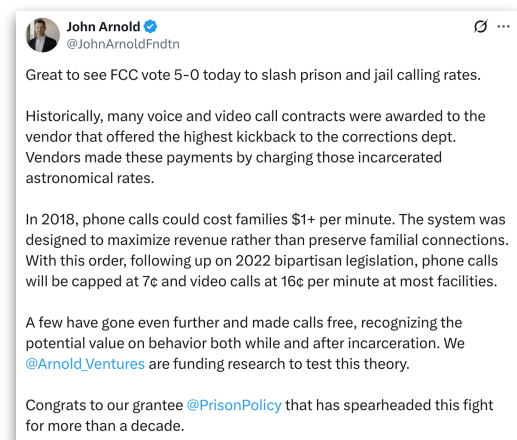
The exploitation of incarcerated people and their loved ones has been a focus of our research and advocacy work for over a decade. Through our work, we've exposed how incarcerated people are nickel-and-dimed for phone calls, medical care, tablets, and more. You can read more about this change below, in addition to other highlights of our work:

FCC votes to slash prison and jail calling rates and ban corporate kickbacks

On July 18, 2024, the Federal Communications Commission voted to implement several new regulations on phone and video calling services in prisons and jails as required by the 2022 Martha Wright-Reed Fair and Just Communications Act. In addition to setting rate caps on calls from prisons and jails, the FCC set the first rate caps for video calls and included a new rule prohibiting companies from charging additional fees for "ancillary services." Unfortunately, as we explain below, that wasn't the end of this story.

FCC postpones its groundbreaking 2024 rules, allowing excessive phone and video rates to continue

On June 30, 2025, the Federal Communications Commission abruptly announced a two-year postponement of rules reducing prison and jail phone rates that it passed unanimously last year in accordance with the Martha Wright-Reed Fair and Just Communications Act. The FCC's reversal defies the Act, a bipartisan law that gave the agency a deadline (which it is now blowing past) to implement these regulations.



Prison Banned Books Week: Books give incarcerated people access to the world, but tablets are often used to wall them off

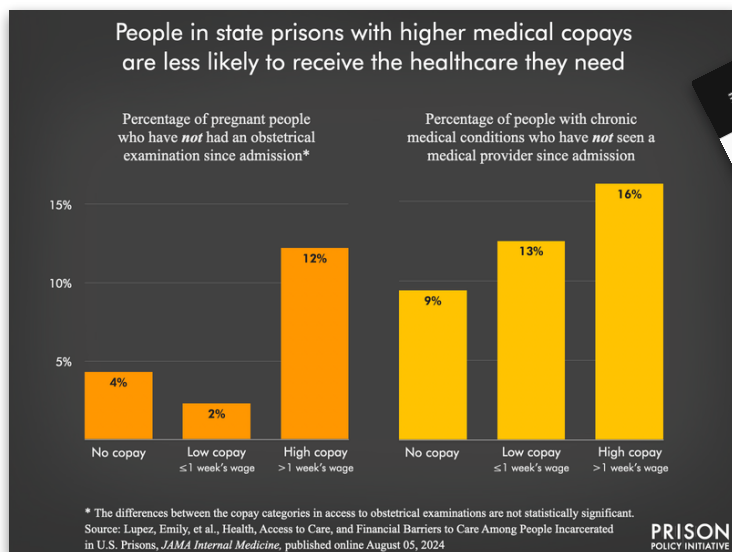
Books have long served as a bridge to the outside world for incarcerated people. This past year's Prison Banned Books Week highlighted the role tablets ironically play in further restricting incarcerated people's access to reading materials. We looked at data collected by the Prison Banned Books Week campaign on prison book bans, policies around books, and the availability of ebooks on tablet computers. We found that tablets limit access to important modern writing and knowledge behind bars.

Federal prison rules push for “financial responsibility” while impoverishing people

The Bureau of Prisons' proposed changes to the Inmate Financial Responsibility Program are a response to the false concerns that incarcerated people are hoarding money in their commissary accounts while refusing to pay legal debts. However, the overwhelming majority of people incarcerated in federal prisons are struggling to afford basic necessities — not living a life of luxury behind bars — and these rules risk pushing incarcerated people and their families further into poverty.

Policies for waiving medical copays in prisons are not enough to undo the harm caused by charging incarcerated people for health care access

In most states, people incarcerated in prisons must pay medical “copays,” which are essentially fees to access health care and other health services. While some prisons have created copay waivers or exemptions, our review of these policies and evidence from a recent study by Dr. Emily Lupez and her colleagues showed that these exemptions are so limited, ill-defined, and inconsistent that they fail to make the copay system fairer and less harmful for incarcerated people.



Public News Service

Social Issues | Criminal Justice News

Report: Tablets in CT, U.S. prisons don't fill the void of books

Edwin J. Viera, Producer
Monday, September 23, 2024

A new report finds using computer tablets in prisons in Connecticut and nationwide isn't filling the void of books.

The Prison Policy Initiative report notes [more states provide access to tablets](#) for prisoners. In 2019, only 12 states allowed them - now, 48 do.

But tablet use is increasing at a time when accessing physical books is a challenge due to bans.

Connecticut has close to 2,500 titles on its banned list, though some deemed explicit include medical books.

Wanda Bertram, communications strategist with the Prison Policy Initiative, said these devices make blanket book bans easier to impose.

THE CARCERAL SYSTEM'S WAR ON BOOKS

Books have long served as a bridge between incarcerated people & the outside world. They've also always been **under attack by prisons.**

This year's **Prison Banned Books Week** highlights the role **tablets** are ironically playing in further restricting incarcerated people's access to reading materials. To better understand these changes, we looked at data on prison book bans, policies around books, and the availability of ebooks on tablet computers.

What we found is that **tablets limit access to important modern writing and knowledge behind bars.**

https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2024/09/16/prison_banned_books_week/

PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE

Forbes

MONEY > PERSONAL FINANCE

New Rules On Federal Inmate Financial Responsibility Program

By [Walter Pavlo](#), Contributor. © I...
Published Dec 21, 2024, 03:21pm EST, Updated Dec 23, 2024, 11:18am EST

Nasser and Kelly both of whom are currently serving sentences that will keep them in prison for life, had large sums of money in their accounts that was shielded from victims and financial obligations they may have. However, according to the [Prison Policy Initiative](#), many prisoners struggle to purchase basic hygiene supplies, stamps, and other necessities of incarcerated life—thanks in part to the low wages they made [working in prison](#) and the [mere pennies](#) they earned. In the BOP, prisoners use their diets with higher quality meat and chicken wings.

Building a stronger justice reform movement

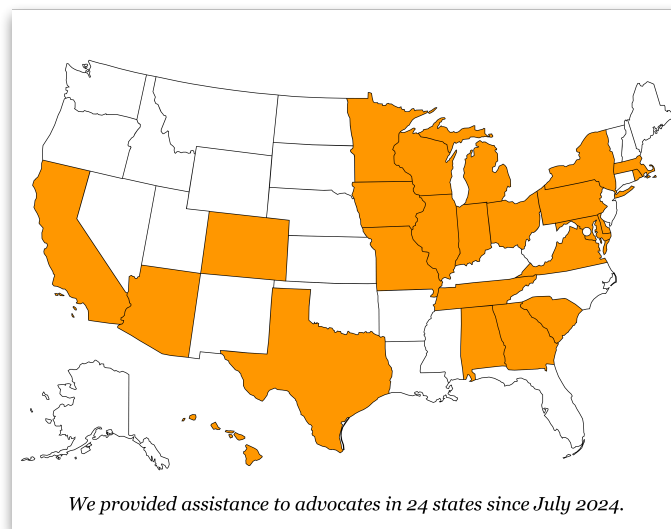
<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/trainings/> &
<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research.html>

Our Advocacy Department works with groups across the country to identify gaps where new research would support reform efforts, provide technical assistance in reviewing legislation, policy documents, and official reports, and connect partners working in similar spaces across the country. We also produce trainings and webinars that cover the issues that we encounter across the country.

We prioritize providing support to state and local groups with limited resources, those in areas without strong organizing networks, and those led by directly impacted people. Since July 2024, we have worked with advocates in 24 states on issues including fighting jail expansion and promoting parole reform.

Here are some examples of the kinds of projects we have worked on with state and local organizations this year:

- In partnership with **Californians United for a Responsible Budget**, we testified before the California Board of Parole Hearings to oppose the use of unreliable drug tests in parole decision-making.
- We worked with **Together Colorado** on their recently passed bill HB 25-1013 to make visitation a right in Colorado.
- We provided assistance to **Texas Prisons Community Advocates** on their report on rampant water contamination in Texas' prisons by helping to locate data, navigate data sources, review drafts, and provide graphics and other support like one-page fact sheets of the report's findings.
- As part of our ongoing work providing technical support to advocates fighting jail expansion projects, we partnered with the **Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition** to oppose jail expansion in Oahu and with **Just City** to oppose jail construction in Memphis.



reimaginingpublicsafetyhawaii and acluhawaii · 11h

Earlier this year, Prison Policy Initiative released a report answering the question:

Does Hawai'i really need a new, billion dollar, expanded-capacity OCCC jail to address overcrowding?

REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY HAWAII COALITION

Learn more →

JANUARY 2025

What are people in TDCJ drinking?

In a study of 16 TDCJ units, dangerous metallic and bacterial contaminants were detected in nearly 90 water samples taken between 2019 and 2023.

Tens of thousands have been or are currently held in prisons which tested positive for things like Lead, Arsenic, and Coliform. Hundreds of TDCJ staff also work in these facilities and consume this water daily.

90% Almost 90% of TDCJ units sampled tested positive for contamination on at least one occasion. Nearly a third tested positive on ten or more separate occasions.

18,500 More than 18,500 people, 14% of Texas' entire prison population, are incarcerated in units where coliform was detected. Nearly 15,000, or 11% of Texas prisoners, are being held in units where lead was detected.

\$750M Texas taxpayers spent over \$750M on prison healthcare in 2019. In 2024, Texas spent almost \$3.2M on dialysis alone.

CONTAMINANT	HARMS	PREVALENCE
Lead	Can impair both renal and cognitive function. Damage to reproductive and nervous systems.	37.5% of Units sampled.
Copper	Anemia, dementia, tremors, kidney failure, liver failure, and death.	6.3% of Units sampled.
Arsenic	Can cause skin lesions and cancer of the skin, bladder, and lung. Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and death.	87.5% of Units sampled.
Coliform and E. coli	Cramping, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever. Infection from E. Coli may lead to life threatening diseases characterized by acute renal failure and severe neurological complications.	37.5% of Units sampled. E. Coli was found in one unit on 4 separate occasions

What bills should you support? SB 1929 Menéndez | Bettencourt

PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE

In addition to providing strategic support to the broader movement, we produce publications that fill key messaging gaps that strengthen the work of local and state advocates, journalists, policymakers, and all those working to transform the criminal legal system. Highlights from our recent work include:

34 criminal legal system reforms that can win in 2025

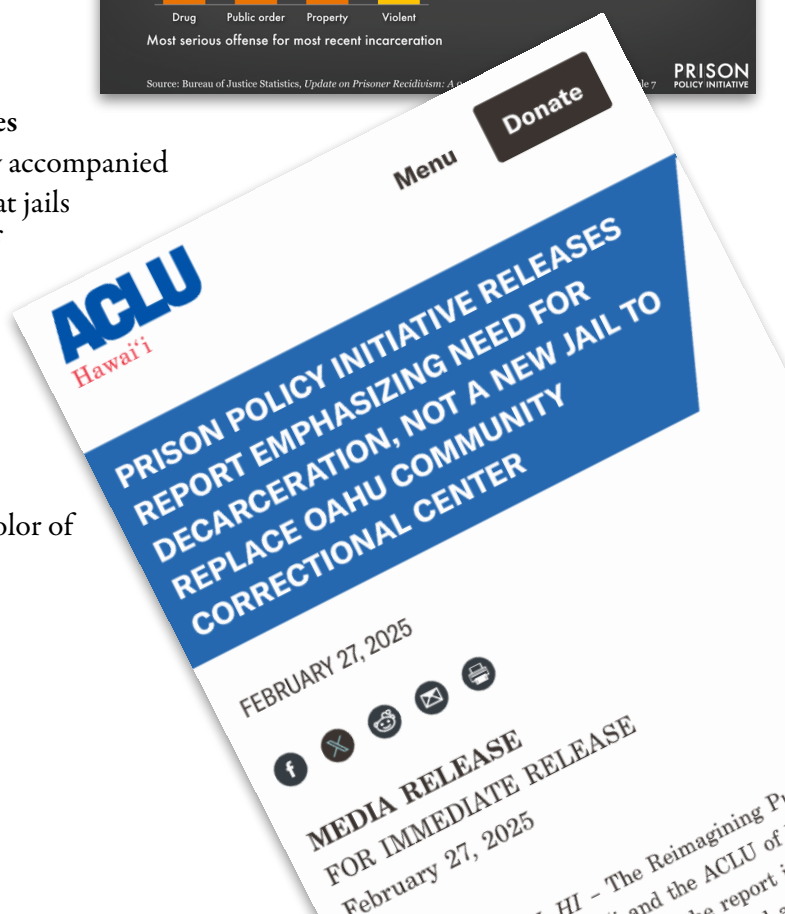
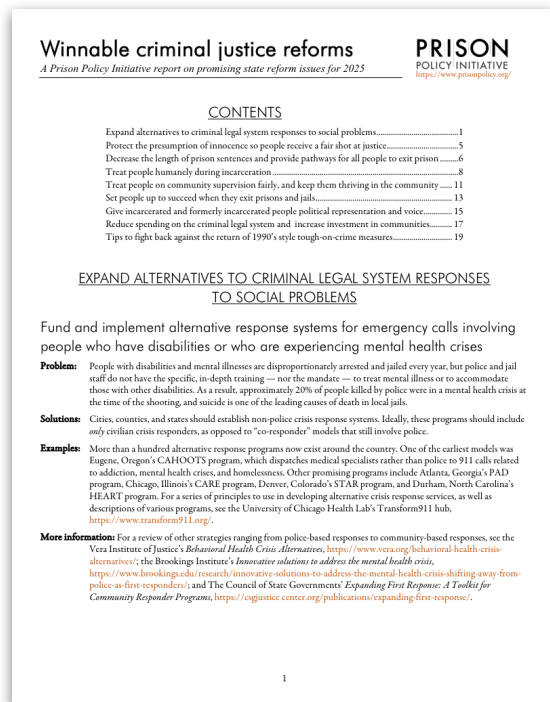
We released our annual list of actionable and specific criminal legal system reforms state legislators can pursue as they return for the new legislative session. This sweeping resource offers examples of reform victories that policymakers can emulate to make the criminal legal system fairer without making it bigger.

The myth of the “revolving door:” Challenging misconceptions about recidivism

We released a new guide to recidivism statistics and their history, and how advocates for decarceration can challenge the way these flawed statistics are used to undermine their efforts. Decision-makers often cite worries about recidivism as a primary reason to oppose criminal legal system reforms, so we decided to tackle this issue as part of our Advocacy Toolkit. We also hosted a webinar in March, where our policy and advocacy team discussed strategies for pushing back against unproductive and inaccurate uses of recidivism stories and statistics.

Fighting Jail Expansion: Lessons from the Front Lines

For decades, calls for new jail construction were largely accompanied by “Tough on Crime” rhetoric that ignored the fact that jails often house the most precariously situated members of our society. Our Advocacy Department hosted a webinar in June to discuss how those on the frontlines who oppose new jail construction have evolved their own arguments and have developed new strategies to push back. Panelists included Carrie Ann Shirota from ACLU-HI, Liz Blum-Guttierrez from Decarcerate Sacramento, and Michael Collins from Color of Change.



In their own words: Organizing legislative testimony from incarcerated people

We updated our Advocacy Toolkit with a new resource designed to provide advocates with a blueprint for organizing legislative testimony from incarcerated people. In the United States, millions of incarcerated people are routinely denied the right to speak in legislative hearings on laws and policies that directly impact every aspect of their lives. Building off insights from advocates who have facilitated testimony from incarcerated people, our toolkit includes information on communication, education, coordination, and possible risks that come with providing testimony. We also hosted a panel of advocates from around the country to discuss this important topic in August 2024. Panelists included Anthony Blankenship of Civil Survival, Jesse White of Prisoner's Legal Services of Massachusetts, and Christopher Blackwell, co-founder of Look2Justice and an award-winning incarcerated journalist.

Alissandra Murray
@alissandra4mht

Just attended a @PrisonPolicy session on receiving inmate testimony and it concerns me deeply how limited remote testimony options are in NH. Much of the work we do on the Criminal Justice committee impacts those incarcerated – we need to establish better paths for engagement.

WEBINAR

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: ORGANIZING LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY FROM INCARCERATED PEOPLE

Learn strategies advocates around the country are using to help incarcerated people be heard at legislative committee hearings.

- Anthony Blankenship
Senior Community Organizer, Civil Survival
- Jesse White
Legislative Director, Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts
- Christopher Blackwell
Award-winning incarcerated journalist, Co-founder of Look 2 Justice

August 5, 2024
3:00 PM EST
Online
www.PrisonPolicy.org

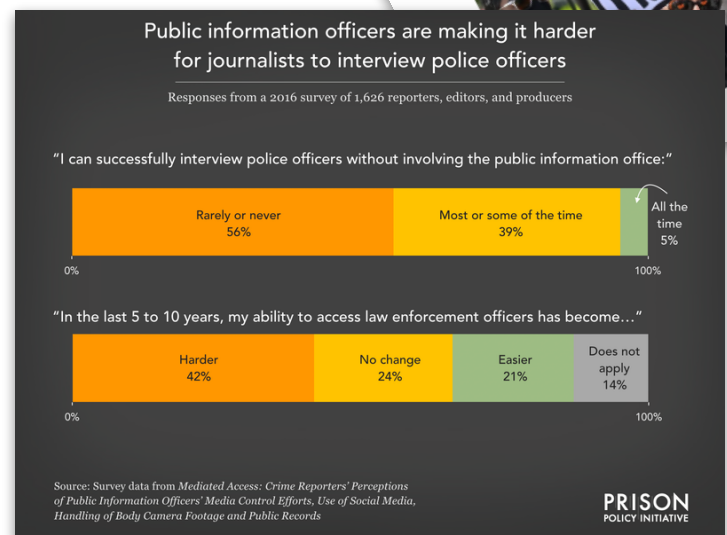
Estimating the impact: How many people are excluded from Fair Housing protections because of a past drug conviction?

A little-known 1988 law called the Thurmond Amendment stripped people with drug distribution convictions of federal protections under the Fair Housing Act, making it even more difficult for many people with criminal records to secure housing. We were asked by a coalition of advocates working to repeal this law just how many people have been potentially impacted, and we combed through historical data to find out: 3 million.



How journalists can push back on prison and jail “gag rules”

Some of the most common obstacles to reporting on jails and prisons are “gag rules” that forbid anyone on staff from talking to journalists without approval from their supervisor or a public information officer. We reviewed research from the Society of Professional Journalists to show how common and far-reaching these gag rules are, and provide an actionable pathway for journalists to challenge them.



California may take a big step backwards towards more incarceration with Proposition 36

In November, Californians had the opportunity to vote on an initiative that purported to curb retail theft and drug use.

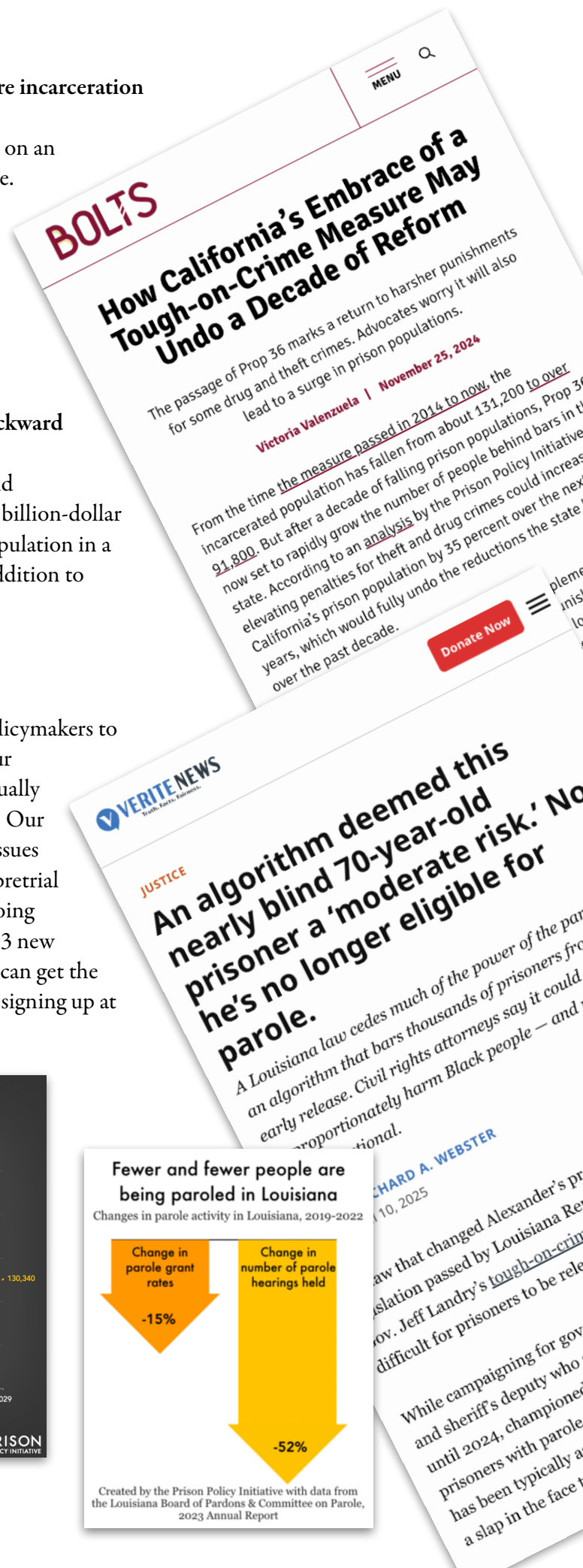
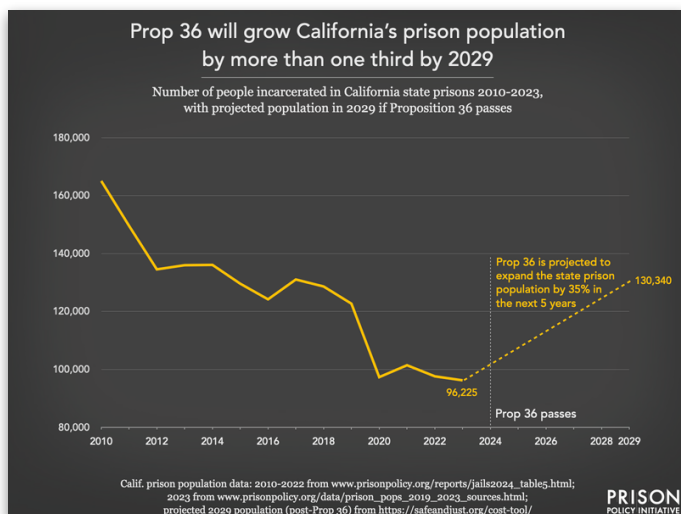
In reality, this measure — which passed — is set to undo a decade of progress towards unraveling mass incarceration without any public safety benefit and is projected to increase the state's prison population by 35% in the next five years.

An Act of Regression: Louisiana takes a giant step backward in parole and sentencing reform

Louisiana lawmakers eliminated discretionary parole and implemented regressive truth-in-sentencing laws. These billion-dollar “zombie policies” are predicted to double the prison population in a state that is already a world leader in incarceration, in addition to harming public safety.

Research Library

Our mission is to empower activists, journalists, and policymakers to shape effective criminal legal policy, so we go beyond our original reports and analyses to curate a database of virtually all the empirical criminal legal research available online. Our searchable Research Library contains 4,519 entries on issues ranging from mental health, women's incarceration, to pretrial detention. It often serves as a reference for journalists doing criminal legal reporting. In the last year, we've added 213 new entries with the most recent cutting-edge research. You can get the newest additions delivered right to your email inbox by signing up at www.prisonpolicy.org/subscribe.



Supporting our work

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/donate>

The Prison Policy Initiative is known for delivering big results on a small budget. Since our founding in 2001, we've grown into an innovative and efficient policy shop at the forefront of the criminal justice reform movement.

Alongside foundation partners, our work is supported by a network of generous individuals who allow us to produce groundbreaking material that reshapes the movement for criminal justice reform.

We welcome you to join our community of supporters working to end mass incarceration. To contribute to our work, you can donate online at [prisonpolicy.org/donate](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/donate) or send a paper check to PO Box 127 Northampton, MA 01061.

If you have any questions about how to contribute or how we would put your financial support to use, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at 413-527-0845 ext. 306.

We thank you for making our work — and our successes — possible.

"Thank you for your important work. We know that structural poverty and racism determine much of who winds up in our jails and prisons. Seeing the facts in black-and-white is very helpful for our work as criminal injustice system activists."

- Micky Duxbury, *donor since 2022*

"Thank you (T'igwicid in Coast Salish Lushootseed) for all you do to end our inhumane and criminally carceral U.S. system. In particular, I say T'igwicid for ensuring that American Indians/Alaska Native incarceration is addressed and data included in your research and reporting. Lifting my hands in gratitude."

- Kyle Taylor Lucas, *donor since 2020*

*"I depend on your deep research in so many ways as an artist and as someone doing **legislative campaign work** and education about prison abolition. Thank you, thank you!"*

- Jo Kreiter
Donor since 2018

Prison Policy Initiative budget report for 2024-2025 year

Income

Grants & Gifts

Large Foundations*	\$1,785,000
Individual Donors and small foundations	\$810,452

Earned Revenue

Honoraria and consulting fees	\$900
Interest	\$348,417

Total Income	\$2,944,769
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Expenses

Salaries and benefits, including fringe	\$1,688,666
Consultants	\$93,661
Computers	\$5,030
Rent	\$11,720
Supplies	\$5,104
Internet hosting, telephone, etc.	\$7,914
Printing and postage	\$7,364
Travel	\$15,340
Other (Accounting, Bank charges, insurance, Dues, Taxes, Advertising, Research tools, FOIA fees, Staff development)	\$23,772

Total Expenses	\$1,858,571
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*Several of these foundation grants are for work that extends outside of the fiscal year and/or for long-term expansion of our work.