

Alaska's Five-Year Prisoner Reentry Strategic Plan, 2011–2016

The *Five-year Prisoner Reentry Strategic Plan, 2011–2016* released by the Alaska Prisoner Reentry Task Force earlier this year presents a comprehensive overview of the issues surrounding successful prisoner reentry in our state, and makes twelve recommendations for implementation of the plan. The plan is the result of efforts of the Alaska Prisoner Reentry Task Force of the Alaska Criminal Justice Working Group (CJWG) which has the mandate to collaborate on ways to improve Alaska's justice system. The CJWG is co-chaired by Alaska Supreme Court Justice Walter Carpeneti and Attorney General John Burns. The Alaska Judicial Council received funding in 2007 to staff the CJWG which has representatives from executive branch departments, the courts, state agencies, and law enforcement.

Concerns and Statistics

Part I of the report provides information about the Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) and the work currently being done by DOC and its state and community partners to improve prisoner reentry outcomes. It further outlines the problems and the statistics impacting Alaska and puts the need for prisoner reentry into context. Similar issues are facing all of the states in the country to varying degrees. Alaska is one of eight states in 2009 with the highest prison population growth: one out of 36 Alaskans was incarcerated—versus one out of 90 in 1982—and two out of three prisoners were back in custody within three years of their release. The price of housing prisoners is high, both in money and in human costs. Incarceration in 2009 cost \$136 per day per prisoner or \$49,800 per year. (Note: Total Alaska offender incarcerated population in 2008 was 4,274, and 4,490 in 2009; these figures represent one day end-of-year counts. The recently released DOC 2010

Alaska Offender Profile indicates a total of 4,671 offenders in all state facilities, in-state and out-of-state, plus 5,797 probationers and parolees under state supervision. As of this writing, over 6,000 individuals were in prison, in a community residential center, or on electronic monitoring. The total 2010 Alaska population was 710,231 according to the U.S. Census Bureau population estimates. See Table 1 for 2006–2010 DOC population figures.) There are currently twelve in-state correctional facilities, with Goose Creek Correctional Center scheduled for opening in 2013.

Moreover, prisoners in Alaska have a constitutional and statutory right to rehabilitation, and the state is actively involved in promoting the “principle of reformation [which is] consistent with the public's embrace of community-based rehabilitation over incarceration in the case of nonviolent offenses, and of prison-based rehabilitation over idleness” (page 9 of plan). A number of states are currently examining their justice programs in light of the recent shift from “tough on crime” to “smart on crime.” The plan refers to “Right on Crime,” a conservative initiative that was introduced in 2010, which encourages criminal justice reforms to reduce both crime and costs.

Other major concerns include the high number of misdemeanants who are incarcerated, recidivism, disproportionate minority confinement, and the housing and treatment of mentally-ill and addicted offenders. Ultimately, the plan notes, 95 percent of offenders are released back into their communities. A 2007 Alaska Judicial Council study, *Criminal Recidivism in Alaska*, reported that 66 percent of released prisoners re-offend within 3 years. Offenders cycle in and out of the system. And of the offenders incarcerated, a disproportionate number are Alaska Natives. According to 2008 figures

from the report, although Alaska Natives make up 18 percent of the state population, they represent 36 percent of the prison population. In 2010 that number rose to 37 percent while U.S. Census figures showed Alaska Natives were 15 percent of the state population in that same year. In addition to this disproportionality, there is the issue of Alaska Natives from remote rural communities who are in custody far from their communities, and whose communities lack rehabilitative and reentry services. Another major concern is the housing and treatment of mentally ill and addicted offenders (individuals who are beneficiaries of the Alaska Mental Health Trust). According to a 2006 study sponsored by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, 42 percent of individuals in custody were Trust beneficiaries.

Summary of Recommendations

Part II looks at the major issues that need to be addressed, including reentry data and evaluation, housing for newly released prisoners, post-release employment, behavioral health needs, the misdemeanor population, the sex offender population, collateral consequences of conviction, and faith-based prison and reentry support. However, the report clearly states that DOC's mandate does not include reentry support such as housing, employment, or substance abuse treatment; therefore, these necessary services must be provided from other resources.

There are twelve recommendations which are summarized below:

- Continue the collaborative process with state, local agencies, non-profits, local partners and concerned citizens working toward successful prisoner reentry, the reduction of recidivism, and the slowing of the growth of prisons in Alaska.

- Expand DOC's institutional substance abuse treatment programs. Current programs can only serve 1,000 of the more than 5,600 under DOC's jurisdiction.

- Expand probationer accountability by utilizing a model with certain enforcement (PACE). Implement this model with parolees immediately upon release from custody. (See “PACE Pilot Project,” page 5.)

- Expand the electronic monitoring program (EMP) in the Mat-Su Valley. This system currently operates in seven communities in Alaska, has been cost-effective, and has shown reductions in recidivism among participants.

- Improve the state's ability to collect, analyze and disseminate criminal justice data. Recommends exploring possibility of establishing an entity responsible for

Table 1. Total Admissions to Alaska Department of Corrections by Year, 2006–2010

Year	Admissions		Offenders in institution		Probation and parole		Alaska population over 18
	N	Rate*	N	Rate*	N	Rate*	
2006	32,705	667	4,369	89	5,464	111	490,482
2007	33,599	677	4,502	91	5,674	114	496,391
2008	33,674	667	4,274	85	5,813	115	504,864
2009	34,897	680	4,490	87	5,848	114	513,202
2010	36,108	691	4,671	89	5,797	111	522,853

* Rate per 10,000 population, based on Alaska population 18 years old and older.

Source of data: Alaska Department of Corrections, 2008–2010 Offender Profile; American Community Survey population estimates and U.S. Census Bureau

aggregating data across agency lines.

- Improve former prisoners' access to affordable housing. This will include addressing the issue of the amount of affordable and available housing, as well as the need to increase subsidized housing programs.

- Promote, where appropriate, the employment of newly released prisoners and facilitate the creation of job opportunities that will benefit communities. Highlight financial incentives for employers and review institutional educational and training programs.

- Improve the DOC's ability to identify and provide for behavioral health needs of inmates. Implement an electronic medical records system, increase ability of staff to manage services with community providers for the Assess/Plan/Identify/Coordinate (APIC) program and Institutional Discharge Project Plus (IDP+).

- Reduce the number of misdemeanor offenders (misdemeanants) cycling in and

out of jails. A misdemeanor is a person convicted of a crime that carries a sentence of incarceration of one-year or less. The strategic plan refers to a 2009 ISER study that reported 78 percent of DOC's total bookings are for misdemeanor offences. The 2010 DOC Offender Profile indicates that as of December 31, 2010, just over 25 percent of offenders at any one time in institutions were incarcerated for a misdemeanor. The plan recommends examining laws, rules, policies and practices that result in incarcerating individuals who pose no substantial risk to the community; increasing prosecutorial discretion; expanding use of halfway houses; and augmenting therapeutic courts and other problem-solving courts for misdemeanants.

- Expand treatment services and housing option for sex offenders. Determine effectiveness of current sex offender programs, increase programs that are shown to be effective, create a sex offender treatment program for women, and remove counterproductive

residential restrictions on housing.

- By order of the Governor, require all state agencies to inventory and review state employment restrictions regarding criminal offenders, compile baseline data on number of persons and jobs affected and the impact of relief mechanisms.

- Expand state support for DOC chaplaincy program. Expand the mentoring program for chaplains, support development of the Healing Communities model in Alaska, support hiring state-paid chaplains, encourage continued expansion of prison Transformational Living Communities and transitional community residences.

The appendices contain information on current DOC programs and services, a report from the Alaska Court System Therapeutic Court, and a list of the members of the CJWG and the Prisoner Reentry Task Force. The strategic plan clearly outlines goals, challenges, strategies, partners/agencies

Please see *Prison reentry* page 8

Further Reading on Prisoner Reentry and Justice Reinvestment

Listed below are some additional resources related to these topics.

- Alaska Judicial Council. (2007). *Criminal Recidivism in Alaska*. (<http://www.ajc.state.ak.us/reports/1-07CriminalRecidivism.pdf>).
- . (2007). "Recidivism in Alaska's Felony Therapeutic Courts." (<http://www.ajc.state.ak.us/reports/recidtherct07.pdf>).
- Clement, Marshall; Schwarzfeld, Matthew; Thompson, Michael. (2011). *The National Summit on Justice Reinvestment and Public Safety: Addressing Recidivism, Crime, and Corrections Spending*. (Council of State Governments Justice Center. <http://justicereinvestment.org/summit/report>).
- Council of State Governments. (2011). *National Reentry Resource Center: A Project of the CSG Justice Center*. (<http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/>).
- . (2011). *Justice Reinvestment: A project of the Council of State Governments Justice Center*. (<http://justicereinvestment.org/>).
- Glaze, Lauren E.; Bonczar, Thomas P.; and Zhang, Fan. (2010). "Probation and Parole in the United States, 2009." *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*, NCJ 231674. (<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2233>).
- Justice Policy Institute. (2011). *Due South: Looking to the South for Criminal Justice Innovation*. (<http://www.justicepolicy.org/research/2472>).
- Lawrence, Alison and Lyons, Donna. (2011). *Principles of Effective State Sentencing and Corrections Policy: A Report of the National Conference of State Legislatures Sentencing and Corrections Work Group*. (<http://www.ncsl.org/?TabId=23325>).
- Pew Center on the States. (2008). "Putting Public Safety First: 13 Strategies for Successful Supervision and Reentry." *Public Safety Policy Brief No. 7*. (http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report_detail.aspx?id=46538).
- . (2011). *State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America's Prisons*. (http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/initiatives_detail.aspx?initiativeID=85899358500).
- . (2011). *Consensus Report of the Arkansas Working Group on Sentencing and Corrections*. (http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report_detail.aspx?id=85899358042).
- Smart on Crime Coalition. (2011). *Smart on Crime: Recommendations for the Administration and Congress*. (<http://www.besmartoncrime.org/about.php>).
- Texas Public Policy Foundation. (2011). *Right on Crime—The Conservative Case for Reform: Fighting Crime, Prioritizing Victims, and Protecting Taxpayers*. (<http://www.rightoncrime.com/>).
- Urban Institute. *Publications for Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*. (<http://www.urban.org/center/jpc/returning-home/publications.cfm>).
- Visher, Christy; Debus, Sara; and Yahner, Jennifer. (2008). *Employment after Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Releasees in Three States*. Urban Institute Justice Policy Center. (<http://www.urban.org/publications/411778.html>).
- Wartna, B.S.J. and Nijssen, L.T.J. (2006). *National Studies on Recidivism: An Inventory of Large-Scale Recidivism Research in 33 European Countries*. Research and Documentation Centre, Ministry of Security and Justice, Netherlands. (<http://english.wodc.nl/onderzoeksdatabase/1453a-international-comparisons-of-reconviction-rates.aspx>).
- Wolf, Robert V. (2011). *Roundtable – Reentry Courts: Looking Ahead—A Conversation about Strategies for Offender Reintegration*. Center for Court Innovation and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. (<http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/reentry-courts-looking-ahead-conversation-about-strategies-offender-reintegration>).

Prisoner reentry (continued from page 7)

needed, and action steps required. (However, no fiscal note is attached to the plan.) Most importantly, the plan notes that although the Department of Corrections clearly accepts its leadership role in improving prisoner reentry outcomes, the fulfillment of this goal is a collaborative one that will require Alaska community-wide and legislative support.

Smart Justice Summit

Many of the recommendations of the *Five-Year Prisoner Reentry Strategic Plan* were a significant part of the discussion during the Smart Justice Summit: Identifying New Approaches to Promote Public Safety, Fiscal Responsibility and Criminal Justice Effectiveness hosted by Senator Johnny Ellis (D) and Representative Bryce Edgmon (D) of the Alaska State Legislature on October 3, 2011 in Anchorage. This event brought together representatives from the Alaska Court System—including Supreme Court Justice Walter Carpeneti, the Department of Law, Department of Corrections, and other agency and community stakeholders to look at some of the major issues facing the justice system: the growing number of incarcerated individuals; the rising costs of housing prisoners and building prisons; high recidivism rates; prisoner reentry programs; the incarceration of high numbers of misdemeanants; provision of medical, mental health, and substance treatment services to offenders both while incarcerated and upon reentry; the need for collaboration with all stakeholder agencies and community and

faith-based entities; and data collection and sharing among agencies.

The need for “justice reinvestment” was stressed by guest presenters, Representative Jerry Madden (R-Texas) and Robert Coombs from the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSGJC). “Justice reinvestment” is defined by the CSGJC as “a data-driven approach to reduce corrections spending and reinvest savings in strategies that can decrease crime and strengthen neighborhoods” (www.justicereinvestment.org). Policymakers, experts, and stakeholders involved in the process move through the following three-phase model: “1) analyze data and develop policy options, 2) adopt new policies and put reinvestment strategies into place [in the justice system], and 3) measure performance.”

Representative Madden has promoted justice reinvestment in his state and this approach has resulted in decreased recidivism and prison costs; he described details of the Texas experience and offered suggestions for implementing a justice reinvestment focus. Robert Coombs, Senior Policy Analyst and Public Affairs Manager for the Council of State Governments Justice Center, works with states in developing their policy and communications plans around these issues, and described offender risk assessment and prioritization strategies. The day-long program looked at the challenges facing the criminal justice system, and participants learned about resources for implementation of approaches to meet these challenges and about possible funding means.

One last point of particular significance: if these challenges are not met, and Alaska’s

prison population continues to grow at its current rate, by 2016 the state will have an insufficient number of prison beds despite the 2013 opening of the new Goose Creek Correctional Center.



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A BJS Report

U.S. State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies Census 2008

The most recent report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics quadrennial “Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2008” shows that there were over 1.1 million persons employed on a full-time basis by state and local law enforcement in this country in 2008. Of that number, about 765,000 were sworn personnel—which is defined as those with general arrest powers.

The report contains data from 17,985 state and local law enforcement agencies with at least one full-time officer or the equivalent in part-time officers, including:

- 12,501 local police departments
- 3,063 sheriffs’ offices
- 50 primary state law enforcement agencies
- 1,733 special jurisdiction agencies

- 683 other agencies, primarily county constable offices in Texas.

There was a slight increase in the number of full-time sworn personnel from 2004 to 2008, with local police departments adding the most officers. Local police departments accounted for 60 percent of the total number of sworn personnel in law enforcement. In 2008 the number of full-time sworn personnel per 100,000 persons in the U.S. was 251: about 1 sworn officer per 400 U.S. residents.

According to the 2008 census, Alaska had 50 state and local law enforcement agencies, with 1,298 sworn personnel—ranking 47th in total number of agencies. There were 42 local police departments with 793 sworn personnel—ranking 45th in total number of local law enforcement agencies. The

Alaska State Troopers, the primary state law enforcement agency, had 274 sworn personnel. BJS reports that in Alaska, there were 189 sworn personnel from state and local enforcement agencies, 115 sworn personnel from local law enforcement, and 40 Alaska State Troopers per 100,000 state residents. (See Table 1.)

Special jurisdiction agencies included 503 four-year education campuses with about 11,000 full-time sworn officers, and 253 two-year education campuses with more than 2,600 sworn officers. Other types of special jurisdictions are public buildings/facilities (e.g., education and medical campuses), natural resources, transportation systems/facilities, criminal investigations, and special enforcement (alcohol/tobacco, narcotics, gaming, racing, and agricultural).