

Idaho Prisons

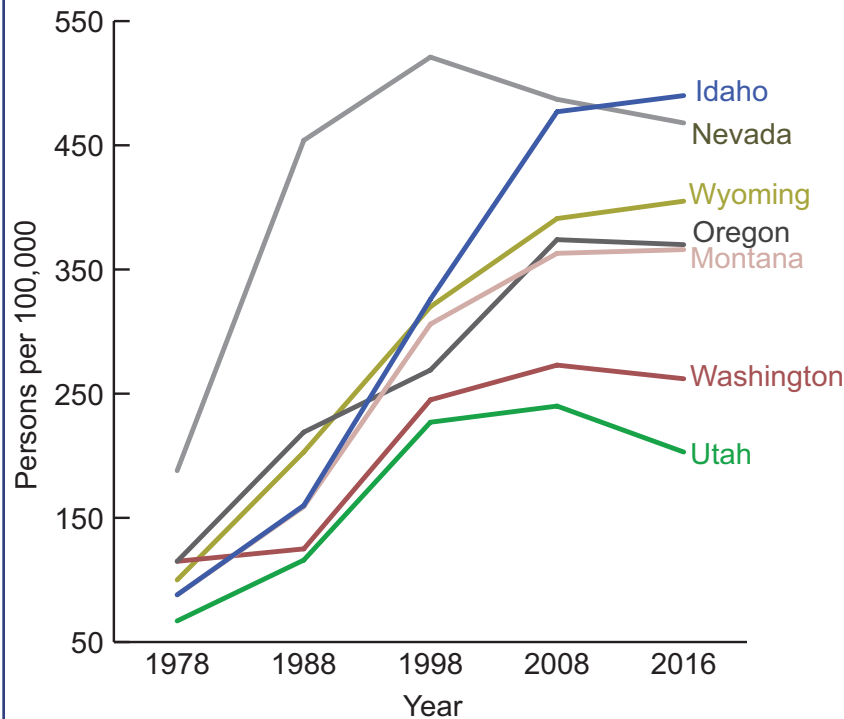
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Idaho’s prisons are an essential part of our state’s public safety infrastructure and together with other criminal justice spending makes up the third largest expense in our state’s budget. Operating the system effectively and efficiently frees up resources for investing in things that help Idaho communities thrive such as schools, roads, and health care.

In 2014, policymakers passed a bill - the Justice Reinvestment Act (JRA) - intended to curb corrections populations and associated costs in the face of a 16 percent projected increase in the prison population over 5 years. A dip in the prison population immediately following this legislation saved an initial \$21 million and temporarily staved off construction of new facilities. Nevertheless, Idaho is again facing many of the same challenges despite a declining crime rate. Several states have enacted solutions in recent years that reduced incarceration rates and associated costs while maintaining reduced crime rates compared with pre-reform periods.

Figure 1: Idaho’s Imprisonment Rate Is Higher Than All Surrounding States, Imprisonment Rates, 1978 to 2016



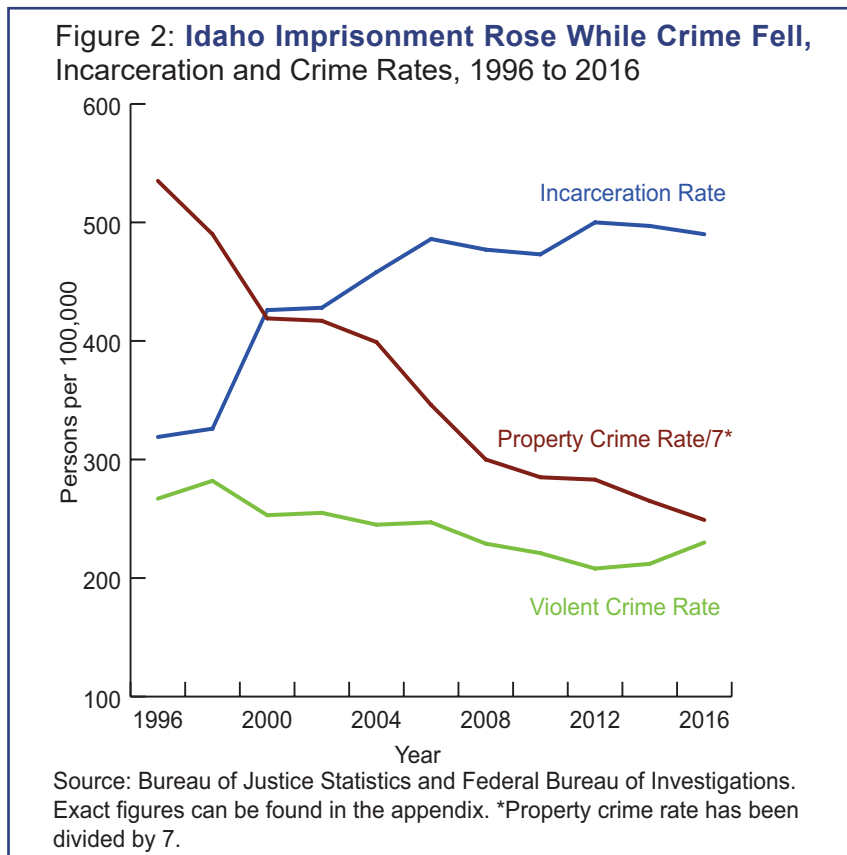
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Exact figures can be found in the appendix.

In this brief:

- ◇ Over the last 35 years the state’s imprisonment rate increased five-fold, making it the state with the 13th highest incarceration rate in the nation and outpacing all 6 neighboring states.
- ◇ Spending on Idaho prisons is poised to take up a much larger share of the budget than in generations past.
- ◇ Policymakers have increased funding for prisons at a faster rate than funding for education.
- ◇ Thirteen states were successful in both reducing their prison populations and prison costs in recent years.

In Idaho, reforms were expected to keep the prison population at 8,724 people by the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. But at the close of FY2018 the prison population had already grown to 8,648 people.¹ While added funding for substance use treatment and mental health services related to JRA have continued, provisions to reduce the prison population were rescinded in 2017.² A new state prison and expansions at existing facilities have been proposed at an estimated total cost of over \$500 million, or roughly twice the current corrections budget of \$276 million.³ Current policies will produce a population projection of 10,500 by the end of FY2022 (or a 21 percent increase compared with FY2018).⁴ A lack of other policy options on the policy agenda that would curb populations and associated costs may have serious fiscal implications for other public services.

Criminal justice and education stakeholders have suggested that state dollars could be better invested in public safety strategies that reduce the need for prison beds and increase resources for public schools and higher education. This brief reviews key facts about Idaho prisons for policymakers and stakeholders.



Rising State Imprisonment as Crime Declines

Prison costs are directly tied to prison populations and related costs, such as facilities and workforce. Idaho’s prison population has been on a consistent and steep upward swing extending over at least 35 years. Between 1978 and 2016, the state’s imprisonment rate increased five-fold, from 88 to 490 per 100,000 Idahoans (Figure 1, Page 1).

Today, Idaho has the 13th highest incarceration rate in the nation, outpacing all 6 neighboring states including Nevada, which historically has had higher rates than other states in the region. Over the 2008 to 2016 period, all neighboring states, with the exception of Wyoming and Montana, saw their imprisonment rates trend downward.

Imprisonment Not a Driver of Lower Crime Rates

Following a national trend, crime rates have decreased significantly over the last 25 years in Idaho (Figure 2, Page 2). Placing more people in prison, however, has had diminishing benefits as a crime deterrent. In Idaho, the decrease in crime attributable to imprisonment has dropped from an estimated 5 percent in the early 1990s (when the imprisonment rate was between 200 and 300 per 100,000 people) to 2 percent in 2013.⁵

Diminishing benefits of incarceration is supported by evidence.⁶ New offenders tend to be relatively lower risk in comparison with the more serious offenders who are already in prison. This decreases the likelihood of preventing crime by removing a person from the community. The effects of prison itself can produce more crime among those exiting. Exposure to prisoners who have committed more serious offenses can increase the criminal behavior of lower-level offenders. Poor conditions in prison such as violence and inadequate physical and mental health treatment can reduce an individual’s chance of successfully reentering the community and increase the likelihood of reoffending.

Fiscal Impact of Increased Imprisonment

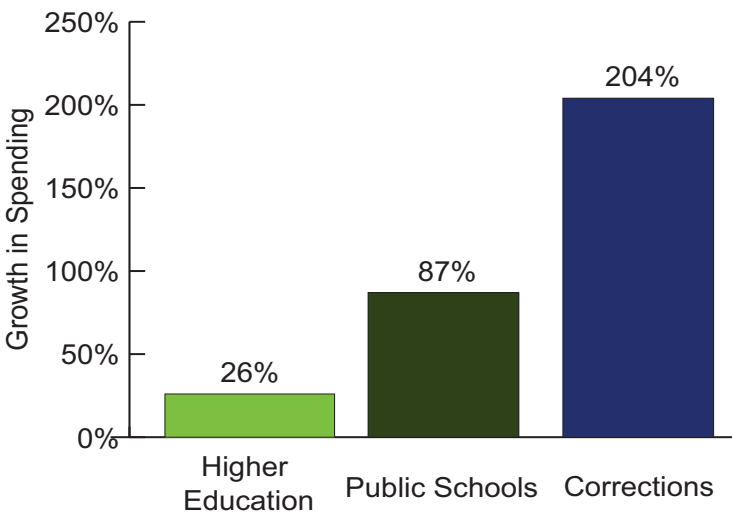
As the imprisonment rate has continued to rise sharply with diminishing benefits for crime rates, corrections spending is poised to take up a much larger share of the state budget than in generations past. From 1992 to 2017, Idaho experienced the eighth highest spending increase on corrections in the nation, after adjusting for inflation (Figure 3, Page 3).

Only two of Idaho's neighbors, Montana and Oregon, have higher increases over the same period, while three have less dramatic increases (data for Nevada were not available). Idaho's cost of imprisonment (measured in either per inmate or per capita terms) is moderate to low compared with other states.⁷ Growth in spending is driven primarily by the sustained growth in the prison population.

Today, corrections spending takes up about 7.8 percent of the state budget, up from 4.9 percent in 1992. Over the past generation, state lawmakers have increased funding for corrections at a faster rate than funding for education. State spending on higher education rose by 26 percent between 1992 and 2017 and by 87 percent for public schools. But corrections spending jumped by 204 percent (Figure 4, Page 3).

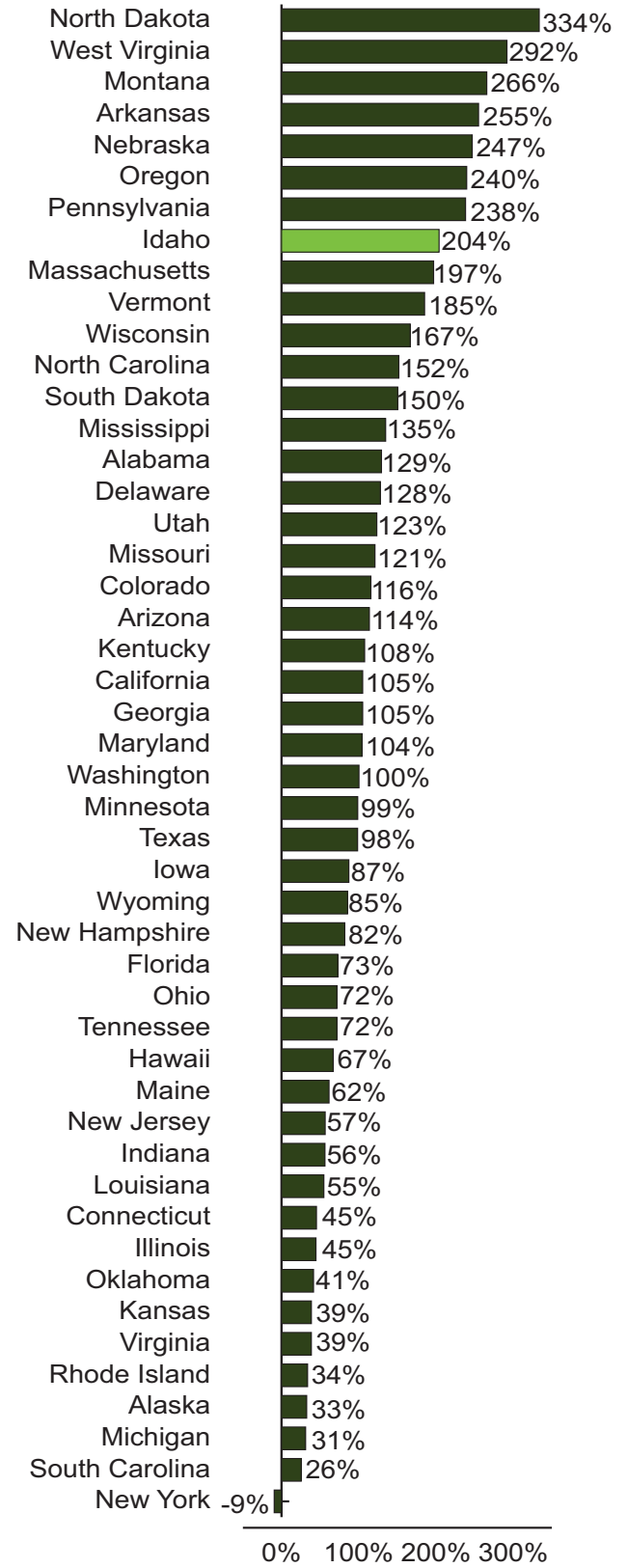
Nationwide, the prison population is aging, meaning inmates will require more costly advanced care. Idaho is one of only five states where healthcare for inmates accounted for 20 percent or more of corrections spending.⁸

Figure 4: Idaho Corrections Spending Growth Has Outpaced Education Spending Growth, Growth in Spending Between 1992 and 2017, Inflation-Adjusted



Source: National Association of State Budget Officers.

Figure 3: State Corrections Spending Has Risen Growth Rate Among States in General Fund Dollars, 1992 to 2017, Inflation-Adjusted



Source: National Association of State Budget Officers survey estimates. Actual state spending may differ. Data not available for Nevada and New Mexico.

Safe, Cost-Effective Solutions

Between 2010 and 2015, 13 states were successful in both reducing their prison populations and prison costs: New Jersey, New York, Maryland, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas.⁹ In some states reforms had begun earlier, producing significant reductions in populations and costs without affecting crime rates.

Figure 4: **Property and Crime Rates Declined in Reforming States, Percent Changes in Crime Rates, 1999 to 2014 and 2010 to 2014**

	Violent Crime Rates Declined During Reform			Property Crime Rates Declined During Reform		
	1999	2014	Percent Change	1999	2014	Percent Change
New Jersey	411.9	261.2	-36.6%	2,988.1	1,734.1	-42.0%
New York	588.8	381.8	-35.2%	2,690.6	1,718.2	-36.1%
Texas	560.3	405.9	-27.6%	4,471.4	3,019.4	-32.5%
	2010	2014	Percent Change	2010	2014	Percent Change
South Carolina	602.2	497.7	-17.4%	3,905.4	3,460.3	-11.4%

New York (1999-Present)

Mandatory penalties enacted in 1973 drove a steady, sharp increase in the state's prison population in the 1980s and 1990s. Changes in policing practices in New York City contributed to a decline in felony drug arrests beginning in the 2000s.¹⁰ In 2009, New York eliminated mandatory sentences for some drug offenses. It also made greater use of drug court alternatives that include high quality substance use treatment. As a result, the proportion of people with felony drug arrests who were sentenced to prison declined from 23.3 percent during the 1990s to 13.2 percent in 2012.¹¹ By that year the state's prison population was 26 percent smaller than its 1999 peak. Since 2010, the state has cut costs by closing 14 prisons and reducing its prison workforce by 11 percent, despite contracted salary increases and rising health care expenditures that drive cost increases.¹² In this period the state's violent crime rate decreased by 35.2 percent and its property crime rate by 36.1 percent (Figure 4, Page 4).

New Jersey (1999-Present)

In 2000, New Jersey increased parole approval rates.¹³ In 2010, it eliminated some mandatory minimums and in 2013, began mandatory treatment for substance-dependent, low-level, nonviolent offenders instead of mandatory jail time. As a result the state was able to reduce the number of prison employees by 8 percent through attrition. The decline in spending on salaries, overtime, and boarding payments to local jails have meant an overall decrease in prison expenditures even while spending on employee benefits has risen.¹⁴ In this period the state's violent crime rate declined by 36.6 percent and its property crime rate by 42 percent (Figure 4, Page 4).

Texas (1999-Present)

In 2005, Texas began incentivizing non-prison alternative sentences for parole violators with a \$55 million allocation. Two years later, facing a price tag of \$500 million to house future prison population increases, policymakers instead appropriated \$241 million to expand substance use and mental health treatment, and alternative sanction facilities and programs targeted at people on probation who were having probation revoked at a high rate for drug-related reasons. Though the state has not adjusted mandatory minimums, it expanded its efforts in 2011 with laws that allow prisoners to earn time off a sentence by completing educational programs and allow probationers to reduce their probation length by completing treatment programs. Over this period Texas' violent crime rate declined by 27.6 percent and its property crime rate by 32.5 percent (Figure 4, Page 4).

South Carolina (2010-Present)

In 2010, South Carolina enacted comprehensive criminal justice legislation that reduced penalties for less serious drug and property offenses, expanded release options, and allowed alternative sanctions rather than prison for people who violate probation. The new law has helped reduce the prison population by 12 percent between fiscal years 2010 and 2015 primarily from a reduction in admissions for nonviolent offenses and parole or probation revocation.¹⁵ Population reduction allowed the state to close three prisons after 2012 and has helped reduce spending by \$11 million. Over this period South Carolina's violent crime rate declined by 17.4 percent and its property crime rate by 11.4 percent (Figure 4, Page 4).

Summary

Idahoans want safe communities and fair treatment of people who are incarcerated. As prison costs take up an ever-larger share of state resources, policymakers will have to make wise choices about the allocation of dollars between prisons, education, and other public services. Other states have shown the way through a variety of successful strategies that have saved money and maintained safe and thriving communities.

Sources

1 Idaho Department of Correction. Personal communications.

2 Other provisions from that legislation that enhanced reporting and clarified processes continue today.

3 [Legislative Services Offices](#). An additional \$50 million goes towards medical services for inmates in state prisons, community work centers, and other correctional programs.

4 Idaho Department of Correction. Personal communications.

5 Roeder O, Eisen LB, and Bowling J. "What Caused the Crime Decline?" [Brennan Center for Justice](#), February 2015.

6 *ibid.*

7 Mai C and Subramanian R. "The Price of Prisons." [Vera Institute of Justice](#), May 2017. In 2015, Idaho ranked 15th in cost of imprisonment per inmate (\$22,182) and 20th in cost of imprisonment per capita (\$109).

8 *ibid.*

9 Roeder et al.

10 Mauer M and Ghandnoosh N. "Policy Brief: Fewer Prisoners, Less Crime." [The Sentencing Project](#).

11 *ibid.*

12 *ibid.*

13 *ibid.*

14 *ibid.*

15 *ibid.*

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Appendix

Figure 1. Idaho's Imprisonment Rate Is Higher Than All Surrounding States, Imprisonment Rates, 1978 to 2016					
	1978	1988	1998	2008	2016
Idaho	88	160	326	477	490
Montana	88	159	306	363	366
Nevada	188	454	521	487	468
Oregon	115	219	269	374	370
Utah	67	116	227	240	203
Washington	115	125	245	273	262
Wyoming	100	203	320	391	405
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics.					

Figure 2. Idaho Imprisonment Rose While Crime Fell, Incarceration and Crime Rates, 1996 to 2016											
	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
Violent Crime Rate	267	282	253	255	245	247	229	221	208	212	230
Property Crime Rate/7*	535	490	419	417	399	346	300	285	283	265	249
Incarceration Rate	319	326	426	428	458	486	477	473	500	497	490
*Property crime rate is divided by 7 for comparison purposes. All figures are rounded. Source: Federal Bureau of Investigations.											