
The Landscape of Prison Oversight in the U.S.

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AGENDA

1. Introduction

2. What is the Prison and Jail Innovation Lab? What is the National Resource Center for Correctional Oversight (NRCCO)?

3. Overview of Correctional Oversight

4. What does oversight look like in other states? www.prisonoversight.org

5. Q&A

WHAT IS THE PRISON AND JAIL INNOVATION LAB (PJIL)?

The Prison and Jail Innovation Lab (PJIL) is a national policy resource center at the LBJ School of Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin that is transforming the landscape of correctional oversight and helping to ensure the safe and humane treatment of people in custody.

We serve as a bridge between academic research, practical experience, and policy.

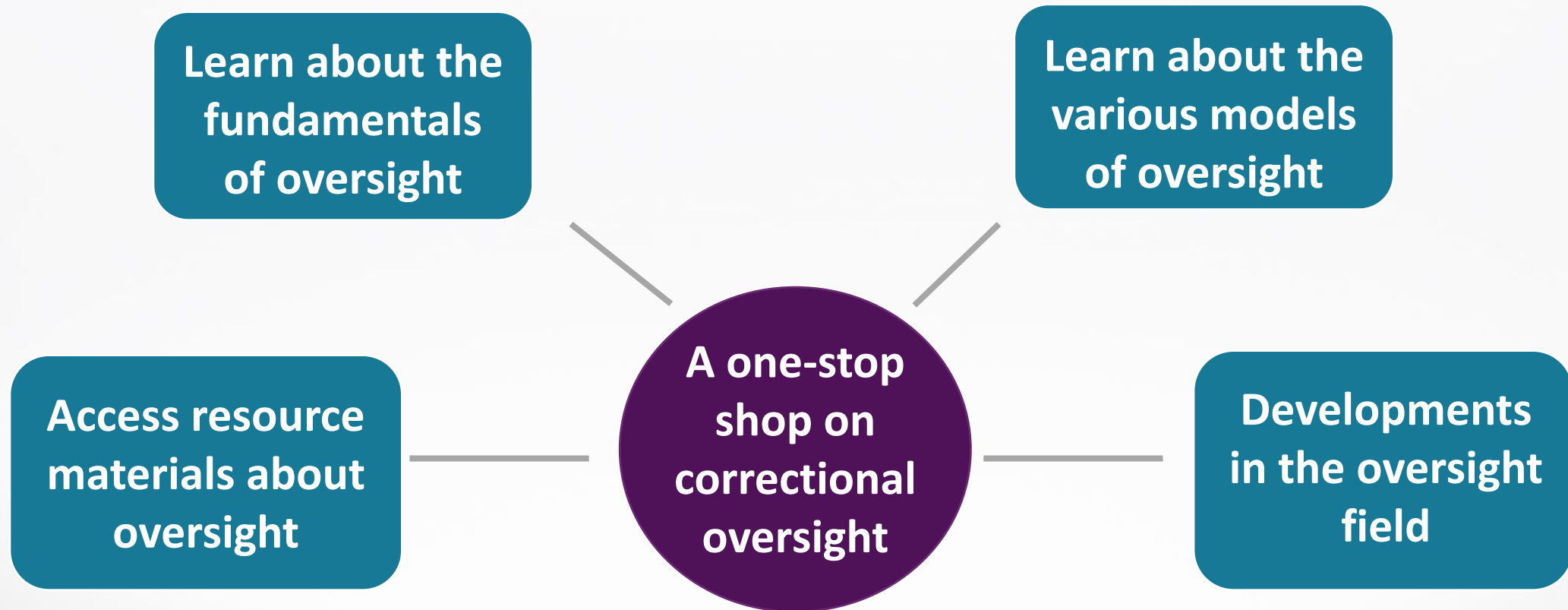
Since launching in late 2021, PJIL has been a go-to resource for policy makers, the media, justice system practitioners, advocates, and corrections officials on three main issues:

- 1) **Effective oversight of prisons and jails**
- 2) **Dehumanizing and dangerous conditions behind bars**
- 3) **Deaths in custody**



WHAT IS THE NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT (NRCCO)?

The National Resource Center on Correctional Oversight (NRCCO) is a signature project of PJIL. The NRCCO provides guidance and research on how to develop or strengthen correctional oversight mechanisms and it operates an online clearinghouse of resources at www.prisonoversight.org.



WHAT IS CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT?

An independent, external mechanism designed to ensure the collection, dissemination, and use of unbiased, accurate, and first-hand information about correctional conditions of confinement and the treatment of incarcerated individuals, primarily through on-site access to the facilities.

WHY IS CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT IMPORTANT?

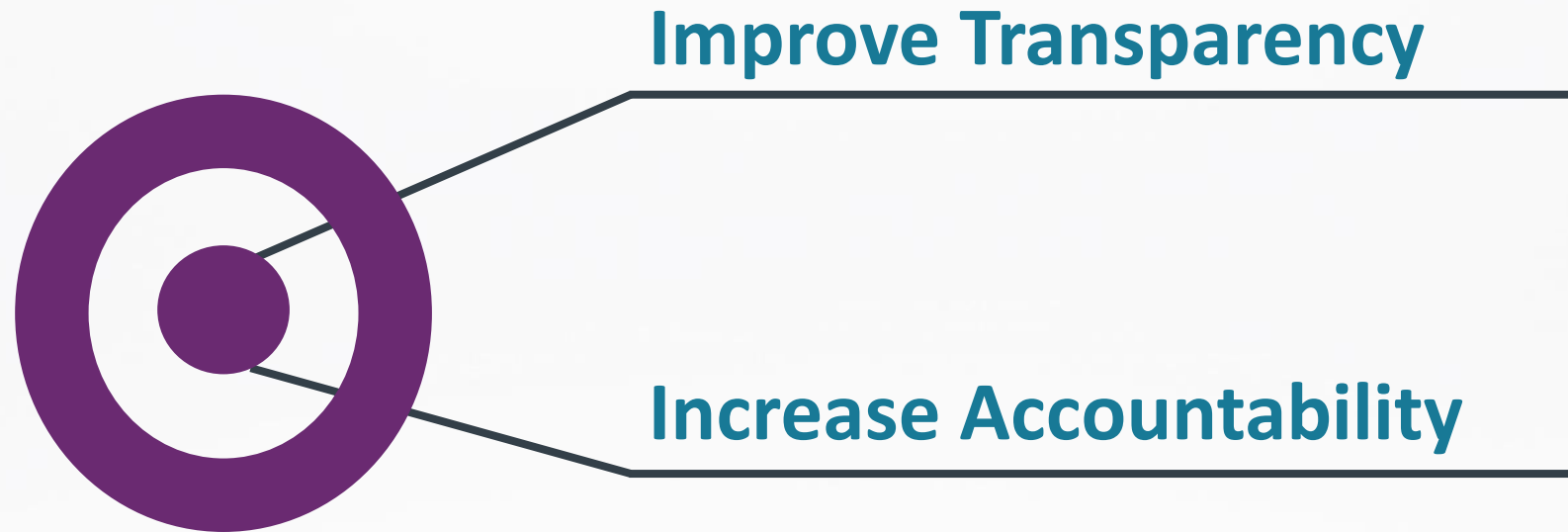
Oversight bodies can help prevent harm by identifying problems at an early stage.

Oversight bodies provide objective information for policy makers, advocates, and the media.

The presence of an oversight body in a facility can change staff behavior.

Oversight bodies provide a trusted place where incarcerated people and loved ones can raise concerns.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT?



INTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY V. EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT

Effective prison management demands both **internal accountability measures** and **external scrutiny**. States can and should ensure that both exist.

INTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Tools for agency administrators that allow them to self-identify and address operational problems at an early stage.

Examples:

- Internal Affairs
- Grievance System
- Internal Auditors

EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT

Entities that exist outside the agency and are responsible for:

- Routinely monitoring and inspecting facilities;
- Investigating complaints;
- Reporting their findings and recommendations to the public.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT?



Should one oversight body handle all these functions?

No.

There should be a *variety of separate oversight mechanisms* in place to serve each function.

WHAT ARE THE HALLMARK FEATURES OF CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT?

- Independence
- Mandated inspections
- Unfettered and confidential access
- Adequate resources
- Duty to report
- Holistic approach
- Mandated agency cooperation

Should oversight bodies be “enforcers”?

No.

Consider **teeth v. sanction authority**.
Sanction authority should be reserved for **regulatory bodies with standards**.

MODELS OF PRISON OVERSIGHT

Governmental Agency or Inspectorate

Ombuds Office

Inspector General

Legislative Committee with Inspection Responsibilities

Non-Governmental Organization with Right of Access

Citizens' Board/Visiting Committee

The name of the entity is less important than what it does!

THE GROWING MOVEMENT TO ESTABLISH PRISON OVERSIGHT IN THE U.S.

Prison oversight bodies created since 2010:

2024: Virginia

2019: Minnesota

2024: Maryland

2018: Massachusetts

2022: Connecticut

2018: Washington State

2022: Oregon

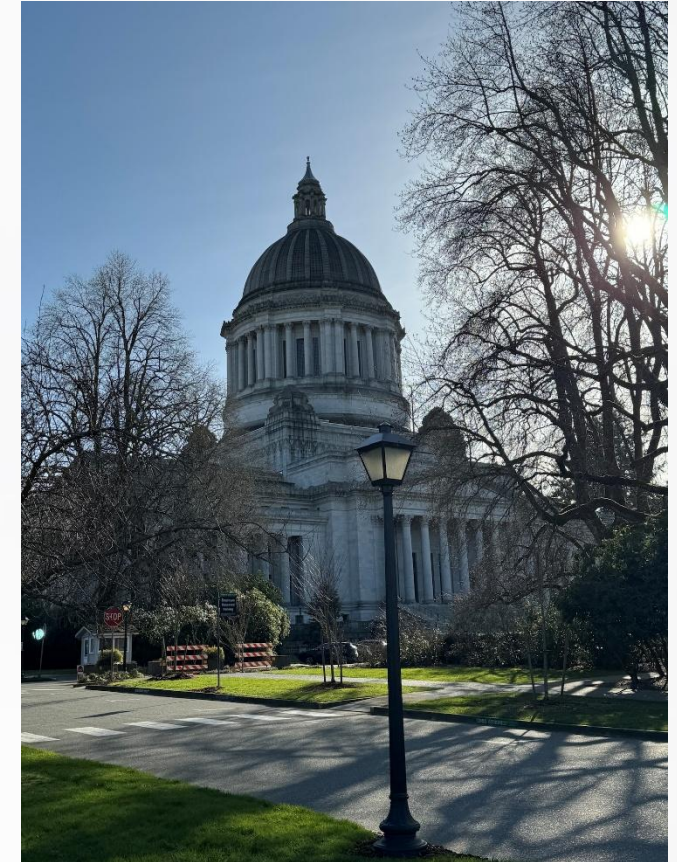
2015: Nebraska

2022: Arizona

2010: Dist. of Columbia

2019: New Jersey

2019: Hawaii



WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT OVERSIGHT?



<http://www.prisonoversight.org/>



WHAT'S ON THE NRCCO WEBSITE?



What is oversight? Why do we need it? What functions does it serve?
What are the different models of oversight?



Detailed profiles of prison oversight bodies in every state wherever they exist.



Publications about oversight



Developments in the oversight field



Sample legislation to establish oversight bodies



News stories about oversight



The University of Texas at Austin
Prison and Jail Innovation Lab
Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs



NRCCO

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
for CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT

Questions?

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