

## **THE FISCAL CASE FOR CORRECTIONS REFORM**

In terms of corrections policy, Alaska is at a crossroads. The Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) opened the Goose Creek Correctional Center at a cost of \$250 million to Alaskans with an annual operating budget of \$50 million. If the state's prison population continues to grow at its current rate of 3% per year, the state's prisons will be operating yet again, at full capacity in three years, 2016. This creates an inescapable reality; the state must today either start planning to build a new prison, recommit to incarcerating out-of-state, or look at proven best practice approaches that more effectively address criminality, reduce recidivism and thereby build healthier, safer Alaskan communities.

1. Crime in Alaska has decreased. All of the violent crime index offense totals and the property crime index offense totals decreased in 2011. The crime rate, which relates the incidence of crime to population, likewise experienced similar decreases as the index offense totals. <sup>1</sup>
2. Yet, Alaska's prison population continues to grow by 3% per year. Since 2005, the hard bed prison population grew from 4,231 to 4,961 in 2012. At this current rate, DOC's inmate population will reach 6,313 by 2020.
3. Not only has DOC's prison population continued to grow while the crime rate has dropped but so has the number of Alaskans under the jurisdiction of DOC. In 1982, 1 in 80 Alaskans were under the jurisdiction of the department. By 2007 that number had grown to 1 in 38 and by 2009 to 1 in 32. <sup>2</sup>
4. At this rate, by 2016 DOC will be at 100% capacity even with GCCC. It costs more than 250 million to build and 50k per year to operate.
5. Since 2005, DOC's budget has grown from \$166.698.3 to 323.191.7 in 2013. This is an average of more than 5.5% growth each year. DOC's agency operations accounts for the state's fifth highest user of GF funds exceeded only by HSS, EED, U of A, and DOT.
6. The 2012 daily cost to incarcerate in a hard prison bed per inmate per day is \$135.00 up from \$110.00 in 2005.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Public Safety Uniform Crime Report, 2011, p. 29, found at: <http://dps.alaska.gov/statewide/ucr.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> *One in 31: The Long Reach of American Corrections*, March 2009, 24 by The Pew Public Safety Project found at: [http://www.pewtrusts.org/our\\_work\\_report\\_detail.aspx?id=49694](http://www.pewtrusts.org/our_work_report_detail.aspx?id=49694)

7. The average length of stay in prison for a felony offender has increased. In 2002, the average length of stay for a felon was 6.60 years. By 2011, that had grown to 7.20 years.
8. The number of nonviolent incarcerated offenders has increased from 42% in 2002 to 62% in 2011.
9. Felony Theft in the Second Degree is the third greatest reason for felony admission. Prison admission for these crimes has increased from 875 in 2002 to 1037 in 2011. In short, the number of Felony C Theft convictions has been steadily increasing at a faster pace than all other convictions. In 2011, felony property offenses represented 32% of all felony cases filed with the court system. The length of the sentence imposed for Felony C Theft has also been steadily increasing since 2005.
10. Incarceration for both misdemeanor and felony drug offenses has increased by 63% since 2002, from 967 admissions to 1,574 in 2010. During this same period, admissions for felony drug offenses have risen by over 81%. In 2011, 348 admissions for Misconduct Involving a Controlled Substance (possession), a class C felony offense, were for offenders between the ages of 18 to 29 years of age.
11. Current effectiveness of Alaska's return for the money spent on the criminal justice system: Two out of three prisoners released from custody return to custody within three years of release for a re-arrest, reconviction or remand on a Petition to Revoke Probation. <sup>3</sup>
12. The above analysis does not take into account the money spent on the Dept of Law, PDs and OPA criminal defense attorneys, courts, etc.

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<sup>3</sup> *Criminal Recidivism in Alaska*, Alaska Judicial Council (January 2007). This study was updated by the *Criminal Recidivism in Alaska*, 2008 and 2009, Alaska Judicial Council (November 2011) study which followed released prisoners for two years and found the recidivism rate had remained about the same.