May 2023

Justice Reinvestment Initiative: Prioritizing Prison Resources Where They Matter Most

The Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) is a partnership with state leaders from all three branches of government committed to using their criminal justice data to examine and improve their systems by implementing proven, innovative, and comprehensive approaches to reduce crime, cut recidivism rates, and shift resources toward more effective public safety strategies.

A central goal for states engaging in JRI is to focus prison space on those who have committed serious, violent, or repeat offenses, freeing up resources to invest in more effective recidivism-reduction strategies.

The Justice Reinvestment Initiative is an intensive, data-driven approach that allows states to address key challenges in their criminal justice systems, including violent crime, opioid addiction, mental illness, corrections costs, and recidivism. JRI is funded through a public-private partnership between the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), a component of the Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs, Arnold Ventures, and The Pew Charitable Trusts. The initiative supports states to increase the cost-effectiveness of their justice systems and reinvest the savings into high performing strategies to increase public safety.

### Mississippi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>64%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **JRI Passed in 2014:**
  - Increased eligibility for prison alternatives such as probation, intensive supervision, and drug court for those convicted of nonviolent offenses
  - Granted the option for retroactive parole eligibility for some individuals incarcerated for a nonviolent offense
  - Required mandatory time served before parole eligibility for nonviolent offenses and doubled that time for violent offenses

### Utah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59%</td>
<td>72%</td>
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- **JRI Passed in 2015:**
  - Reduced penalties for certain lower-level offenses, most of which are nonviolent
  - Increased alternative sanctions in lieu of revocation to prison
  - Expanded the availability of community-based drug and mental health treatment
Achieving the Goal

A key indicator of progress toward prioritizing prison resources where they matter is the increase in the proportion of a state’s prison population comprised of people convicted of violent offenses versus nonviolent offenses.

Four states that received technical assistance from the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI), with funding from BJA, enacted policies to achieve this goal.

The main strategies to shift the composition of the states’ prison populations include:

1. Creating tiered penalties to address violent conduct based on severity

2. Focusing recidivism reduction resources on those most likely to reoffend

3. Prioritizing incentives to encourage completion of treatment, employment, and education programs

4. Expanding parole eligibility for those convicted of nonviolent offenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage of Prison Beds Occupied by those Convicted of Violent Offenses</th>
<th>Decrease in Prison Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>45% (2016) to 66% (2021)</td>
<td>26% decrease</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**JRI Passed in 2017:**
- **Reduced** penalties and expanded eligibility for prison alternatives and treatment for some nonviolent offenses
- **Allowed** more individuals convicted of nonviolent offenses to earn time off their prison sentence through good behavior and participation in rehabilitative programs
- **Expanded** parole eligibility to individuals convicted of nonviolent, non-sex offenses, including those sentenced under the habitual offender statute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage of People Incarcerated for Violent Offenses</th>
<th>Decrease in Incarcerated Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>55% (2015) to 65% (2020)</td>
<td>14% decrease</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**JRI Passed in 2016:**
- **Expanded** law enforcement arrest discretion to focus on serious offenses
- **Reclassified** certain lower-level misdemeanors as violations and some nonviolent felonies as misdemeanors
- **Reduced** presumptive sentencing ranges for some offenses
- **Increased** penalties for homicides

Contact

For more information or additional state data, contact Barbara Pierce, Director of Justice Initiatives, or visit cjinstitute.org.

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Sources: All data from annual reports from state departments of corrections and the Bureau of Justice Statistics Prisoners series.