

How Texas Tackled Growing Prison Population & Exploding Corrections Budgets

The prison population in Texas had been on the rise for over twenty years. Between 1983 and 1997, the growth in the prison population forced the state to build 108,000 new prison beds at a cost of \$2.3 billion.

In 2007, this population was projected to explode to a level that would exceed their capacity by 3,000 individuals and that number was expected to increase by an additional 14,000 people within five years at a cost of \$523 million to build and operate more prison facilities in the FY08-09 biennium.

In response to the rapidly growing problem, the Texas Legislature requested intensive technical assistance from the Justice Center to implement a justice reinvestment approach to avert an increase in spending on corrections and instead reinvest in strategies to increase public safety.

In 2007, Texas policymakers came up with a legislative package reinvesting the funding that would have otherwise been spent on prison construction and operations into additional treatment and diversion programs.

The components of Texas' new approach included:

- Funding for probation officers to use for outpatient substance abuse treatment for offenders.
- Funding for a mental health Pre-Trial Diversion Program
- Expansion of in-custody substance abuse Therapeutic Communities (like ADOC's RSSAT program).
- A prison dedicated to providing DWI offenders with intensive substance abuse treatment.
- Use of Intermediate sanction facilities for probationers who violate probation conditions.
- Early school intervention programs
- The Nurse Family Partnership program

With these and other measures, the Texas Legislature successfully averted construction all of the previously planned prison beds through 2012.

According to Rep. Madden (*who will be speaking at the Smart Justice Summit in Anchorage on October 3rd, 2011*), the Texas prison population completely leveled off as a result of these initiatives. No shortfall in capacity is predicted until 2013, when the system may need a small number of prison beds compared to the previously predicted need for eight prisons. Moreover, following the adoption of these reforms, Texas' crime rate did not increase, but continued to fall.

For more information on what Texas experienced and more, you can visit the Justice Center's website at <http://justicereinvestment.org/summit/report>.