

The National Challenge of Prisoner Reentry

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Program for Prisoner Reentry to Society
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Why has prisoner reentry
become such an important
policy issue?

*Some important contextual
information to consider.*

More Individuals Than Ever In Prison and Leaving Prison

- Approximately 640,000 prisoner will leave state prisons this year—a 37% growth since 1995.
- 1.3 million prisoners in state institutions—a 46% growth since 1994.

Number of Releases from State Prison 1980—2005

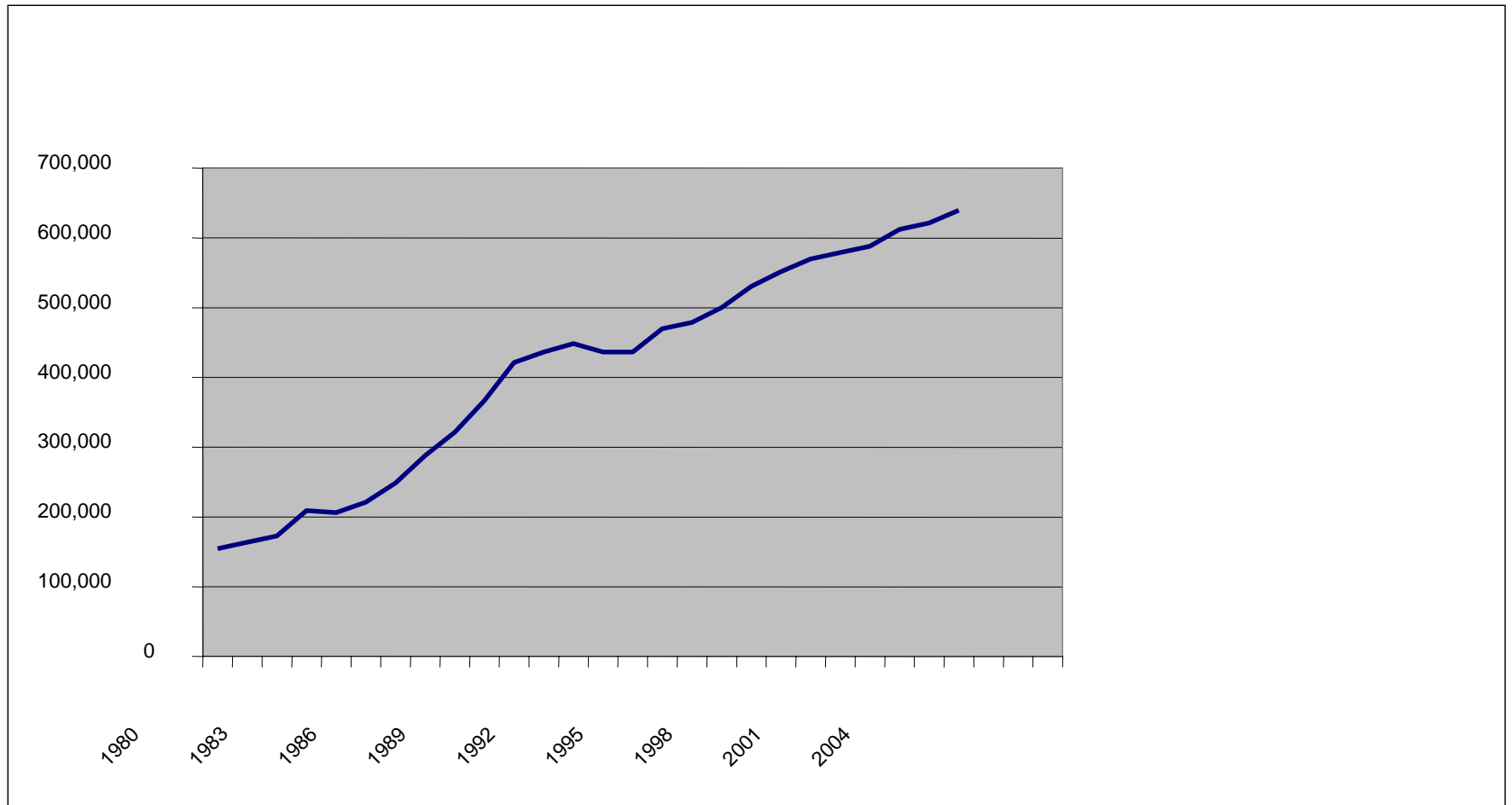
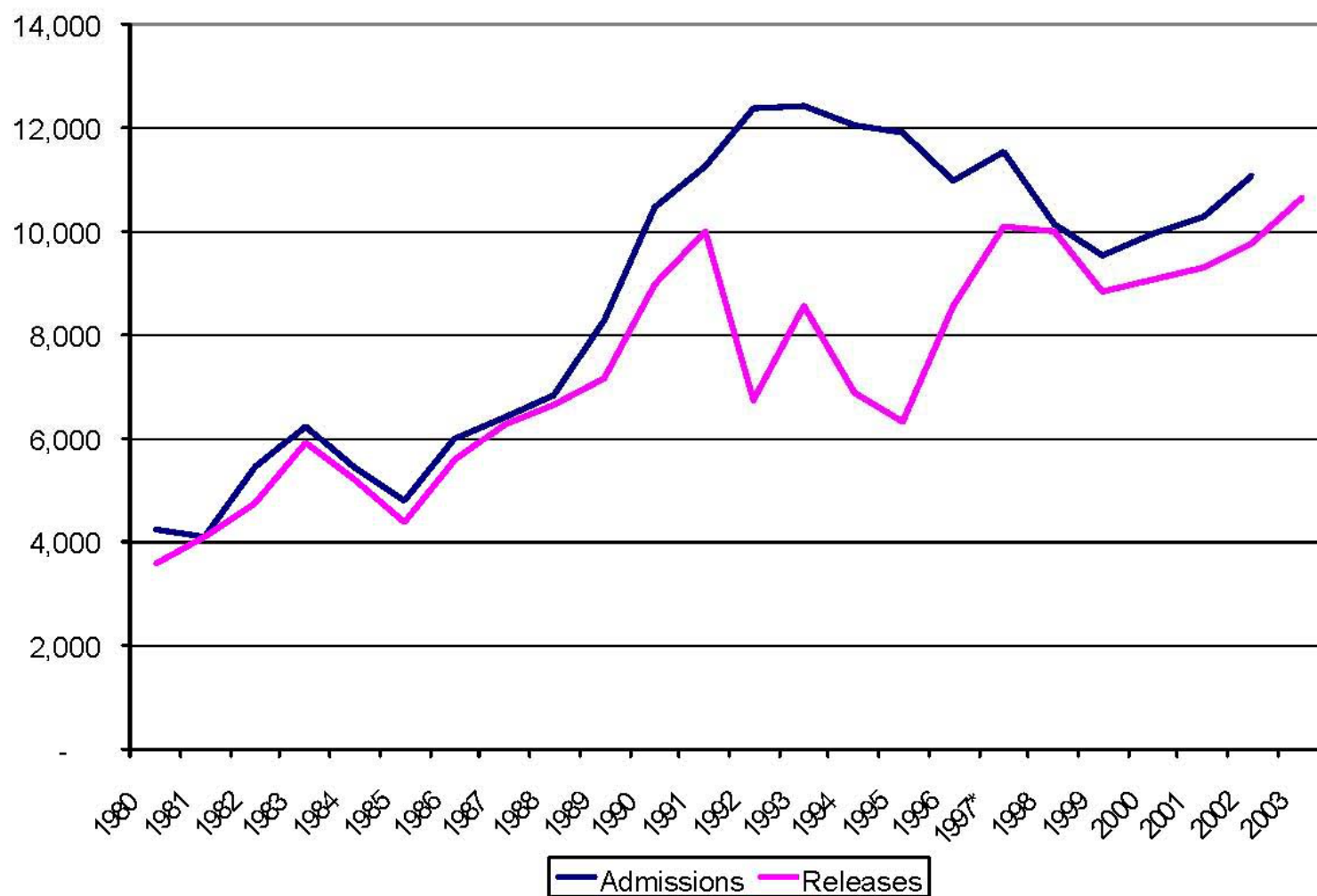


Figure 3. Virginia Prison Admissions and Releases, Fiscal Years 1980–2003



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

*“Lock ‘em up and throw away
the key.”*

But in reality....

- 95% of all prisoners will eventually be released.
- 98% of all prisoners admitted to prison each year will be released.

In other words, they're (almost) all coming back.

Recently Released Prisoners Commit a Significant Number of Crimes

- Over 67% will be rearrested and 50% will be re-incarcerated within 3 years.
- 35% of all felon arrestees are under some form of supervision at the time of arrest.

Growing Corrections Costs

- State corrections expenditures have grown 538% since 1982—an annual average growth of 9.9%.
- States spent an estimated \$40.7 billion on corrections alone in 2004.
- Estimated 2004 corrections expenditures in Virginia were \$1.06 Billion.

Growing Criminal Justice Expenditures

In 2001 the U.S. spent a record \$167 billion for police, corrections, and judicial and legal activities. A 165% increase in real dollars since 1982.

States' Share:

\$10.5 billion in police

\$14.4 billion in judicial and legal

\$38.4 billion in corrections

\$63.4 billion total

Approximately 9% of states budgets

452% growth since 1982

(Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004)

What's the cost of reincarceration?

Assuming an average prison-bed cost of \$22,650 per year and an average prison term of 2.5 years, re-incarcerating just one cohort of returning prisoners costs states approximately \$18.4 billion excluding other criminal justice costs.

Crime Rates...holding steady

- Crime rates holding at the lowest levels since 1973
- Violent crime rates at around 22.6 per 1,000 or 1 in 44 U.S. residents.
- Property crimes at around 163 per 1,000.
- Slight increase in murders from 16,200 to 16,420—up 1.3% from 2002. (2004 National Crime Victimization Survey).

*What does the returning
prisoner population look like?*

Characteristics of the Returning Prison Population

- 80% have a history of substance abuse.
- 16% are diagnosed with a mental illness.
- Many already are or will become homeless. For example, a study of the New York prison system found that 11% of released prisoners entered a homeless shelter within 2 years of release.
- 25% of the US population currently living with HIV or AIDS was released from prison within the last year. Overall, two to three% of the prison population has HIV or AIDS.

Characteristics of the Returning Prison Population (cont.)

- 18% have hepatitis C.
- 7% have tuberculosis.
- 70% are high school dropouts, roughly half are functionally illiterate.
- Most are unemployed upon release. (Nearly 75% were employed prior to incarceration. Of these, about half were employed full-time.)
- Earning potential for ex-inmates drops 10-20% compared to what they were earning prior to incarceration.
- Female offenders confront serious physical and mental health issues (over 60% have a history of physical or sexual abuse) and long-term substance abuse issues.

Families and Children

- About half of male and two-thirds of female prisoners have children.
- This translates into approximately 1.5 million minor children and 336,300 households having a parent incarcerated.
- Most families will want to become reconnected.

Communities

- Returning prisoners typically concentrated in specific communities. For example, in Maryland 59% of prisoners return to a only few neighborhoods in Baltimore.
- It was estimated that in 1999, 1 out of every 9 black men between the ages of 25-29 was in prison.
- In some neighborhoods in Brooklyn, 1 in 8 men are sent to prison each year.

Other Important Trends to Consider

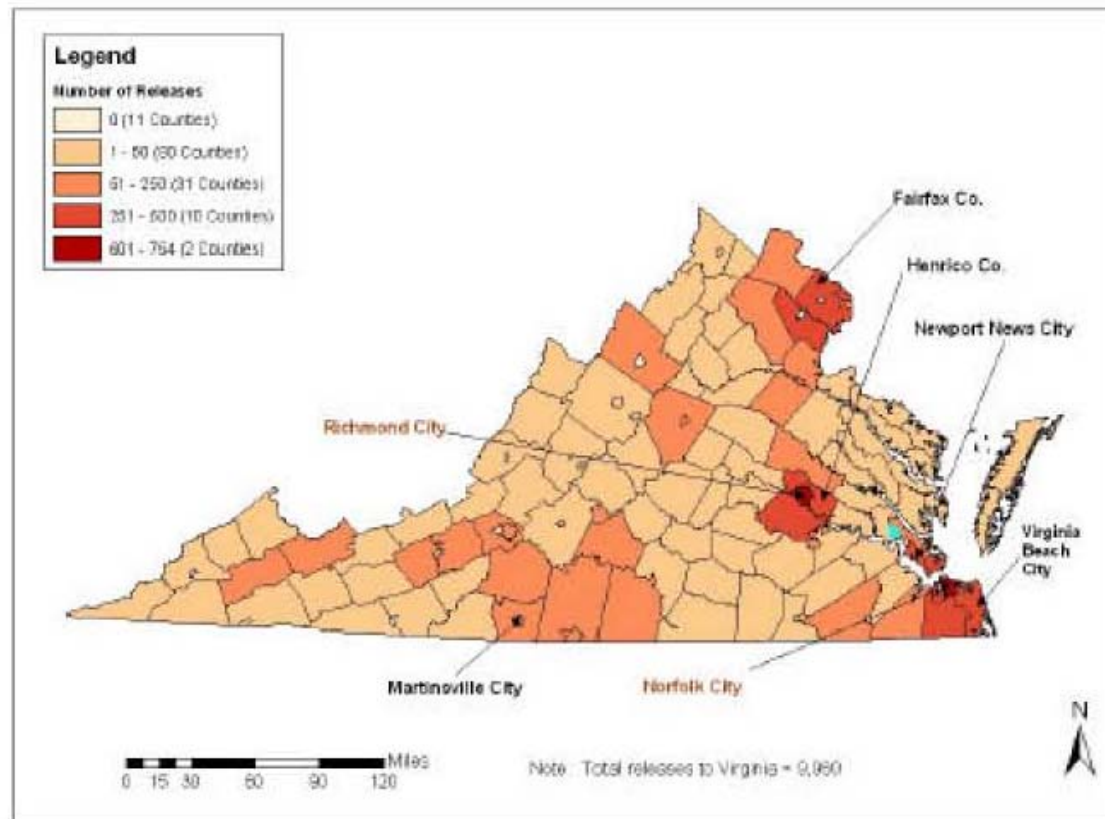
- Prison sentences have gotten longer.
- Fewer in-prison programs and lower participation rates.
- Prisoners farther away from home, especially women.
- Technical parole violations driving prison growth in many states.

Prisoner Reentry in Virginia

- Nearly 10,000 individuals released from prison and jail in 2002.
- Most (63%) are black.
- 70% are between 20-39 years old.
- Half of all returning offenders are convicted of a non-violent offense.
- 33% have been in prison for 1-2 years.
- Most (72%) do not have a previous felony.
- Over half (52%) do not have a high school diploma.
- 75% have history of drug use.
- 5.9% have hepatitis.
- 1.3% have HIV/AIDS.
- 95% of releases are nondiscretionary.
- 81% of individuals released were subject to a period of supervision.

Prisoner Reentry In Virginia

Map 1. Number of VA DOC Releases by Committing Jurisdiction, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

The good news: We're beginning to know what works?

Effective reentry policies save money and make better use of limited resources by establishing a more coordinated and comprehensive continuum of care and supervision. Even small reductions in recidivism rates will generate substantial cost-savings by avoiding more costly re-incarceration. For example, the net cost for cognitive skills training programs is \$308 per person, while the cost savings is \$7,104 per person. Likewise, well run prison industry programs cost around \$1,800 per person, while the net benefit is \$9,413. (Source: Gerry Gaes, US Department of Justice 2002)

Challenges to Successful Reentry

- Uncoordinated service systems.
- Cuts in funding for prison programs.
- Systemic and legal barriers (e.g., bans to public assistance and housing, difficulty obtaining state-issued identification).
- Lack of sentencing options and alternative sanctions.

Challenges for Returning Prisoners to Secure Employment.

- Employers least likely to hire former prisoners as compared to other disadvantaged groups (e.g., welfare recipients) (Holzer 2003).
- Growing use of background checks.
- Low-skills and education levels of returning prisoner population.
- Few transitional jobs available.
- Weak social networks.
- Sometimes a job may not be top priority.

Strategies to Improving Prisoner Reentry

- Develop an interagency approach—reentry is not only a corrections issue. Strategies include, creating interagency governance structures; mapping prisoner reentry; mapping services; and developing shared measures.
- Improve the process how individuals are sent to prison (e.g., expand community-based treatment, improve parole revocation policies).

Strategies to Improving Prisoner Reentry

- Improve how prisoners are prepared for release in prison. For example, begin reentry planning early; improve use of risk and assessment tools; and improve access of service providers and faith based organizations.
- Improve how prisoners are released from prison. When and where are prisoners released? Do they have a specific transition plan? Proper identification? Have they already applied for benefits and services?

Strategies to Improving Prisoner Reentry

- Build on key social and family relationships and ensure local connections. Family and other social relationships matter.
- Ensure that prisoners have transitional and/or temporary jobs. Important role of intermediaries, for example, New York's Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) and Chicago's Safer Foundation.

Strategies to Improving Prisoner Reentry

- Ensure a continuum of care for high-need individuals with health, mental health, and substance abuse issues.
- Target highly impacted communities and locate services in those communities.
- Form partnerships with local law enforcement.

Successful prisoner reentry is
fundamentally about public
safety.

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