

From Policy to Practice: Criminal Justice Reform in Oklahoma

SEPTEMBER 2026



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The Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) is a trusted, nonpartisan leader in justice system improvement, uniquely combining policy expertise, practitioner experience, and rigorous data analysis with deep partnerships and cross-system collaboration. We help stakeholders uncover root causes, build consensus, and implement evidence-based responses to complex justice and behavioral health challenges. For over two decades, CJI has partnered with leaders, practitioners, and communities across the country, providing strategies that strengthen systems and improve outcomes.

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Executive Summary

Historically, Oklahoma has had one of the highest incarceration rates in the country. It ranked first in the country in 2018 and 2019, igniting a series of changes driven both by voters and state leaders to address the urgent criminal justice challenges in the state. These changes included two rounds of the Justice Reinvestment process, ballot initiatives 780 and 781, and a series of enacted legislatively driven bills targeting specific areas of the justice system. Many reports have documented the challenges that led to these responses. Far fewer have examined what the policies produced.

These policies took effect in a changing state. Since 2014, Oklahoma's population increased six percent to 4.12 million. Along with this growth, Oklahoma saw expansion in the oil and gas industries, its primary tax base, and gross domestic product, as well as a high prevalence of behavioral health challenges among its population, and a state budget increasingly reliant on federal support. However, in terms of criminal justice trends, Oklahoma has seen a great degree of success. The overall crime rate in the state is down 28 percent over the past decade, driven by significant drops in property crime rates. Its prison population declined 15 percent, and its incarceration rate is now fourth in the nation compared to its former rank as first.

This assessment focuses on five key policies enacted through Oklahoma's 2017 Justice Reinvestment process, drawing on outcome data and on the experience of those who implemented them. It documents what each policy produced, what shaped those results, and where the evidence points for further assessment, implementation, or expansion.

To conduct this assessment, the Crime and Justice Institute analyzed publicly available data from federal sources such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and state sources such as reports from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. This report examines ten years of available data and supplements the quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews with stakeholders across the state, including judges, attorneys, law enforcement, corrections staff, parole board, directly impacted individuals, and reform advocates. These interviews fill in information gaps and provide important context that deepens understanding of the data. Together, this analysis produced several key findings on how these policies are affecting the state nearly a decade after enactment:

- Removing the mandatory minimum requirement for second degree burglary and creating a new third-degree burglary offense coincided with a 44 percent decrease in burglary crime rate across the state.
- A tier-based approach to property offenses, scaling punishment with value resulted in a significant decline in property offenses and fewer property convictions entering prison.
- Expanding access to alternatives to incarceration produced limited change until the Legislature funded the programs. SB 689 removed barriers to deferred adjudication, but the effects were only realized after funding followed.
- Increasing the time period individuals are eligible for parole and creating processes for those who are compliant with case plans to be released for parole without a hearing has reduced the number of days from when a person becomes eligible for parole and is released on parole by 68 percent.

Understanding the impact of these policies is significant for stakeholders and leaders as certain key trends shift in the coming years. First, Oklahoma's prison population has begun to increase in recent years, up eight percent since 2023. Second, Oklahoma's reliance on federal support through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and federal contributions to Medicaid will wane. And third, executive leadership is changing after nearly a decade. These factors, and the impacts of these prior policies, will be important to paving the way for Oklahoma's future.

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State Background & Socioeconomic Trends

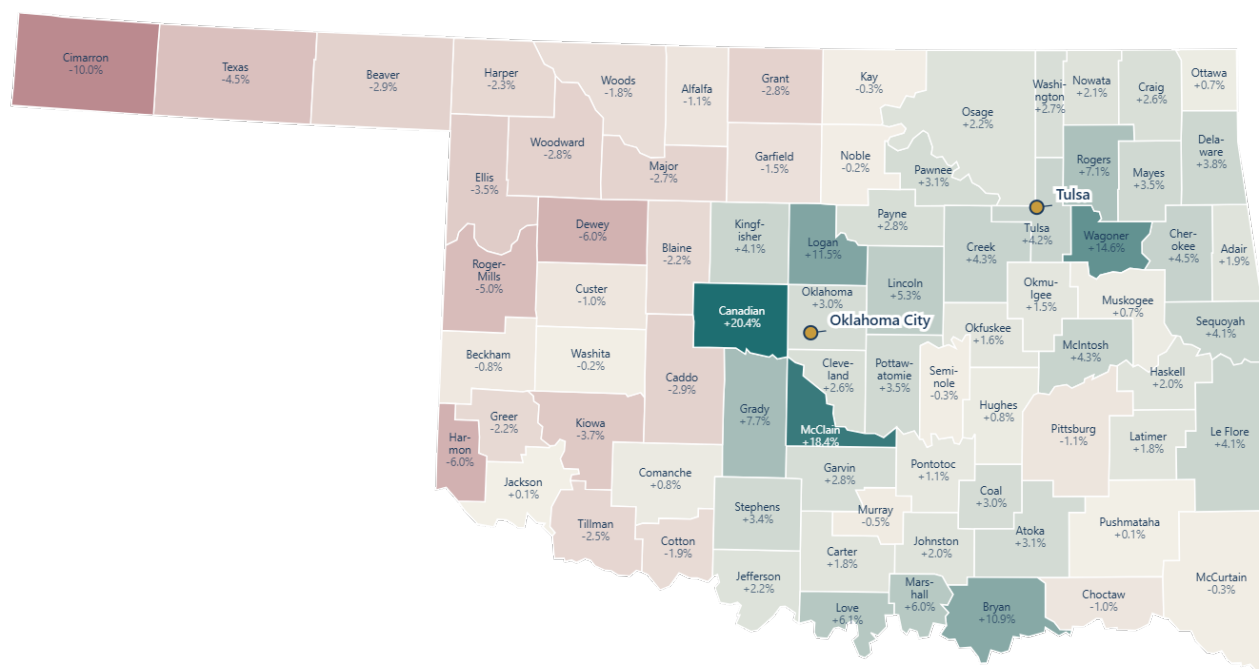
Oklahoma is growing. Its population and economy have expanded over the past decade, driven in large part by its oil and gas industry. The state also faces high rates of behavioral health needs and housing cost pressure. The sections below trace shifts in the state's population, economic development, housing, mental health, and substance use. These are factors that shape both demand on justice systems and a state's capacity to respond.

Population

In 2025, Oklahoma's population was 4.12 million residents, up 6.2 percent from 3.88 million in 2014.^{1,2} From 2014-2024, the growth rate averaged approximately 0.55 percent annually.^{3,4} More recently, from 2020-2025, Oklahoma's population increased by 4.14 percent, outpacing the national average over the same period, which grew at a rate of 3.12 percent.⁵

Just under two-thirds of Oklahomans reside within the metropolitan statistical areas of Oklahoma City (36%) and Tulsa (26%) and both are experiencing continued growth.⁶ Canadian County, part of the Greater Oklahoma City metro area, has grown 20.4 percent from 2020 to 2025 and is the state's fastest growing county.⁷ Southeast of Tulsa, and within the Tulsa Metropolitan Statistical Area, Wagoner County has grown 14.6 percent since 2020.⁸ In contrast, rural counties, especially in the western regions and panhandle, are experiencing population loss. Dewey County in West Central Oklahoma has declined six percent and the state's westernmost county, Cimarron, by 10 percent since 2020.⁹

Population decline Population growth Major city



As of 2025, approximately 58.7 percent of the population in Oklahoma identified as white (non-Hispanic), and the largest racial or ethnic minority was Hispanic or Latino, representing 14.0 percent—up from 12 percent in 2020. While Oklahoma is home to 38 federally recognized tribes and has the fifth-largest share of Native American residents of any state, the American Indian, Alaska Native, or other race (non-Hispanic) population held roughly steady at 8.1 percent in both 2020 and 2025. The rest of the population in 2025 included people who identified as two or more races (9.2%), Black or African American non-Hispanic (7.2%), and Asian (2.7%).¹⁰ In terms of age, Oklahoma's population trends younger than the nation as a whole. As of 2025, the median age was 37.7 years, younger than the national median of 39.4 years. Further, residents aged 18-24 comprised 10 percent of the population compared to 9.2 percent nationally. Also, those 65 and older comprised 18.0 percent of the state population compared to 18.9 percent nationally.¹¹ Oklahoma's gender distribution is relatively balanced, with females representing 50.5 percent – just slightly lower than the national rate of 50.9 percent.¹²

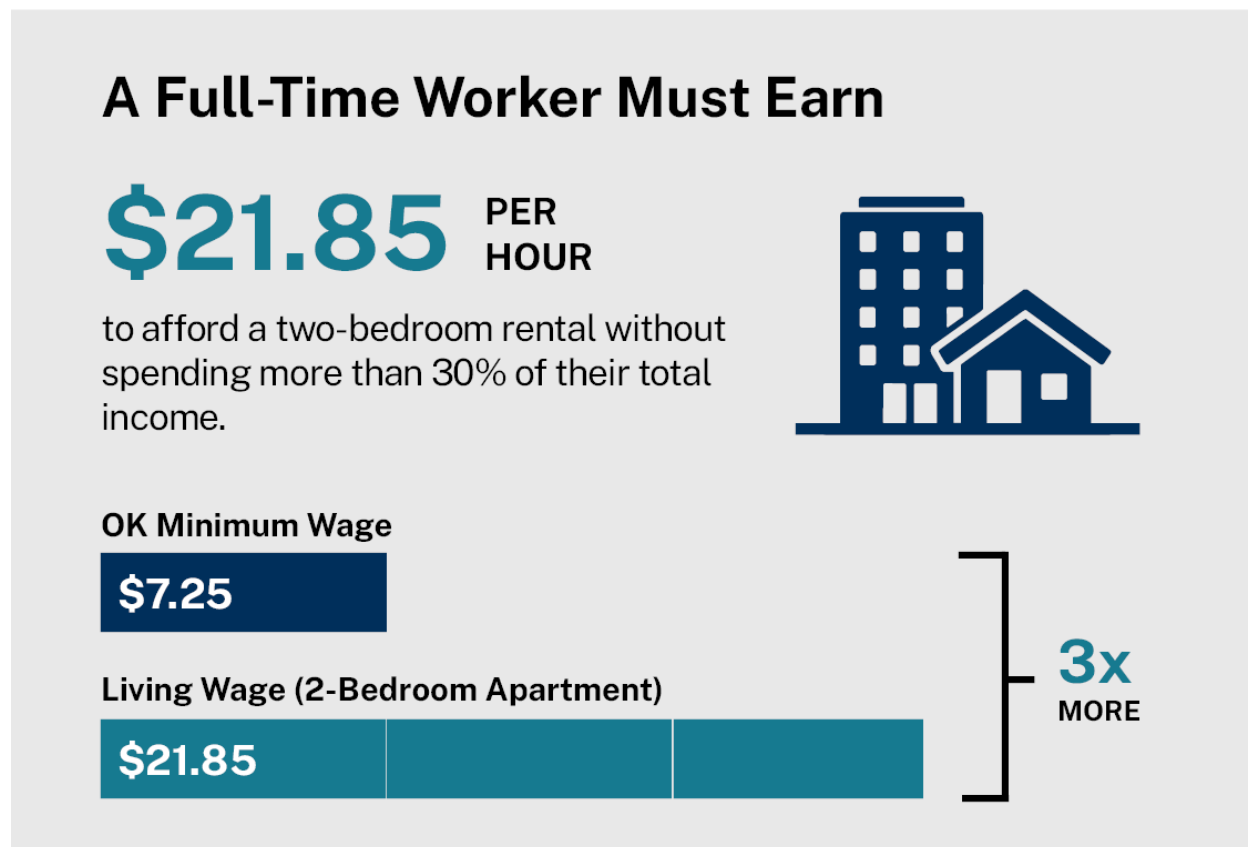
Economic Development

In 2024, Oklahoma's gross domestic product (GDP) reached \$263.7 billion, reflecting growth of three percent over the prior year.¹³ Additionally, GDP in the oil and gas extraction sector reached \$16.5 billion in 2024.¹⁴ Oil and gas is an outsized sector in Oklahoma, both a major share of the state economy and a meaningful contributor to the country's energy production. In 2024, Oklahoma was the nation's sixth-largest producer of both marketed natural gas and crude oil.¹⁵ Oklahoma typically produces between three and four times more natural gas than it consumes.¹⁶ In 2024, oil and natural gas contributed 23 percent of total statewide GDP, generating \$1 in every \$5 of total statewide income.^{17,18} Though oil and natural gas remain central to Oklahoma's economy, the state has sought to diversify growth through workforce development initiatives and business incentives spanning aerospace, manufacturing, agriculture, and professional services. These include the Quality Jobs Program, which provides cash rebates to companies that create well-paying jobs; targeted workforce tax credits; engineering and research and development rebates; and tax incentives for manufacturers making major capital investments or expanding their workforce.¹⁹ Healthcare joined this incentive landscape in July 2026, when the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission added it as a qualifying industry under the Oklahoma Talent Accelerator Grant, part of a broader push to grow the state's healthcare workforce alongside its other target industries.²⁰

Oklahoma's annual unemployment rate ranged from a low of 3.1 percent in 2019 to a high of 6.3 percent in 2020 at the peak of the COVID-19 disruption. In 2024, the state's unemployment rate was 3.2 percent, compared to a national rate of four percent. Consistent with the statewide rate, Oklahoma City's monthly, seasonally adjusted, unemployment rate was 3.0 percent in 2024.²¹ Despite relatively low unemployment, that same year, the median household income in Oklahoma was approximately \$66,148, and 21 percent lower than the national median of \$81,604.²² This income gap is particularly relevant when considering housing affordability, as lower household earnings can limit residents' ability to absorb rising housing costs even in a relatively strong labor market.

Housing

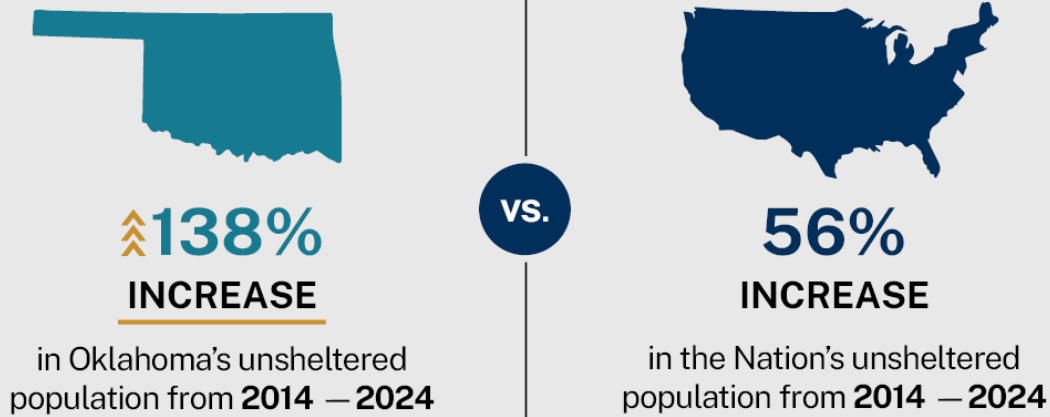
Oklahoma's housing landscape reflects mounting affordability pressures. While the median property value in Oklahoma was approximately \$199,800 in 2024, and the homeownership rate stood at 65.8 percent, Oklahoma ranks 41st among the 50 states and Washington D.C. for rental housing affordability.²³ Further, a full-time worker must earn \$21.85 per hour, three times Oklahoma's minimum wage of \$7.25, to afford a two-bedroom rental without spending more than 30 percent of their total income.²⁴



Homelessness in Oklahoma has increased by approximately 30 percent over the past decade. Between 2014 and 2024, the total number of people unhoused (i.e., those who are in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or unsheltered) rose from 4,191 to 5,467.²⁵ The sharpest growth occurred among those living unsheltered, which increased approximately 138 percent between 2014 and 2024, compared to the national unhoused population, which grew only 56 percent during the same period.²⁶

At a local level, Oklahoma City's homelessness point-in-time count from January 25, 2024, identified 1,838 individuals experiencing homelessness in the city alone, a 28 percent increase from 1,436 in 2023.²⁷ Chronic homelessness (i.e., homelessness lasting more than 12 months) also increased to 44 percent of the homeless population in 2024, up from 19 percent in 2016.^{28,29}

Homelessness in Oklahoma Surged



Education

In 2024, Oklahoma's K-12 public school system served 699,102 students; an increase from 681,578 in 2014.³⁰ Despite the overall increase, enrollment in 2024 was down from 701,258 in 2023 and a decade high of 703,650 in 2020.³¹

Against this backdrop, recent assessment data highlight ongoing challenges in aligning academic outcomes with national averages. According to the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the Nation's Report Card, approximately 23 percent of Oklahoma fourth graders and 20 percent of eighth graders scored at or above proficient in reading, compared to national averages of 30 percent and 29 percent.³² Similarly, in mathematics, 31 percent of fourth graders and 17 percent of eighth graders reached proficiency, compared to national averages of 40 percent and 27 percent.³³ Oklahoma's NAEP results remain below pre-pandemic levels.³⁴

These academic challenges are reflected in long-term outcomes. The state's four-year high school graduation rate for the 2023–24 school year was 82 percent, below the national average of 87 percent.^{35,36} Additionally, in-state postsecondary enrollment is decreasing, as only 35 percent of 2022 Oklahoma public high school graduates enrolled in an Oklahoma college or university the following fall semester, down from 44 percent in 2018.³⁷

Mental Health

Oklahoma is among the states with high rates of mental illness and affordability barriers to treatment. Based on 2022–2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) data, the most recent available at the state level, approximately 22 percent of Oklahoma adults experienced any mental illness (AMI) in

the past year, placing the state approximately 12th nationally for adult AMI prevalence.³⁸ Further, while approximately 200,000 individuals received services through the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) in fiscal year 2024, it's estimated that between 700,000 and 950,000 adult Oklahomans need behavioral health services.^{39, 40}

Access to mental health services depends on both provider availability and cost. Oklahoma is above average in provider supply with 451.3 mental health providers (i.e., psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, counselors, marriage and family therapists and advanced practice nurses specializing in mental health care) per 100,000 residents – ranking 12th in the nation and exceeding the national average of 362.6.^{41,42} Despite an above-average provider supply, provider availability does not appear to adequately meet the needs of all communities across the state. Oklahoma has 135 Mental Health Professional Shortage Area Designationsⁱ, covering nearly 2.6 million residents. Only about a quarter of the state's mental health care needs are currently met, and an estimated 148 additional practitioners would be needed to eliminate existing shortages. Among the five states in its federal region, Oklahoma meets the smallest share of its mental health care need at approximately 24 percent - trailing Texas (32%), Louisiana (29%), Arkansas (26%), and New Mexico (26%).⁴³

Affordability is a factor in individuals accessing mental health care. Similar to national rates, more than a quarter (27%) of Oklahoma adults were unable to see a doctor due to cost. Nationally, Texas has the highest percentage of individuals (43%) unable to access treatment due to cost, and Hawaii has the lowest percentage at 15%.⁴⁴

The prevalence of mental illness is also evident in Oklahoma's justice system. In January 2022, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (DOC) reported that 75 percent of incarcerated females and 53 percent of incarcerated males had an identified mental health need, and 55 percent of incarcerated individuals diagnosed with a mental illness were serving sentences for nonviolent offenses. At the local level, county jails reported similarly high levels of behavioral health needs, with the Oklahoma County Jail housing as many as 400 individuals with a mental illness at any given time and the Tulsa County Jail reporting that between 500 and 600 incarcerated individuals were taking psychotropic medications.⁴⁵ These figures highlight the significant intersection between unmet behavioral health needs and involvement in the criminal justice system, underscoring the importance of accessible, community-based mental health services and diversion opportunities.

Substance Use

Based on 2020-2023 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) data, the most recent available at the state level, approximately 18.4 percent of Oklahomans aged 12 and older met the criteria for substance use disorder in the past year, above the national rate of 17.7 percent.⁴⁶ An estimated 20.4 percent of Oklahomans were classified as needing substance use treatment, yet only 4.9 percent

ⁱ A Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) is a geographic area, population group, or health care facility that has been designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as having a shortage of health professionals in primary care, dental health, or mental health.

received it, meaning approximately 75.8 percent of those who needed treatment did not receive it, a gap that closely mirrors the national unmet need rate of 77.1 percent.⁴⁷

From 2020 to 2023, fentanyl-related overdose deaths in Oklahoma grew nearly six-fold, from 127 deaths in 2020 to 730 deaths in 2023, and approximately 70 percent of fentanyl deaths that year also involved methamphetamine or another substance.⁴⁸ Methamphetamine remains the most prevalent drug in Oklahoma overdose deaths overall - involved in two out of three overdose deaths in 2024 and responsible for a 21-fold increase in deaths from 2007 to 2023, from 39 to 813.^{49,50} As of 2024, fentanyl was involved in 86 percent of opioid-related overdose deaths, compared to approximately 10–20 percent annually prior to 2020.⁵¹

Fentanyl Overdose Deaths in Oklahoma Continue to Increase

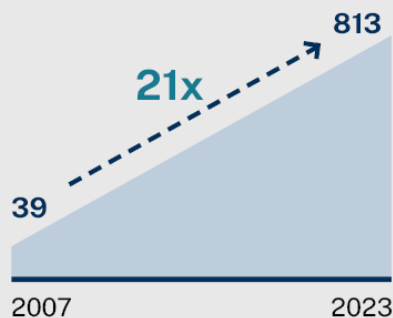
From **2020** — **2023**, Fentanyl-related overdose deaths in Oklahoma increased nearly **6X**.



of Fentanyl-related overdose deaths in 2023 also involved Methamphetamine or another substance.

Methamphetamine-related overdose deaths remain the most prevalent overall, involved in **2 out of 3** overdose deaths in 2024.

From **2007** — **2023**, Methamphetamine was responsible for a **21-fold increase** in overdose deaths across the state.



Oklahoma's overall drug overdose death rate in 2024 was nearly 10 percent above the national rate, and the state has seen its overdose mortality increase 26 percent from 2014-2024. Notably, there has been an increase of 53 percent from 2019-2024.⁵² While urban areas including Oklahoma City and Tulsa accounted for the largest absolute numbers of fentanyl deaths from 2020-2024, Pawnee County, a rural county in northeastern Oklahoma, recorded the 2nd highest fentanyl-related death rate in the state during that same period, reflecting the acute geographic disparity in the crisis.⁵³

There are recent signs of improvement. From 2023 to 2024, fentanyl overdose deaths declined 33 percent, from 730 to 487.⁵⁴ In August 2023, Oklahoma expanded efforts to reduce fentanyl and opioid overdose deaths by allowing SoonerCare (the state's Medicaid program) to cover naloxone without a doctor's visit, enabling pharmacists to dispense it directly under a standing order.⁵⁵ Also, in August 2025, The Oklahoma Opioid Abatement Board awarded \$16.6 million in grants—\$12.9 million to 31 communities and \$3.7 million to 16 school districts—to strengthen efforts addressing the state's opioid crisis. The funding was intended to support treatment and recovery services, mental health programs, opioid education, and strategies to reduce the supply of narcotics statewide.⁵⁶

Budget Trends

As Oklahoma's population has grown over the past decade, so has the state budget. Spending on public safety has increased substantially, though corrections costs have grown at a more measured pace than overall state expenditures.⁵⁷ The state has also enacted a series of income and sales tax reductions that, while each individually modest, have cumulatively narrowed the state's revenue base over time.⁵⁸ At the same time, the state has increased its reliance on federal support just as those funding streams are showing signs of vulnerability.

Overall Budget Trends and Reliance on Federal Funding

Oklahoma's total state appropriations grew from \$7.2 billion in FY 2016 to \$12.6 billion in 2026, an increase of approximately 75 percent over the decade.⁵⁹ This reflects increases across all major budget categories, including education, health and human services, and public safety, as well as the state's growing reliance on federal funds.⁶⁰

Medicaid is the clearest example of this dependence: Oklahoma expanded the program in 2021 following a voter-approved ballot initiative, and the federal government now covers approximately 90 percent of the cost for the expansion population.⁶¹ The state also received over \$3.19 billion in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) appropriations since 2023, which funded one-time investments across several agencies. ARPA funding must be spent by the end of the calendar year, and Medicaid funding has shown signs of instability.^{62,63}

First, Oklahoma's Medicaid expansion works differently than most states and that affects how much budget risk the state is taking on. Oklahoma embedded Medicaid expansion directly in the state constitution through State Question 802, which required the Oklahoma Health Care Authority to cover adults between 18-65 whose income is up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level and to take all

actions necessary to maximize federal financial participation.⁶⁴ This means Oklahoma cannot simply scale back expansion through legislative action if the federal government were to reduce their match percentage below the current 90 percent.⁶⁵ For now, the federal budget reconciliation law H.R. 1, enacted in July 2025, did not reduce the match rate for Oklahoma’s existing expansion population. However, it did impose new work-requirement and eligibility-redetermination mandates and restricts how states finance their share of Medicaid costs.⁶⁶

Second, Oklahoma relies on Medicaid and ARPA funding for behavioral health and public safety that make these changes destabilizing. Oklahoma has used one-time ARPA investments to support a range of public health, behavioral health, workforce, and youth-service initiatives rather than ongoing state appropriations in recent years.⁶⁷ For example, the Oklahoma Psychiatric Care Center, a 106-bed hospital in downtown Tulsa, received \$38 million in ARPA funds toward its construction. The facility nearly doubles the region's available psychiatric beds and includes a 24-hour crisis response Urgent Recovery Center, with capacity to serve an estimated 1,000 or more additional patients a year with the goal of reducing mental health-related emergency department visits, incarceration, and homelessness.⁶⁸

Tax Policy Changes, Revenue from Energy Industry, and State Revenue Stability

Oklahoma's individual income tax has been reduced multiple times over the past decade, reflecting a sustained legislative priority of lowering the tax burden on residents. Oklahoma has passed a series of laws that have reduced individual income tax directly and embedded trigger mechanisms that reduce the income tax automatically if revenue estimates hit certain levels. For example, SB 1246, passed in 2014, reduced rates to five percent beginning January 1, 2016, based on reaching target revenue estimate levels.⁶⁹ The top rate dropped again to 4.75 percent in 2022 with the passage of HB 2960, HB 2962, and HB 2963.⁷⁰ More recently, in 2025, HB 2764 consolidated the three lowest income tax brackets, reduced rates on the remaining brackets by 0.25 percent each, and established a trigger mechanism for future reductions contingent upon Board of Equalization findings.⁷¹ Beginning January 1, 2026, the top marginal rate is 4.50 percent.⁷²

Oklahoma's reliance on gross production taxes—tax revenue from oil and gas—makes its revenue base structurally volatile in a way that distinguishes it from other states, since collections swing sharply with global commodity prices. In 2016, gross production taxes totaled \$366.6 million, or about 3.3 percent of total tax collections, during the oil price downturn of the mid-2010s; recovered to \$1.83 billion, or about 10.5 percent of total tax collections, in 2023 during the post-pandemic energy surge; and fell again to \$1.02 billion, or about 6.4 percent, in 2025 as prices moderated.^{73,74,75}

Despite this volatility, the state's main revenue sources have stabilized over the past decade. The General Revenue Fund, the primary source of discretionary spending, grew from approximately \$4.96 billion in 2016 to a projected \$8.55 billion in 2027.^{76,77} Combined Constitutional Reserve Fund and Revenue Stabilization Fund balances are projected at approximately \$1.78 billion at the close of 2026, reflecting several years of post-pandemic revenue surges and surplus accumulation.⁷⁸

Table 1. Oklahoma Public Safety Funding Change 2016-2026

Department	FY 2016 Appropriation	FY 2026 Appropriation	% Change	\$ Change
Department of Corrections	\$485,900,943	\$547,359,022	13%	\$61,458,079
Department of Public Safety	\$95,709,377	\$120,846,454	26%	\$25,137,077
Oklahoma Indigent Defense System	\$15,074,740	\$26,470,125	76%	\$11,395,385
District Attorneys Council	\$37,661,285	\$86,040,957	128%	\$48,379,672
Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation	\$13,421,374	\$40,361,631	201%	\$26,940,257
Council on Law Enforcement Education & Training	\$3,296,355	\$8,039,731	144%	\$4,743,376
Pardon and Parole Board	\$2,392,681	\$2,604,446	9%	\$211,765
Supreme Court	\$16,736,919	\$28,858,789	72%	\$12,121,870
District Courts	\$55,518,416	\$86,960,297	57%	\$31,441,881
Court of Criminal Appeals	\$3,521,293	\$4,686,775	33%	\$1,165,482
Total Public Safety & Judiciary	\$685,110,221	\$1,045,784,929	53%	\$360,674,708

Note: 2016 figures drawn from the State of Oklahoma 2016 Executive Budget; 2026 figures drawn from the State of Oklahoma 2027 Executive Budget.

As shown in **Table 1**, the DOC budget grew 13 percent over the decade, from \$485.9 million to \$547.4 million—modest growth for one of the state’s major public safety agencies and well below the 75 percent increase in overall state appropriations.^{79,80} However, there were costs beyond annual legislative appropriations. In 2025, there was a large, one-time outlay for the purchase of the Lawton Correctional Center, a privately operated prison.⁸¹ The DOC received an additional \$312 million supplemental appropriation to purchase the facility, now renamed the Red Rock Correctional Center.⁸²

The purchase was prompted by a contract dispute: in 2024, the Oklahoma Legislature passed a bill increasing the per diem rate for the facility's private operator, which Governor Stitt vetoed. The operator responded by moving to end its contract, leading the state to purchase the facility rather than lose its bed capacity.⁸³ With the purchase, and following the state's 2020 closure of the privately operated Cimarron facility and its 2023 reclamation of the Great Plains facility, Oklahoma no longer contracts with any privately operated prison.⁸⁴

As shown in **Table 1**, DOC's relatively flat fiscal trajectory stands in contrast to the broader public safety and judiciary category, which grew 53%, with notable increases in the District Attorneys Council (128%), the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (201%), Council on Law Enforcement Education & Training (144%), and the Indigent Defense System (76%). The Pardon and Parole Board received a nine percent increase over the decade—growing from \$2.4 million to \$2.6 million—the smallest increase among the agencies in this category, despite its central role in managing prison population through parole decisions and sentence reviews.⁸⁵ Discussions with Oklahoma stakeholders indicated that the growth in certain budget categories was in response to two developments. First, the loss of anticipated funding due to policy changes that reduced the imposition of financial obligations on people involved in the justice system, such as fines and fees from court processes and criminal convictions. Second, the new responsibilities required to meet the objectives of the Clean Slate law, which authorized the automated expungement of criminal history information when a person has met the expungement criteria.

Justice Trends Over the Last Decade

★ Oklahoma's overall crime rate has decreased, driven by lower property crime rates.

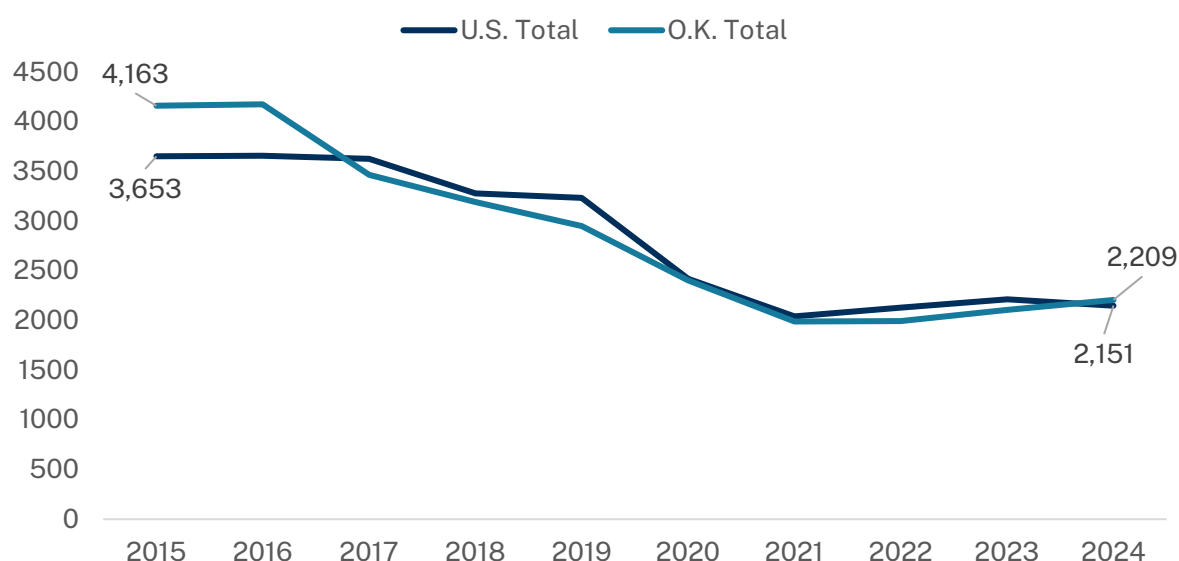
Over the past decade, Oklahoma's crime rate has decreased by 28 percent, from 3,348 crimes per 100,000 people in 2015 to 2,400 crimes per 100,000 people in 2024.⁸⁶ This reflects a similar decrease in nationwide crime rates, though Oklahoma's crime rate is consistently higher than the national: about 12 percent higher in 2024 (2,119 crimes per 100,000 people nationally).⁸⁷ This gap between Oklahoma's and the national crime rate is driven predominantly by the violent crime rate, which has decreased by about one percent in Oklahoma over the past decade (compared to a seven percent decrease nationally). This decrease in violent crime, in turn, is due to a 50 percent reduction in the robbery rate in Oklahoma over the past decade (from approximately 77 in 2015 to 38 in 2024).⁸⁸ All other violent index crimes have increased: homicide by two percent, rape by 19 percent, and aggravated assault by eight percent (these rates are, respectively, 46 percent, 46 percent, and 22 percent higher than national rates).⁸⁹

By contrast, property crime in Oklahoma has declined by 32 percent, similar to a 30 percent decline nationally; the burglary rate is 44 percent lower in 2024 than it was in 2015, the larceny rate is 30 percent lower, and the motor vehicle theft rate is 18 percent lower.⁹⁰ Burglary and larceny rates remain higher in Oklahoma than they are nationally in 2024 (57 percent higher and five percent higher, respectively), while the motor vehicle theft rate is 15 percent lower.⁹¹

★ **Oklahoma's arrest rate is slightly above the national rate, and falling faster.**

Oklahoma's arrest rate is also higher than the national arrest rate, but the difference is smaller than that between crime rates—only about three percent in 2024 (2,209 arrests per 100,000 people compared to 2,151).⁹² **Figure 1** illustrates that over the past decade, Oklahoma's arrest rate has decreased more quickly than the national—a 47 percent decrease compared to 41 percent (Oklahoma's arrest rate was 13 percent higher than the national in 2015).⁹³ This trend is predominantly driven by the nonviolent arrest rate, which has decreased 48 percent in Oklahoma compared to a 42 percent decrease nationally; violent arrest rates for both national and Oklahoma, by contrast, have declined by about 10 percent.⁹⁴

Figure 1. National vs. Oklahoma Arrest Rates, 2015-2024

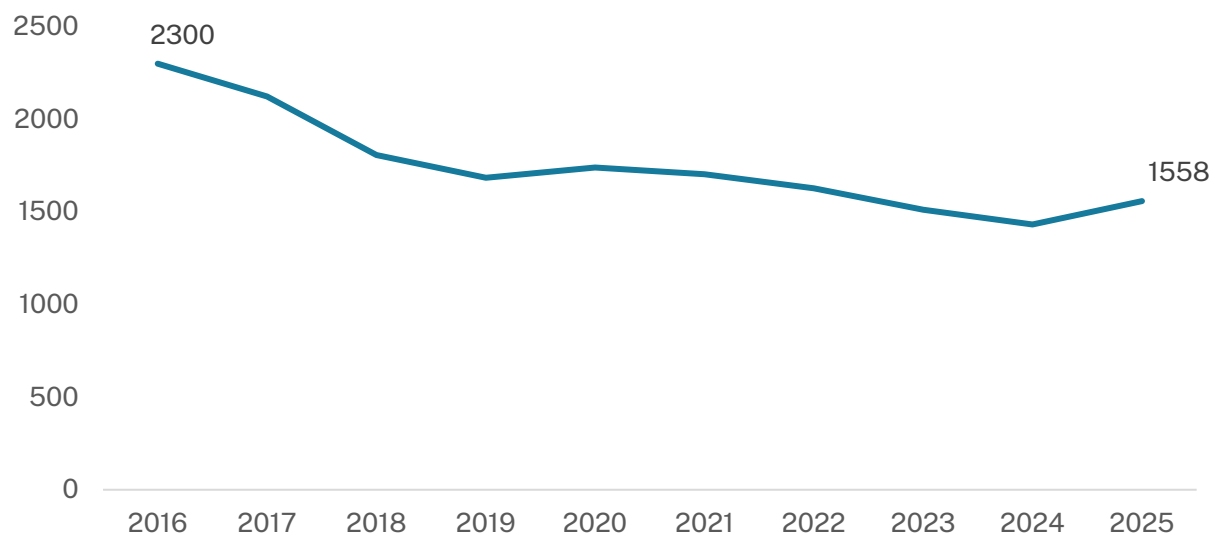


Following similar trends, the number of criminal cases in Oklahoma state courts has also decreased. There were 27 percent fewer criminal cases filed in 2024 than in 2019 (the earliest year of available court data) and 29 percent fewer criminal cases disposed.⁹⁵

★ **Oklahoma's jail population is trending downward, increasingly maximum security and nonwhite.**

Consistent with the previously discussed trends, the average yearly population of the Oklahoma County Jail, the largest jail in the state, has decreased 32 percent over the past decade, from 2,300 individuals in 2016 to 1,558 in 2025.⁹⁶ As **Figure 2** illustrates, the largest decrease occurred between 2016 and 2019, when the population dropped 27 percent, and has decreased seven percent since. Between 2016 and 2025, jail bookings also decreased by 40 percent (from 38,229 to 22,953) and releases decreased by 37 percent (from 26,265 to 22,912).⁹⁷

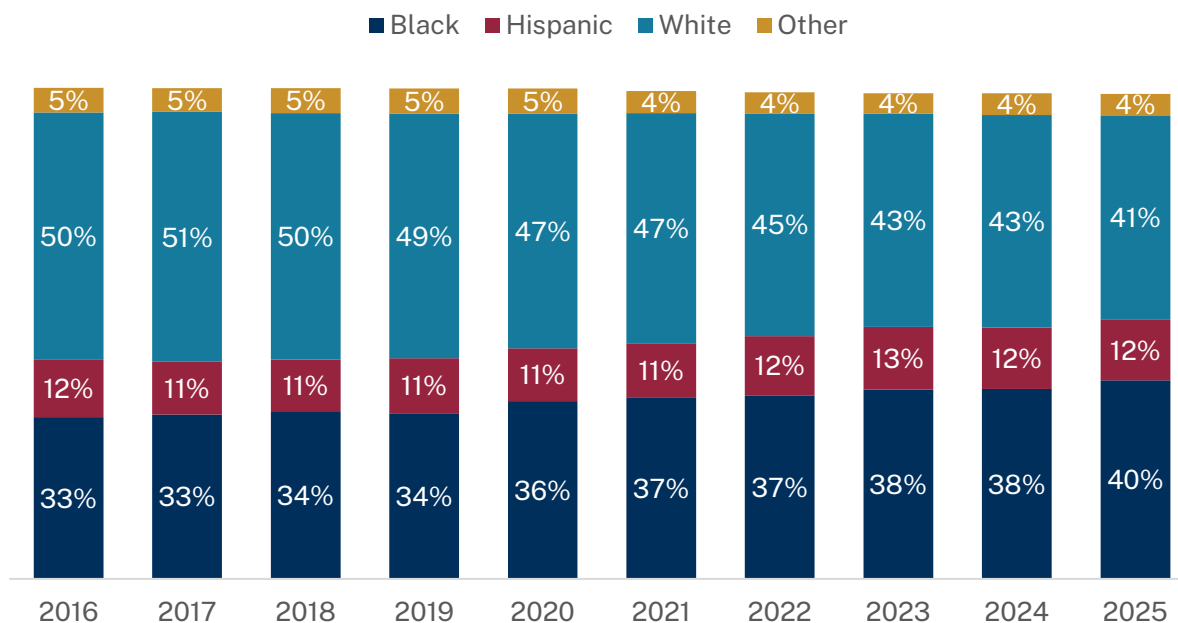
Figure 2. Average Oklahoma County Jail Population by Year, 2016-2025



As of September 9, 2026, individuals in the Oklahoma County Jail were held for a median of 58 days, with eleven percent of the population held for over a year.⁹⁸ Eighty-five percent were held pretrial. Nearly half were held with a violent crime as their top charge, the most common being first-degree murder, assault/battery with a dangerous weapon, or child abuse/neglect (together representing over a third of individuals with violent offenses). Property offenses comprise about 20 percent of top charges (first- and second-degree burglary represent about 29 percent of property offenses) and drug offenses comprise about 15 percent (about two-thirds of which are trafficking/distribution). Seventeen percent of individuals are held with an “other” charge as their top charge, with the most common being conspiracy, illegal possession of a firearm, and obstruction of justice.

Between 2016 and 2025, fewer women have been booked into the Oklahoma County Jail; women have gone from 20 percent to 14 percent of the average standing population and from 28 percent to 25 percent of both bookings and releases.⁹⁹ As **Figure 3** shows, the racial distribution has also shifted over time, with a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic individuals and a lower percentage of white individuals in the jail. Black individuals have gone from 39 percent of the population to 43 percent, and from 33 percent to 40 percent of both bookings and releases; Hispanic individuals have gone from 11 percent to 14 percent of the population, though they represent a similar proportion of bookings and releases over time (potentially indicating longer lengths of stay for this group).¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, white individuals have gone from 45 percent to 37 percent of the population and from around 50 percent to 41 percent of both bookings and releases.¹⁰¹

Figure 3. Oklahoma County Jail Bookings by Race and Year, 2016-2025

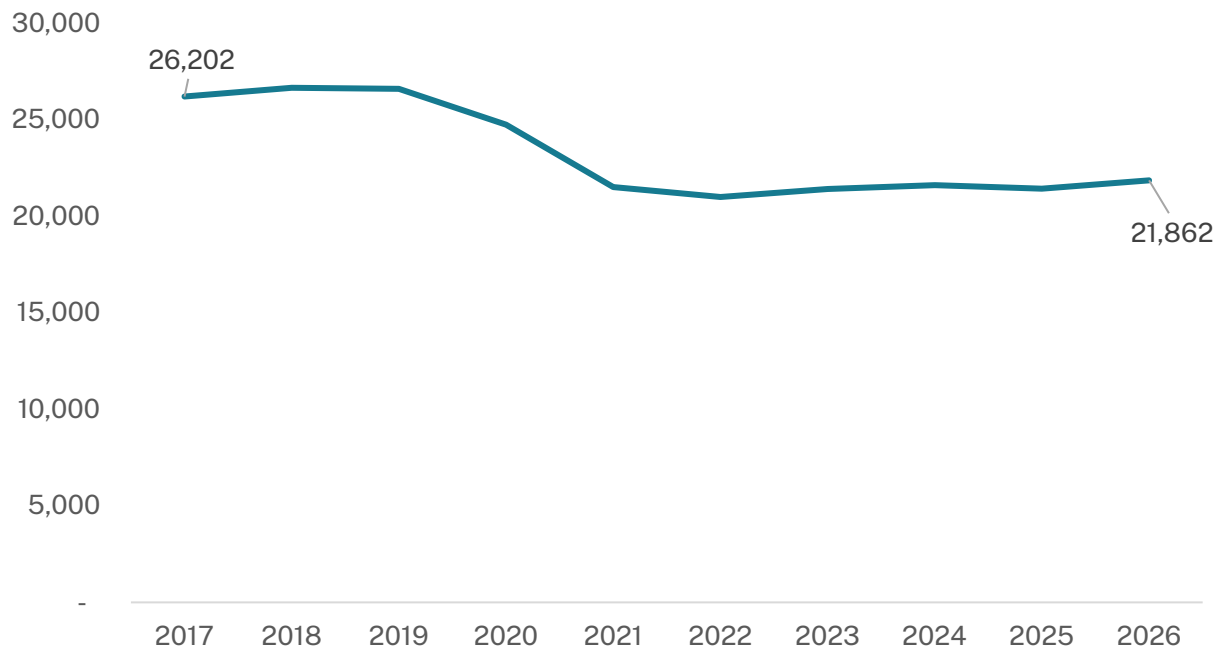


The average jail population classified as maximum has grown by nine percent, from 29 percent to 46 percent of the population between 2016 and 2025, while the numbers classified as minimum and medium have both dropped approximately 50 percent, minimum going from 21 to 15 percent of the population and medium from 49 to 38 percent.¹⁰² Similar trends have occurred with bookings and releases—maximum security classifications at booking have grown four percent and releases have grown 35 percent, while minimum and medium security classifications have decreased by a comparable percentage as the overall population. In 2016, 49 percent of bookings and 51 percent of releases were classified as minimum security, 43 percent and 42 percent were medium, and eight percent and seven percent were maximum; in 2025, 42 percent of both bookings and releases were minimum, 43 percent were medium, and 15 percent were maximum.¹⁰³

★ **Oklahoma’s prison population decreased, contains a higher proportion of individuals with violent offenses and Black and Hispanic individuals.**

Oklahoma’s prison population was 21,862 people in January of 2026, down by 17 percent from 2017, as illustrated in **Figure 4**.¹⁰⁴ This is primarily due to a decrease from 2017 to 2021; since then, the population has stayed relatively steady, fluctuating by no more than 500 every year (and in fact growing by two percent from 2021 to 2026).¹⁰⁵ The 2026 population represents a 97 percent utilization of Oklahoma’s prison capacity, which demonstrates an improvement from the previous decade (up until 2021, Oklahoma’s prisons were over capacity), but a steady increase in use since reaching a post-COVID-19 low of 84 percent bed utilization.¹⁰⁶

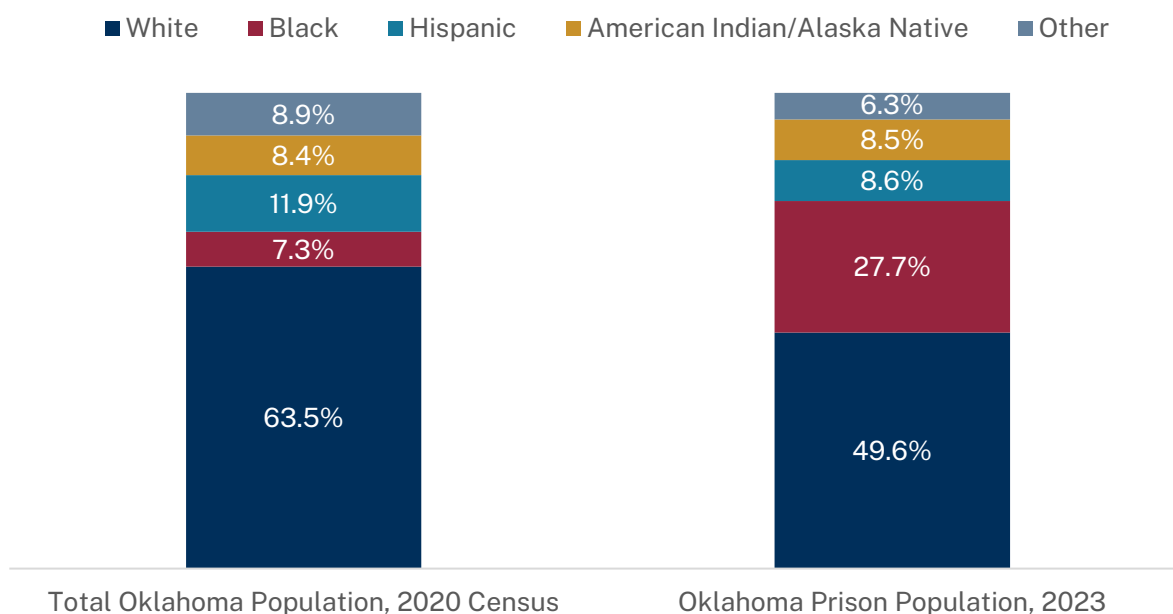
Figure 4. Oklahoma Prison Population, 2017-2026



According to BJS reports from the Prisoners series, this population has shifted in terms of offenses represented. From 2019 to 2022 (the only years for which offense data are available), violent offenses have grown from 56 percent to 62 percent of the prison population, and public order offenses have gone from nine to 12 percent.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, drug offenses have gone from 16 percent to 10.5 percent of the prison population, while property offenses have gone from 18 to 15 percent.¹⁰⁸

The population is consistently between 9.3 and 11.5 percent female (with 2,070 women incarcerated in 2026); there are 15 percent fewer men incarcerated in 2026 compared to 2017 and 30 percent fewer women.¹⁰⁹ BJS's Prisoners series of reports indicates a slight shift in the racial distribution of incarcerated individuals in Oklahoma, with a larger decrease in the population for white and Native American individuals (29 percent and 39 percent, respectively) compared to Black and Hispanic individuals (17 percent and eight percent, respectively) between 2015 and 2023.¹¹⁰ As a result, from 2014 to 2023, the prison population in Oklahoma has gone from 54 percent to 50 percent white, from 11 percent to eight percent Native, from 26 percent to 28 percent Black, and from seven percent to nine percent Hispanic, mirroring similar trends in the racial composition of Oklahoma County Jail.¹¹¹ By comparison, as illustrated in **Figure 5** below, the 2020 Census describes Oklahoma's population as 63.5 percent white, 7.3 percent Black, 8.4 percent Native, and 11.9 percent Hispanic.¹¹²

Figure 5. Oklahoma State and Prison Population by Race



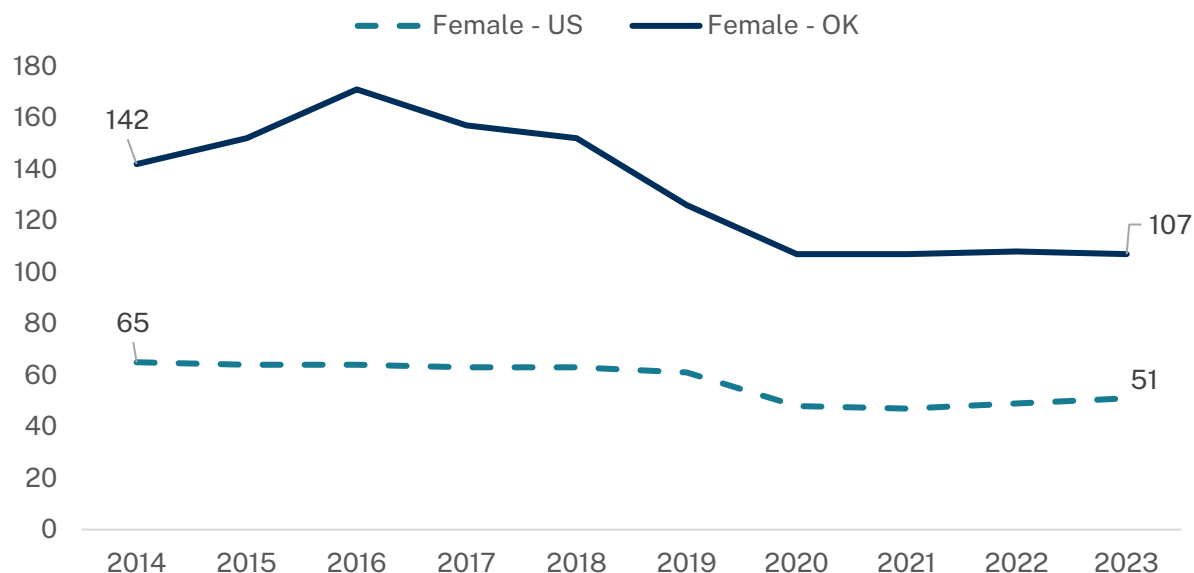
★ Releases outpace admissions in Oklahoma, but imprisonment rate remains high.

Between 2016 and 2025, admissions to prison in Oklahoma decreased by 35 percent, from 9,394 individuals to 6,124.¹¹³ During this time, there was a six percent increase in admissions for violent offenses and a 12 percent increase in admissions for public order offenses.¹¹⁴ All other offense types decreased, with the biggest decline in drug offenses, which went from 38 percent of admissions to prison in 2016 to 16 percent in 2025.¹¹⁵ By contrast, violent offenses grew from 21 percent of admissions to 35 percent.¹¹⁶

Between 2016 and 2025, releases from prison have decreased 49 percent, from 10,859 individuals to 5,531.¹¹⁷ Since 2021, admissions and releases have trended fairly closely together, with admissions slightly outpacing releases nearly every year (leading to a two percent growth in the prison population over this period).¹¹⁸ Releases to parole have become more common, growing from four percent to 11 percent of releases; simultaneously, average length of stay prior to release onto parole has decreased 11 percent, from 45.4 months to 40.7 months.¹¹⁹

Despite decreases in both admissions and releases, Oklahoma's imprisonment rate remains high. It has consistently been about 52 percent higher than the national average (545 individuals per 100,000 compared to 318 per 100,000 nationally in 2023).¹²⁰ One reason for this difference is the female imprisonment rate. As shown in **Figure 6**, while there has been about a 25 percent decrease in Oklahoma's female imprisonment rate, it remained 71 percent higher than the national average in 2023.¹²¹

Figure 6. Female Imprisonment Rate in the US and in Oklahoma, 2014-2023



★ **Community supervision rate and population are growing, primarily due to growth in probation population and rate.**

Oklahoma's community supervision population (probation and parole combined) has been steadily declining between 2017 and 2026, from nearly 32,700 people on community supervision to just over 22,000.¹²² This is largely due to trends in the probation population (which comprises more than three-quarters of individuals on community supervision), which has decreased 33 percent during this time. By contrast, the parole population has grown 15 percent, from 2,525 to 2,893 individuals; as a result, parole has grown from comprising eight percent of the total community supervision population in Oklahoma to 13 percent.¹²³ The proportion of women on parole has grown considerably, compared to a decrease in women on probation. Women have gone from comprising 24 percent of the probation population to 21 percent, a 42 percent decline; during the same timeframe, women on parole have increased 54 percent, going from comprising 15 percent of the parole population to 21 percent.¹²⁴

While the population counts reported differ from the counts provided by Oklahoma DOC, the BJS Prisoners series reports that Oklahoma's rate of individuals on community supervision per 100,000 people has also grown 11 percent, compared to a 25 percent decrease nationally.¹²⁵ Oklahoma's community supervision rate is consistently lower than the national, but its upward growth contrary to national trends has resulted in the rate growing from 57 percent lower than the national in 2014 to only 20 percent lower in 2023.¹²⁶ The rate of individuals on probation per 100,000 people has also grown 15 percent (five percent lower than the national in 2023, but down from 47 percent lower in 2014).¹²⁷ About sixty percent of the population was on felony probation in 2023 (with the rest on misdemeanor probation), comparable to national trends.¹²⁸ As of 2022, about 47 percent was white, 19 percent Black, and eight percent Hispanic.¹²⁹

Oklahoma's rate of individuals on parole per 100,000 people has decreased 14 percent. National trends are similar, but the decrease is more rapid—a 21 percent decline in population and a 26 percent decrease in rate, resulting in Oklahoma's parole rate being 120 percent lower than the national rate in 2014 and 110 percent lower in 2023.¹³⁰

Justice Reinvestment in Oklahoma

In 2016, Oklahoma had the second-highest overall imprisonment rate and, moreover, had maintained the highest female imprisonment rate in the country since 1991. At the same time, Oklahoma's prison population was projected to grow 25 percent by 2026 and cost an estimated \$1.2 billion in capital expenditures and \$700 million in operating costs over the next decade.¹³¹ State leaders as well as the public recognized that without intervention, taxpayers would continue to pay more and prison facilities would become more crowded and unsafe.

The first significant response came from the public in the form of State Questions (SQ) 780 and 781, two ballot initiatives that altered sentencing policy for low-level crimes and shifted funding to community-based treatment. SQ 780 reclassified simple drug possession and certain low-level property crimes from felonies to misdemeanors, while SQ 781 directed the prison cost savings from fewer low-level offenses coming into prison toward a fund distributed to counties for mental health and substance abuse treatment programs.^{132, 133} SQ 780 and 781 were companion citizen initiatives that were approved by Oklahoma voters in the 2016 general election.¹³⁴

In 2023, the legislature modified the breadth of SQ 780. House Bill 2153, signed by Governor Stitt and effective November 1, 2023, made a fourth simple drug possession conviction within a 10-year period a felony, carrying a sentence of one to five years in prison. The bill excluded marijuana-related offenses and included an optional diversion program that could reduce the felony charge to a misdemeanor upon successful completion.¹³⁵

Concurrent to the adoption of SQ 780 and 781, Oklahoma state leaders requested and received assistance through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) Grant in 2016 and established a bipartisan, interbranch group to lead an examination of the challenges facing Oklahoma's justice system. The Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force conducted a comprehensive review of the state's criminal justice system and developed recommendations to improve public safety, use prison resources more effectively, expand treatment and services that reduce recidivism and keep citizens out of the system, and provide a better fiscal return to taxpayers.¹³⁶

Problem Identification and System Diagnosis

The Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force (Task Force) was charged with four principal objectives:

1. Developing comprehensive criminal justice and corrections reform policy;
2. Identifying more cost-effective, evidence-based sentencing and supervision practices aimed at holding offenders accountable and reducing recidivism;

3. Estimating any resulting savings from the policy recommendations; and
4. Identifying opportunities to reinvest the resulting savings into policies shown to increase public safety, reduce recidivism, and improve offender reentry outcomes.¹³⁷

After eight months of analysis, the Task Force developed [27 recommendations](#) designed to work in concert with one another to focus prison resources on violent offenders; improve and enhance release and reentry practices; strengthen supervision and interventions to reduce recidivism; provide better support to victims of crime; and ensure oversight and accountability for the criminal justice system.¹³⁸

The projected impact of these recommendations was to avert all anticipated prison population growth through 2026 and reduce the prison population by seven percent, saving an estimated \$1.9 billion over ten years.¹³⁹

The JRI Legislative Package

Over the next two legislative sessions, the legislature adopted, and Governor Fallin signed, a package of 10 bills with bipartisan support.

Sentencing

- Senate Bill 793 reduced sentences for commercial drug offenses, establishing tiered penalties for possession with intent to distribute, distribution, and manufacturing of controlled substances based on offense level, and removed eligibility restrictions that had prohibited suspended, deferred, or probation sentences for those offenses.¹⁴⁰
- Senate Bill 796 restructured burglary sentencing by creating a new third-degree burglary offense for breaking and entering a vehicle and removing the two-year mandatory minimum for second-degree burglary.¹⁴¹
- House Bill 2281 created a tiered penalty structure for felony property offenses based on the value of property involved, aligning penalties for low-level property offenses with the revised felony theft threshold established in 2016.¹⁴²
- Senate Bill 649 modified habitual offender sentencing enhancements for nine specific nonviolent offenses, capping second and subsequent offense sentences at twice the maximum for a first-time offender, and excluded simple drug possession from being used as a prior conviction to enhance a subsequent sentence.¹⁴³

Release and Reentry

- Senate Bill 603 required the DOC to administer a validated risk and needs assessment and develop an individualized case plan for every person entering DOC custody, using results to guide programming and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.¹⁴⁴
- House Bill 2286 established an administrative parole process for individuals not serving sentences for violent offenses, providing automatic parole at the eligibility date for those who have substantially complied with their case plan, and expanded geriatric parole eligibility to

individuals aged 60 and older who have served the shorter of 10 years or one-third of their sentence and pose minimal public safety risk.¹⁴⁵

- Senate Bill 650 expanded expungement eligibility, authorizing individuals with no more than one nonviolent felony conviction to apply for expungement after a five-year waiting period following completion of sentence, provided they have no new convictions or pending charges.¹⁴⁶

Supervision

- Senate Bill 689 addressed multiple supervision and reentry barriers in a single omnibus bill: it established payment plans for fines and fees for indigent defendants; expanded alternatives to incarceration by allowing individuals with a prior deferred judgment to receive a subsequent deferred judgment; established caps on incarceration for technical supervision violations; defined what constitutes a technical violation; authorized sentence modification for nonviolent offenders serving life without parole; required specialized supervision caseloads for repeat offenders, sex offenders, domestic violence offenders, and those with mental health needs; expanded the judicial safety valve for departures from mandatory minimum sentences; and prohibited the extension of supervision solely for failure to pay fines or fees absent a finding of willful nonpayment.¹⁴⁷

Additional Provisions

- Senate Bill 604 added personal safety planning to required law enforcement training on domestic violence and stalking investigation.¹⁴⁸
- House Bill 2284 established evidence-based behavioral health and treatment training requirements for public defenders, district attorneys, and members of the judiciary, including training on domestic violence dynamics, victim trauma, and mental health and substance use needs of defendants.¹⁴⁹

Policy Changes since Justice Reinvestment

In the years since JRI, Oklahoma has continued to center criminal justice as a focus of its state policy agenda and pursue a data-driven, statewide approach to reform. When Governor Kevin Stitt ran for office in 2018, ensuring Oklahoma did not earn the distinction as the nation's top incarcerator was a focus of his campaign.¹⁵⁰ With his support and leadership as Governor, in 2019, the Oklahoma legislature passed House Bill 1269, which made SQ 780 retroactive, allowing individuals currently serving felony sentences for offenses that SQ 780 had reclassified as misdemeanors to petition for sentence modification. Acting on the legislation, Governor Kevin Stitt commuted and released 467 individuals on a single day, at the time the largest single-day mass commutation in U.S. history.¹⁵¹

In the years since, Oklahoma has undertaken many different approaches to reform in the criminal justice space, some reflecting the goal of JRI and others seeking the tough-on-crime demand that arose nationwide during the pandemic.

Sentencing Standardization

- After three years of study by the Oklahoma Criminal Justice Reclassification Council (created in 2018), the legislature considered changes to felony sentencing. House Bill 1792, the Oklahoma Sentencing Modernization Act of 2024, was signed into law and became effective January 1, 2026.¹⁵² HB 1792 classified over 2,000 felony offenses into 14 new felony classes with standardized penalty ranges.

Reentry and Employment Support

- Beginning in 2019, Oklahoma legislators focused on increasing access to employment for people returning from prison and lowered barriers to occupational licensing. House Bill 1373, authored by Representative Zack Taylor (R-Seminole), was signed into law on May 14, 2019.¹⁵³ HB 1373 scaled back restrictions that made it difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals convicted of nonviolent offenses to obtain occupational licenses.
- In 2021, the legislature advanced two reentry measures. House Bill 1679, known as the Sarah Stitt Act, passed unanimously in both chambers. Signed into law by Governor Stitt on April 20, 2021, HB 1679 requires the Oklahoma DOC to provide individuals nearing release with state-issued identification cards, Social Security cards, certified birth certificates, vocational training records, and work records from incarceration, documents critical for securing employment and housing upon reentry.¹⁵⁴
- House Bill 1795 was signed into law on May 21, 2021, and became effective November 1, 2021.¹⁵⁵ HB 1795 modified driver's license revocation provisions, preventing license suspension solely for failure to pay court fines and fees when a person has committed a non-vehicular offense.

Court Fines and Fees Reform

- Also in 2019, Senate Bill 694 was approved by the governor and redirected fines and fees collected from defendants to a single general revolving fund for the state.¹⁵⁶ Money from the revolving fund and additional appropriated dollars would be distributed back to district courts and district attorneys, greatly reducing the financial incentive for district attorneys to collect fines and fees in order to fund their offices.
- More recently, House Bill 1460 was signed into law on May 28, 2025. HB 1460 eliminated six fees across Oklahoma's criminal justice system and expanded judicial discretion to waive monthly supervision fees.
- House Bill 1462, signed into law on June 2, 2025, prioritizes the payment of victim restitution in the financial obligation hierarchy. HB 1462 requires county clerks to certify that restitution payments to victims have been paid before accepting payments toward fines and fees.¹⁵⁷
- In 2026, the legislature enacted House Bill 4237, allowing courts to assess a defendant's ability to pay fines and fees at the sentencing hearing and establishing standards for that determination.¹⁵⁸
- In contrast to reining in the use of financial penalties and fees that have been shown to hinder progress for returning individuals, the legislature, in 2026, passed House Bill 3262, which raises

the sheriff's service fee from \$50 to \$100 in adult cases and from \$20 to \$100 in juvenile cases. Governor Stitt allowed the bill to become law without his signature.¹⁵⁹

Educational Achievement and Earned Credits

- Oklahoma has also pursued efforts to improve education and employment access by incentivizing participation and completion of programs. Senate Bill 690 allows individuals who attain their GED while in pretrial detention to earn good time credits, reductions in sentence length for behavior, program participation, and educational achievement, equivalent to those earned after conviction.¹⁶⁰
- In 2026, the legislature passed Senate Bill 1213, which expands eligibility for earned time credits that reduce sentence length for good behavior, and specifies that individuals held in county jails while awaiting transfer to prison custody are eligible to begin accruing these credits.¹⁶¹

Medical Parole Expansion

- In an effort to address the growing number of medically frail incarcerated people, the legislature passed Senate Bill 320 that expanded medical parole eligibility by defining two categories of inmates eligible for compassionate release: those deemed medically frail (unable to perform two or more activities of daily living independently) and those deemed medically vulnerable (with one or more medical conditions making them more susceptible to serious illness or death while incarcerated).¹⁶²

Record Clearing and Automatic Expungement

- In 2022, Oklahoma became the sixth state in the nation to pass clean slate legislation. House Bill 3316 was signed into law on May 2, 2022.¹⁶³ HB 3316 established a process for automatic expungement of certain criminal records without requiring individuals to petition courts, making eleven categories of misdemeanors and non-conviction records eligible for automatic sealing. The law estimated that over 354,000 Oklahomans would eventually benefit from automatic expungement.
- To address flaws that delayed implementation of the process, the 2026 legislature amended the Clean Slate Act, directing the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation to launch a free online expungement request portal by November 1, 2026, and to have a fully automatic expungement system operational by November 1, 2027, with all eligible records cleared by December 31, 2029.

Local and Community-Based Diversion Initiatives

Oklahoma County Diversion Hub

- In addition to statewide legislation affecting the criminal justice system, local leaders advanced efforts to improve and expand the services that provide support and stability to returning individuals. After two years as a pilot program, the Oklahoma County Diversion Hub was established in 2020. The Diversion Hub functions as a multi-agency network providing case

management, court navigation assistance, and access to emergency resources for individuals involved or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system.¹⁶⁴ The organization has expanded its services beyond Oklahoma County to serve Norman and Cleveland County.

- Originally funded by the Arnall Foundation, an Oklahoma City philanthropy, the Diversion Hub was added to the list of projects included in a taxpayer-funded public improvement program. In 2019, Oklahoma City voters approved MAPS 4 (Metropolitan Area Projects 4) that raised \$1.1 billion for public projects included on the list. Diversion Hub was allocated \$18.9 million from MAPS 4 for construction of a new facility, which opened in May 2026.¹⁶⁵

Oklahoma City Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program

- Launched publicly in May 2025, the Mobile Integrated Healthcare program (MIH) is an alternative response to 911 calls involving behavioral health and mental health crises.¹⁶⁶ Operated by the Oklahoma City Fire Department, MIH dispatches teams consisting of clinicians, paramedics, and peer recovery support specialists rather than traditional law enforcement responses.
- MIH built on earlier initiatives: the Community Advocacy Program (established 2019) and the Overdose Response Team (established 2023). In response to demonstrated need, MIH received a \$572,697 grant from the Opioid Abatement Board (distributed over three years) to hire additional peer recovery support specialists and supply equipment and educational materials for opioid addiction treatment.¹⁶⁷

Still She Rises

- Two Tulsa organizations supported by the George Kaiser Family Foundation complement this model with legal and wraparound services. Still She Rises, established in 2017, is a holistic public defense law firm serving mothers in north Tulsa, pairing legal representation in criminal, civil, and juvenile matters with case management and social support aimed at keeping families intact.¹⁶⁸

JusticeLink

- JusticeLink, launched in October 2022 through a partnership between the George Kaiser Family Foundation, ProsperOK, and Third Sector Capital Partners, co-locates multiple community organizations including Family & Children's Services, Housing Solutions, and the Center for Employment Opportunities to connect individuals navigating the Tulsa County criminal legal system with housing, benefits enrollment, transportation, and behavioral health services.¹⁶⁹

Analysis of Key Policies

This next section focuses on four of the policies enacted as a result of the 2017 JRI effort. Under each policy is an examination of why the policy was pursued, how Oklahoma enacted it in statute or administratively, whether it has been updated in the last decade, and what impact it has had.

1. BURGLARY SENTENCING

As part of the JRI effort, the Oklahoma legislature passed Senate Bill 786, which eliminated the mandatory minimum for second-degree burglary and narrowed its scope to breaking and entering dwelling houses or commercial structures. The bill simultaneously created a new third-degree burglary offense for breaking and entering a vehicle, truck, trailer, or vessel, carrying a sentence of zero to five years with no mandatory minimum. Prior to the passage of SB 786, Oklahoma law categorized both residential and vehicle break-ins as second-degree burglary, carrying a mandatory minimum sentence of two years and a maximum of seven years in prison. This policy was pursued in response to the Task Force finding that second-degree burglary was among the 10 most common offenses driving prison admissions for both men and women in Oklahoma. The Task Force found that the average sentence for second-degree burglary exceeded five years.¹⁷⁰ Oklahoma's burglary statutes were also out of step with those of neighboring states; in Texas, for example, burglary of a vehicle or a vending machine is a misdemeanor punishable by no more than a year in county jail.¹⁷¹

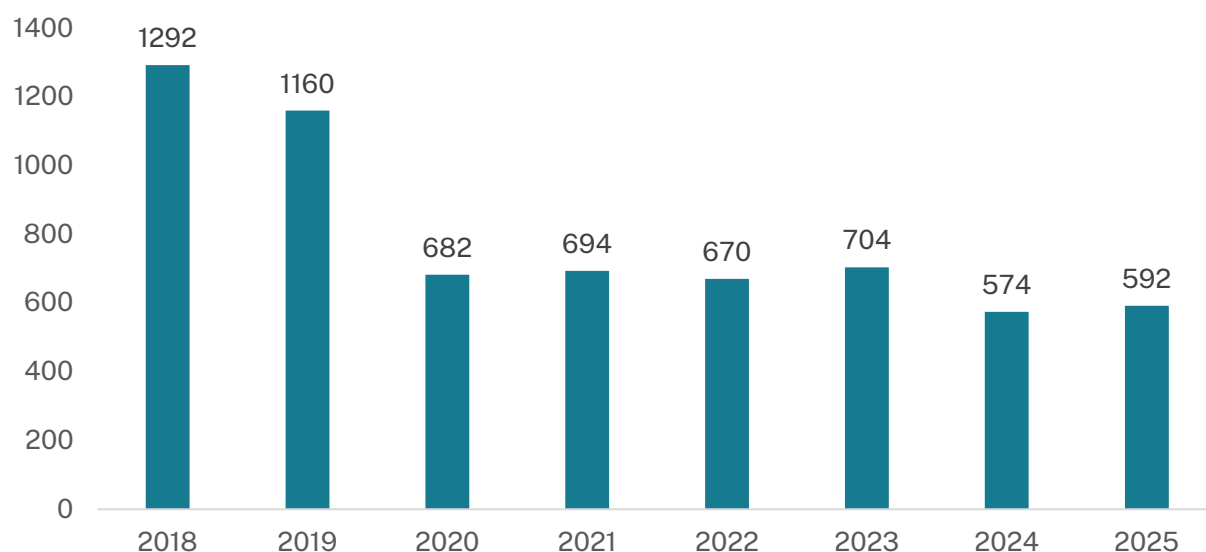
Subsequent legislative changes have expanded the third-degree burglary statute. In November 2022, the Legislature broadened the offense to include not only breaking and entering a vehicle, truck, trailer, or vessel, but also climbing under or using jack stands or other devices to raise a vehicle with the intent to steal property attached to the vehicle.¹⁷² In 2026, the penalty provisions were amended to expressly authorize a fine of up to \$5,000, either separately or in combination with a prison sentence.¹⁷³

Most recently, as part of the Oklahoma Sentencing Modernization Act of 2024 (HB 1792), effective January 1, 2026, second- and third-degree burglary were reclassified to Class C1 and D1 crimes, respectively.^{174, 175} These sentencing changes increased maximum prison sentences for both burglary classifications and instituted graduated increases based on a defendant's criminal history.¹⁷⁶

Outcome of the Policy

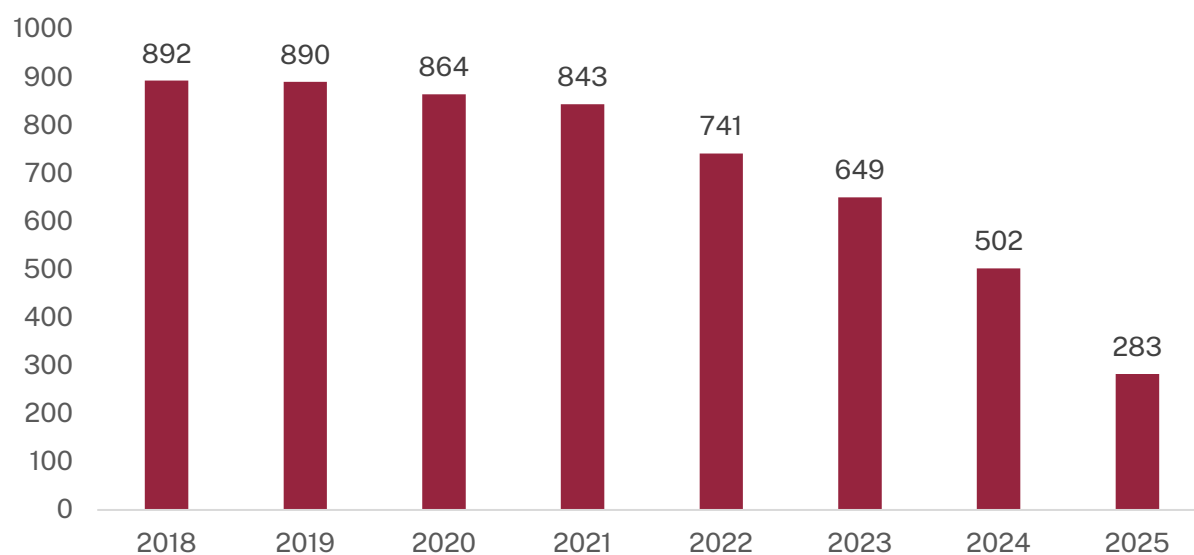
Since the implementation of Senate Bill 786, Oklahoma has experienced substantial declines in the use of incarceration associated with burglary offenses. Between 2018 and 2025, prison admissions for all burglary offenses fell 44 percent, decreasing from 1,472 admissions to 820 admissions.¹⁷⁷ Admissions for second-degree burglary alone declined by more than half, from 1,292 individuals to 592, as shown in **Figure 7**.¹⁷⁸

Figure 7. Prison Admissions for Second Degree Burglary, 2018-2025



Over the same period, Oklahoma has experienced a decline in burglary crime rates. The burglary rate was 44 percent lower in 2024 than it was in 2015.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, the average time served for individuals whose most serious offense was burglary of any degree fell 68 percent, from 892 days to 283 days, as shown in **Figure 8**.¹⁸⁰

Figure 8. Average Days Incarcerated for Burglary, 2018-2025



These trends suggest that the 2018 reclassification of vehicle break-ins into a lower-level burglary offense, combined with subsequent sentencing reforms, resulted in fewer prison admissions and shorter periods of incarceration for burglary-related offenses.

2. TIERED PENALTIES FOR PROPERTY OFFENSES

Prior to 2018, many felony property offenses in Oklahoma carried a single, flat sentencing range regardless of the value of property involved; for example, embezzlement of \$1,001 and embezzlement of \$100,000 were punishable by the same range of zero to five years in prison.¹⁸¹ House Bill 2281, effective November 1, 2018, restructured penalties for more than a dozen property offenses by tying sentence length to the value of property at issue, creating graduated tiers that impose more severe penalties for higher-value offenses.¹⁸² HB 2281 introduced distinct sentencing ranges across three value bands—\$1,000–\$2,500, \$2,500–\$15,000, and \$15,000 and above—for several offenses, including embezzlement, unlawful delivery of goods, grand larceny, and false or bogus checks. The bill also aligned penalties for low-level property offenses with the \$1,000 felony threshold established by the legislature in 2016.¹⁸³

These changes were made in response to substantial growth in incarceration for property offenses and research that suggests for many nonviolent, lower-level offenders, incarceration may increase the likelihood of future criminal behavior, while longer prison stays provide little additional public safety benefit. More specifically, between 2011 and 2015, the number of individuals convicted of property offenses and admitted to prison increased 29 percent, including a 37 percent rise in those sentenced directly to prison for these crimes. During the same period, average sentence lengths for property offenses grew by 11 percent, reaching an average of 68 months. In Oklahoma, individuals incarcerated for property offenses were disproportionately female and were most often convicted of "paper crimes," such as fraud, forgery, and writing bad checks.¹⁸⁴

Since the passage of HB 2281, the Oklahoma Sentencing Modernization Act, Oklahoma House Bill 1792 (2024), has reorganized felony offenses into classes based on offense severity. Most of the property felonies originally addressed in HB 2281 were placed into Class D3, D1, or C2 felonies, with C2 representing the most serious property offenses and D3 being the least serious.

While HB 1792, the Sentencing Modernization Act, retained the property value thresholds used to determine offense class, it changed sentencing in two ways. First, it established time-served requirements for each class requiring individuals to serve a percentage of their sentence before becoming eligible for release (D3 requires 10%, D1 and C2 require 20%). Second, it standardized increased penalties for repeat offenders by adding mandatory minimum sentence requirements and increased maximum sentence lengths.

For example, a first-time offender for Unlawful Delivery of Goods for property valued between \$1,000 and \$2,500, now classified as a D3 felony, remains subject to a maximum sentence of two years and/or a \$1,000 fine. However, the person must serve at least 10 percent of the sentence imposed. A person with one or two prior Class C or Class D criminal offenses faces a sentence range of one to four years and must also serve at least 10 percent of the sentence. In addition, someone with three prior Class C or

Class D criminal offenses, or one or more Class Y, A, or B felony convictions, faces a sentence range of one to ten years and must serve at least 20 percent of the sentence.^{185, 186}

Outcome of the Policy

Prison admissions for property offenses in Oklahoma declined substantially following the implementation of HB 2281 and related criminal justice reforms. In 2018, 2,434 individuals were admitted to prison with a property offense as their most serious conviction; by 2025, admissions had fallen to 1,254—a 48 percent decrease, compared to a 39 percent decline in overall prison admissions during the same period.¹⁸⁷ While admissions decreased, the average length of stay for individuals increased modestly, rising from 696 days in 2018 to 734 days in 2025 (6%).¹⁸⁸ By comparison, the average length of stay for all prison releases statewide increased 34 percent over the same period. Among major offense categories, property offenses experienced one of the smallest increases in length of stay, other than public order and "other" offenses.¹⁸⁹

Stakeholders noted that the public conversation in recent years has shifted to focus on Organized Retail Theft. In response to lobbying by certain members of the retail community, the legislature passed House Bill 1592.¹⁹⁰ Governor Stitt vetoed the bill; however, the legislature subsequently overrode the veto. HB 1592 creates a felony offense of organized retail crime, applicable when two or more persons engage in theft or retail theft coordinated through specific indicators, such as possession of theft tools, organized planning, property intended for resale, or use of nonpublic exits. Penalties include up to five years in prison for theft under \$15,000 and up to eight years for theft of \$15,000 or more.^{191, 192}

3. ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION: DEFERRED JUDGMENT

Another policy enacted as part of the JRI effort was Senate Bill 689, effective November 1, 2018, which amended § 22-991c to allow individuals who had previously received a deferred judgment to receive a subsequent deferred judgment, expanding access to this alternative to incarceration.¹⁹³ The reform responded to Task Force findings that Oklahoma relied far more heavily on incarceration relative to community supervision than other states, that incarceration cost roughly 13 times more than probation or parole supervision, and that existing alternatives to incarceration—including deferred sentencing—carried eligibility restrictions that limited participation even where an individual was an appropriate candidate.¹⁹⁴ Under a deferred judgment, the court withholds a finding of guilt and places the individual on supervised probation; successful completion results in dismissal of the charge and eligibility for expungement.¹⁹⁵ The bill also reduced the maximum deferral period from 10 years to seven, and capped community supervision at 18 months rather than two years, limiting the duration of court oversight for those who complete the process.¹⁹⁶ Prior to the passage of SB 689, Oklahoma law prohibited the use of deferred judgment procedures for anyone who had previously received a conviction, effectively limiting this community supervision alternative to first-time offenders.¹⁹⁷

Outcome of the Policy

Interviewees noted that judges and prosecutors are more willing to forgo mandatory minimums and pursue deferred prosecution when a credible alternative program exists and trust has been built with

the court over time, suggesting that program development and relationship-building, not the statutory change alone, contributed to greater access. Nearly all interviewees noted that access to alternative programming varied dramatically based on location, and that rural counties lacked the mental health and substance use treatment services needed to properly serve the community at large, as well as those necessary to stand up alternative-to-incarceration programs.

Stakeholders noted several barriers for rural counties over the last decade. One factor is that these types of programs in Oklahoma often start as pilots funded by private or philanthropic support. If they become permanent, they are often exclusive to the Oklahoma City or Tulsa region, with only a very small number adopted by the state and expanded beyond the major metropolitan areas. State Question 781 was intended to help fix this problem by using the prison cost savings generated by fewer low-level offenses entering the system and directing them into a fund that counties could draw on to support mental health and substance abuse treatment programs.¹⁹⁸

However, stakeholders noted what has been reported for many years: that this funding has been slow to materialize and the delays frustrated many well-intentioned efforts to improve alternative responses to incarceration and wraparound support services. Years after voters approved SQ 781, the Legislature had sent no money directly to counties and instead redirected comparable funding to the state mental health department, which lawmakers described as following the "spirit" of SQ 781 despite advocates noting this bypassed the law's core intent of putting decisions in local hands.¹⁹⁹ Meanwhile, county jails and sheriffs absorbed the fallout: felony filings dropped while misdemeanor filings rose sharply after SQ 780 took effect, and local law enforcement leaders expressed increasing frustration as more people were diverted or charged at the misdemeanor level without the treatment infrastructure the ballot measure had promised.²⁰⁰

In 2023, the state finally took steps to address this gap. Nearly seven years after the law's passage, legislators restructured the County Community Safety Investment Fund so that counties are now able to apply for funding through an annual request-for-proposals process to develop mental health and substance abuse treatment, pretrial diversion, employment, education, or housing programs.²⁰¹ The legislature has since allocated the same \$12.5 million annually for 2024 through 2026.²⁰²

As this money becomes more available, there are examples of programs taking aim at diverting people from incarceration and growing their community's apparatus of mental health and substance use treatment providers that the court system can work with. Women in Recovery (WIR) is an example of philanthropy and state dollars coming together to fill a critical need in the justice system, show success, and then expand the program's reach.^{203,204} George Kaiser Family Foundation launched WIR in 2009, and the program first served women in Tulsa. The state has since invested public dollars in the program through the Department of Human Services and grew its reach to Creek, Osage, Pawnee, Rogers, Wagoner, and Washington counties in 2024.²⁰⁵ It is worth noting that this was through one-time ARPA funding, and sustainable funding may be in jeopardy. Several interviewees noted that rural counties need state and local stakeholders in Tulsa and Oklahoma City to invest in programs and people outside the major metropolitan areas in a sustained way for statewide change to take hold.

As many interviewees noted, this is as much about challenging the cultural approach to punishment and treatment in Oklahoma's criminal justice system as it is about available services. One interviewee described training newer prosecutors on social determinants of health and poverty as a core function of her organization's work, with the goal of building empathy before attorneys move into felony caseloads.

Interviewees also noted the constant battle over the mandatory versus voluntary nature of programs, and how SQ 780 frustrated many stakeholders. Program providers, district attorneys, and judges all noted in conversation that when SQ 780 reclassified certain drug possession offenses to misdemeanors, it stripped the incentive that made defendants complete drug court treatment programs rather than take a lesser plea. Proponents of voluntary models note that participants are more motivated when they choose to participate rather than being forced by the courts; those frustrated with changes under SQ 780 felt the changes undercut programs they credited with success among high-risk participants for whom other interventions had failed and for whom no other programs were available without SQ 781 funding flowing from the state.

4. PAROLE ELIGIBILITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE PAROLE

Before 2018, all individuals in DOC custody seeking parole (regardless of offense type) were required to go before the Pardon and Parole Board for a hearing, and nonviolent offenders became eligible for parole consideration only after serving one-third of their sentence. House Bill 2286, effective November 1, 2018, made two significant changes to this process. First, it moved parole eligibility for nonviolent, non-life sentence offenders from one-third of the sentence served to one-fourth, allowing earlier access to parole consideration. Second, it established a streamlined release mechanism called administrative parole under which people who meet the statutory requirements are released without a full Pardon and Parole Board hearing. To be eligible, a person could not be serving a sentence of life in prison or for a violent crime, and they had to be in compliance with the DOC case plan, have a clean disciplinary record for a specified length of time, and there had to be no victim objections.

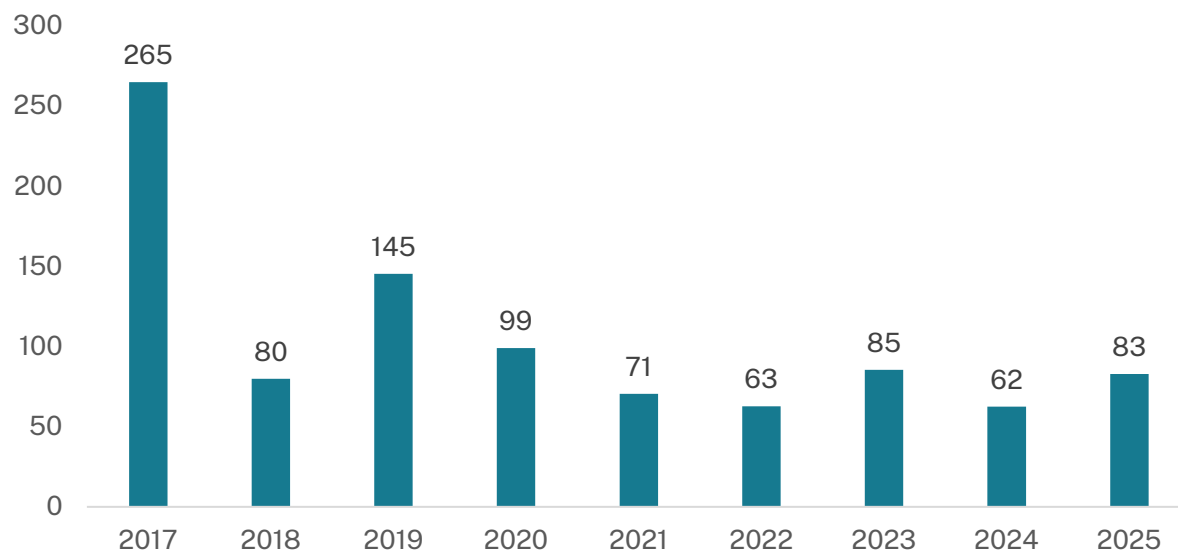
These changes to the parole process were made to streamline release for eligible, compliant, nonviolent offenders, encourage program participation, increase post-release supervision, and use correctional resources more efficiently. Oklahoma was incarcerating people more frequently than using community supervision compared to other states. In 2015, more than half (54%) of the state's felony offenders were in prison, compared to 31 percent nationally, while 46 percent were on probation or parole, versus 69 percent nationally. These numbers are noteworthy, given that the annual cost of incarceration in Oklahoma was 13 times more expensive than probation or parole supervision in 2015. In 2015, less than six percent of individuals released from prison were released on parole, a decline from 12 percent in 2011. Additionally, drug and property offenders served an average of nine months beyond their parole eligibility dates. The Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force concluded that low parole approval rates and unmet treatment requirements preventing parole release, combined with limited confidence in the hearing process, discouraged many incarcerated individuals from pursuing parole and led them to waive hearings in favor of discharging their sentences without community supervision.²⁰⁶

Since 2018, Oklahoma has not changed the parole eligibility provisions for individuals who may be considered for parole after serving one-fourth of their sentence. The only substantive change to administrative parole was a 2022 expansion allowing individuals within six months of their discharge date to be granted administrative parole, unless a victim or district attorney speaking on the victim's behalf objects.²⁰⁷

Outcome of the Policy

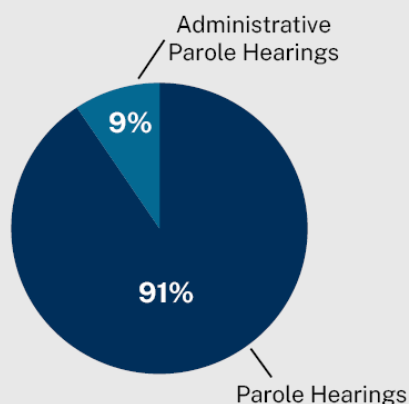
The implementation of these reforms appears to have meaningfully reduced the amount of time individuals spend incarcerated after becoming eligible for parole. For individuals released from prison in 2017, the average time between the parole eligibility date and actual release was 265 days.²⁰⁸ As shown in **Figure 9**, by 2025, that average had declined to 83 days, with the lowest average observed during the period occurring in 2024 at 62 days.²⁰⁹ These reductions suggest that the combination of earlier parole eligibility and the creation of the administrative parole process has accelerated releases.

Figure 9. Average Number of Days Between Parole Eligibility Date and Actual Release Date, 2017-2025



Between January 2024 and July 2026, the Pardon and Parole Board held an average of 468 parole hearings every month; an average of 44 of those were administrative parole hearings (about nine percent of hearings every month).²¹⁰ The grant rates for administrative parole tend to be high—an average of 81 percent between July 2024 and April 2026, with the lowest monthly grant rate of 73 percent (and grant rates reaching 89 percent in some months).²¹¹

The Board of Pardons and Parole holds an average of **468** hearings each month, with **44** of those being administrative parole hearings.



Administrative parole hearings have an **average grant rate** of

81%



Stakeholder interviews suggest that, despite the creation and initial impact of administrative parole, a number of barriers continue to limit its use. Stakeholders identified operational challenges within DOC, particularly shortages of substance use treatment programming that impact individuals' compliance with their case plan, which often requires programming such as substance abuse treatment. Long waiting lists for treatment, combined with ongoing difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified staff, were cited as barriers to program completion. It should be noted that individuals are not denied administrative parole if they have not completed required programming when it is unavailable, either due to lack of offerings at their facility or lengthy waitlists.

Interviewees also questioned whether parole reforms have achieved their intended impact on sentencing and release practices. One stakeholder reported that some judges may have responded to parole reforms by imposing longer sentences, operating under the assumption that individuals would ultimately serve only a portion of their sentence before release. Others described Oklahoma's parole system as particularly restrictive, noting that the Pardon and Parole Board is often perceived as difficult to obtain release through and that administrative parole is used relatively infrequently. Oklahoma law requires Pardon and Parole Board members to hold at least a bachelor's degree and have a minimum of five years of experience in criminal justice, parole, probation, corrections, criminal law, law enforcement, mental health services, substance abuse services, or social work. The statute further requires that at least two of the board's five members have five years of training or experience in mental health services, substance abuse disorders, or social work.²¹² Stakeholders believe that ensuring the composition of the board is consistent with the intent of the statute, by including representation from mental health, substance abuse disorders, or social work backgrounds, can help ensure the board brings a broad range of expertise to its work. Additionally, the parole process has grown more complex; a full-time board may be better positioned to provide the time and attention these decisions require. Former board members have noted the demands of the position can exceed what is feasible on a part-time basis.

A recurring theme across interviews was the impact of district attorney opposition on administrative parole approvals. Under the law, an individual may not be released through administrative parole if a victim, as defined in statute, or the district attorney acting on behalf of a victim, submits an objection. Stakeholders characterized Oklahoma as having a strong and influential district attorney community and reported high rates of objections to administrative parole candidates from district attorney offices themselves. According to one interviewee, the monthly administrative parole caseload has continued to decline over the past several years, in large part because of increased objections to administrative parole.

Interviews also revealed that interpretation of the statute differs when it comes to eligibility for individuals convicted of violent offenses. The Board of Pardons and Parole deems anyone ever convicted of a violent offense ineligible for administrative parole (as defined under Section 13.1 of Title 21). Other stakeholders interpret the statute to mean just those currently serving time for violent offenses and that criminal history should not be considered in the eligibility determination. Collectively, these observations suggest that while administrative parole provides a mechanism for expedited release, its practical impact may be constrained by program capacity, prosecutorial objections, and other implementation challenges.

Despite these challenges, Oklahoma continues to explore policies aimed at increasing release opportunities. Enacted in November 2026, Senate Bill 1213 expands opportunities for eligible incarcerated individuals to earn sentence-reduction credits more quickly by removing the minimum incarceration periods previously required to reach higher class levels. Prior to the bill, individuals generally entered DOC custody at Class Level 2 and were required to remain incarcerated for at least three months before becoming eligible for Class Level 3 and at least eight months before becoming eligible for Class Level 4, the highest-class level. SB 1213 eliminates those waiting-period requirements, allowing eligible individuals to be assigned to higher class levels sooner based on their conduct and participation rather than simply time served. This change is significant because Class Level 4 individuals can earn up to 44 sentence credits per month—twice the 22 credits available to those at Class Level 2—and may earn higher wages for assigned prison jobs, including up to approximately \$20 per month in some positions.²¹³ By allowing eligible individuals to reach the highest class level more quickly, SB 1213 increases opportunities to earn credits, encourages positive institutional behavior, supports participation in programming and work assignments, and may reduce the amount of time individuals spend incarcerated.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, Oklahoma invested significant legislative, administrative, and community effort in changing how its justice systems work. During that time, its prison population declined 15 percent, its crime rate fell 28 percent, and its imprisonment rate dropped substantially. The policies examined here, such as removing mandatory minimums for burglary offenses, creating a tiered property penalty structure, expanding access to alternatives to incarceration, and enabling earlier parole consideration, were part of that movement for change.

Now, Oklahoma confronts a shifting environment—a new administration taking office, jail and prison populations rising, and unresolved funding gaps. Each policy examined points to opportunities for stakeholders to confront these new challenges, including additional assessment, stronger implementation, or expansion. Oklahoma's data-driven approach to criminal justice policy creation and implementation has worked, and it is a path worth continuing.

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