

States Report Reductions in Recidivism

In many jurisdictions, state and local government officials have intensified their efforts to reduce recidivism. As policymakers are under tremendous pressure to cut spending wherever possible, Republican and Democratic elected officials alike have made the case that improved efforts to reduce reoffense rates among people released from prison would save money and increase public safety. Their position is backed by an extensive and compelling body of research that demonstrates the impact that policies, practices, and programs can have in reducing the likelihood that someone released from prison or jail will reoffend.

The report of the 2010 National Summit on Justice Reinvestment and Public Safety highlighted four principles that the research reflects are critical to any effort to reduce recidivism: focusing resources on individuals most likely to reoffend; investing in research-driven, evidence-based programs; implementing effective community supervision policies and practices; and applying place-based approaches.¹

Many states are now presenting data that indicate declines in statewide recidivism rates for adults released from prison. This brief highlights a cross-section of states with robust, current data that reflect such improvements.² It is not a comprehensive research report, nor is it an evaluation of any state's recidivism efforts, assessing how changes in the recidivism rate in each state correlate to particular changes in policy or practice.

Instead, this brief summarizes recent data provided to the Council of State Governments Justice Center's National Reentry Resource Center by a select group of states that carefully monitor changes in their recidivism rates. For each state highlighted, this brief also reviews strategies that, according to their own qualitative assessments, these states believe have contributed to the decline in their recidivism rates.

Reductions in Statewide Recidivism Rates for 2005 and 2007 Prison Releases

This brief highlights significant statewide recidivism reductions achieved in Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Vermont. For each state, this brief compares three-year post-release recidivism rates for two cohorts: people exiting prison in 2005 and those released in 2007. This data is among the most current available for statewide three-year recidivism rates. Some states saw particularly sharp reductions during this period, such as Kansas, which achieved a 15-percent decline, and Michigan, which saw an 18-percent

	PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN RECIDIVISM RATE* FOR 2005 AND 2007 RELEASES	NUMBER FEWER RETURNED TO PRISON FOR THE 2007 RELEASE GROUP **
Kansas	-15%	289
Michigan	-18%	862
Mississippi	-9%	235
Ohio	-11%	1,278
Oregon	-8%	138
Texas	-11%	1,212
Vermont	-6%	141

*Percentage change in recidivism rate is calculated by dividing the percentage-point change by the initial recidivism rate, which yields the percentage by which the recidivism rate changed. Throughout this brief, percentage figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. To see percentage figures rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent, see Figure 1 in the Appendix.

**This figure is determined by subtracting the number of individuals who returned to prison in the latest data-year from the number that *would have returned* had the state not reduced its recidivism rate. The number is calculated based on a single release cohort, but if the number of people released and recidivism rates were to remain constant, the number would also represent an annualized average. See Figure 2 in the Appendix for further illustration.

1. Marshall Clement, Matthew Schwarzfeld, and Michael Thompson, *The National Summit on Justice Reinvestment and Public Safety: Addressing Recidivism, Crime, and Corrections Spending* (New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011).

2. Results from a national survey on recidivism may be found in the 2011 report *State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America's Prisons*, in which the Pew Center on the States compares the three-year recidivism rates for 1999 and 2004 prison releases. The report shows that, in addition to the states highlighted in this brief, many other states have also achieved recidivism reductions.

drop. When measuring recidivism changes over a longer period of time, the reductions for some states are even more dramatic: Ohio's recidivism rate declined by 21 percent between 2003 and 2008, while Texas saw a drop of 22 percent between 2000 and 2007.

The table on the previous page indicates reductions in states' recidivism rates for 2005 and 2007 prison releases. These states use a standard tracking period of three years after release from incarceration, so the recidivism rate for 2005 releases was calculated using data from 2005 through 2008, while the rate for 2007 releases was calculated using data from 2007 through 2010.

The table also shows how many fewer people released from prison in 2007 returned to prison within three years because of the reduced recidivism rate in each state. These numbers do not necessarily correspond to a reduction in the state's prison population, as some states may have had an overall population increase or decrease due to other factors. These numbers do demonstrate, however, that even for states that experienced growth in their prison populations during these periods, the number of people returning to prison *would have been even higher* if the state had not reduced its recidivism rate.

State-Specific Recidivism Rate Reductions and Strategies

Kansas³

Three-year recidivism rate for 2005 prison releases	Three-year recidivism rate for 2007 prison releases	Decline in recidivism rate
39 percent	33 percent	15 percent

- In 2004, the Kansas Legislature created the Kansas Criminal Justice Recodification, Rehabilitation and Restoration Committee, which developed a comprehensive strategy for reducing recidivism. Among other initiatives, the strategy included establishing the Kansas Reentry Policy Council and implementing two pilot programs targeting parolees at high risk of reoffending.
- Community supervision officials provided intensive training to parole officers and strengthened supervision

strategies that connect individuals in need of treatment and services to community-based resources.

- State officials invested in reentry initiatives at the county level and partnered with local communities that were experiencing the highest rates of return from prison to connect released individuals more effectively to housing and workforce development services.
- In 2007, legislation was passed to create a performance-based grant program for community corrections agencies to design local strategies to reduce revocations; it also established a 60-day earned time credit for successful completion of educational, vocational, and treatment programs.
- Strong partnerships with state and national government agencies and nonprofit organizations have provided critical financial support for efforts to reduce recidivism, as well as practical technical assistance, including valuable data analyses and guidance on the implementation of evidence-based practices.

“One of my wardens constantly asks his staff, right down to the line staff, ‘What can we do to reduce recidivism?’ This gets them thinking that reentry is an important part of what they do...that they can do something to improve the likelihood that the people who leave their custody are successful when they return home.”

Ray Roberts, Secretary of Kansas Department of Corrections

3. The Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC), through the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA), defines recidivism as “the number of inmates released from the DOC during a given calendar year who returned to a Kansas prison within 36 months after release, divided by the number of inmates released during that calendar year.” Neither the KDOC nor ASCA includes rearrests in recidivism calculations. Recidivism-related information is gathered

by analyzing data that is tracked for each released individual. Kansas measures recidivism based at three junctures after release—at 12 months, 24 months, and 36 months. Separate rates are calculated for those persons returning to KDOC with new sentences and those returning with no new sentences. Kansas calculates its recidivism rate based on the total number of releases.

Michigan⁴

Three-year recidivism rate for 2005 prison releases	Three-year recidivism rate for 2007 prison releases	Decline in recidivism rate
40 percent	33 percent	18 percent

- In 2003, the state launched Michigan Prisoner Reentry (formerly known as the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative), a program that targets individuals at greatest risk for failure on parole and uses standardized risk and needs assessments to inform the services they are provided in order to reduce their risk of reoffending.
- The Michigan Department of Corrections has found that participants in the program are 38 percent less likely to return to prison as compared to baseline expectations.⁵
- Under the Prisoner Reentry program, corrections officials allocated \$50 million annually to provide community-based housing for parolees, to subsidize employers who hire them, and to maintain funding for community-based programming that provides transition support services. This funding was derived in part from the savings generated by the closing of 21 correctional facilities and minimum-security camps.
- Over a longer period, Michigan's decline in recidivism is even more significant, with a 28-percent reduction in returns to prison between the 2000 and 2008 release cohorts.⁶

Mississippi⁷

Three-year recidivism rate for 2005 prison releases	Three-year recidivism rate for 2007 prison releases	Decline in recidivism rate
31 percent	28 percent	9 percent

- Between 1999 and 2004, state policymakers revamped the state's use of earned time credits and supervision strategies. Expanding the use of supervision options for people at low risk for reoffending has helped to alleviate system overcrowding, reserving critical resources for high-risk or violent offenders.
- Corrections officials received expert technical assistance from a national government organization on the use of evidence-based practices and validated risk assessment tools to help ensure that individuals with the most acute needs were targeted for treatment and services.
- Policymakers are optimistic about continued improvements in recidivism rates, in part due to legislation enacted in 2009 that expanded the use of house arrest and allowed courts to consider the use of intensive community supervision for individuals who violate probation rather than returning them to prison.
- Mississippi's inmate population decreased by more than 1,300 from 2008 to 2010—the most significant decline in prison population that the state has ever seen. Despite recent signs of growth in the prison population, this growth is contained by the state's efforts to improve its recidivism rate.

“ We know that the majority of those incarcerated will be rejoining society and their successful reentry is as critical to public safety as a sentence served... Effective prisoner reentry is an important component of smart justice. Michigan's prisoner reentry program has been a major contributor to lower recidivism rates for the state.”

Governor Rick Snyder (R, MI)

4. The Michigan Department of Corrections defines recidivism as a return to prison within three years of release for either a new prison sentence or for a technical violation of parole conditions. Recidivism analysis is based on follow-up data for three years after each individual's release, determining whether the offender returned to prison as a Parole Violator Technical (PVT), Parole Violator New Sentence during the parole term (PVNS), or with a new prison sentence after the expiration of the parole term. Michigan calculates its recidivism rate based on the total number of releases on parole to Michigan counties (i.e., excluding paroles to other states or paroles to other jurisdictions' custody).

5. Michigan Department of Corrections officials report that the agency conducted an analysis of multiple release-year cohorts that participated in the in-reach phase of the program. This internal analysis examined outcomes against baseline expectations for the 1998

release-year cohort, which was the year before the Michigan Prisoner Reentry program began.

6. See Figure 1 of the Appendix.

7. Mississippi defines recidivism as a return to inmate status. The state calculates recidivism by tracking the return to inmate status for individuals who are placed on parole, Earned Release Supervision, house arrest, or probation, or who are released unconditionally from inmate status every calendar year. The rate does not distinguish between individuals on community supervision who are returned to inmate status for technical violations of the terms of their release or those who return to inmate status for committing a new offense. Mississippi calculates its recidivism rates based on the total number of releases.

Ohio⁸

Three-year recidivism rate for 2005 prison releases	Three-year recidivism rate for 2007 prison releases	Decline in recidivism rate
38 percent	34 percent	11 percent

- The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) worked closely with community corrections, drawing on evaluation outcomes from a series of studies conducted by the University of Cincinnati of the state's community corrections programs. These studies helped to inform the implementation of evidence-based practices and the development of training programs for probation and parole officers in areas such as conducting assessments and effective interventions, planning case supervision, and improving communication skills.
- Over four years, the DRC anticipates investing \$20 million to improve felony probation supervision and provide incentive funding for community corrections agencies that successfully reduce recidivism.
- State officials anticipate that Ohio's House Bill 86, passed in 2011, will be a key factor in reducing recidivism. The landmark legislation included multiple strategies for reducing crime and recidivism, including mandating the consistent use of a risk assessment tool across various phases of the criminal justice system, ensuring that individuals assessed as high risk are placed under supervision upon release from prison, and improving reentry services for individuals returning from incarceration.
- In 2011, the state reported a recidivism rate of 31.2 percent for 2008 releases—the lowest rate since 1991. Compared with the recidivism rate for 2003 releases, this represents a 21-percent reduction in recidivism.⁹

Oregon¹⁰

Three-year recidivism rate for 2005 prison releases	Three-year recidivism rate for 2007 prison releases	Decline in recidivism rate
30 percent	27 percent	8 percent

- In 2003, the state enacted legislation requiring that prevention, treatment, and intervention programs intended to reduce future criminal behavior must be evidence based.
- The state provides every person released from prison with an individualized reentry plan that is informed by criminogenic risk assessments.
- In-prison treatment programs and other services are targeted primarily to medium- and high-risk individuals, and the counseling model has been adjusted to give counselors smaller caseloads of medium- and high-risk individuals who benefit from the additional attention and resources.
- Over a longer period, Oregon's recidivism rate fell from 31.1 percent for 2003 releases to 27.7 percent for 2008 releases—a decline of 11 percent.¹¹

8. Ohio defines recidivism as the individual's first return to prison within the specified follow-up period. The state calculates recidivism based on returns to incarceration for a new crime, prison sanction, or technical violation of the conditions of parole supervision. Although an individual may reoffend more than once in a given year, only the first incidence of reoffense is reflected in the recidivism calculation for that year. Ohio calculates its recidivism rates based on the total number of releases.

9. See Figure 1 of the Appendix.

10. Oregon defines recidivism for individuals on parole as the total percentage of a release cohort convicted of a felony within the specified follow-up period, including individuals who are convicted of a new felony but are not reincarcerated. Technical violations are not counted

in the recidivism rate. Recidivism for individuals on probation is defined as the total percentage of an admission cohort convicted of a felony within the specified follow-up period. The state calculates its recidivism rate by tracking release and admission cohorts within a specified period of time after the start of parole or probation. Release cohorts include those who were released to parole supervision or were sentenced to serve their first felony probation sentence. Release cohorts exclude individuals released following a return to incarceration for a revocation. Although an individual may be sentenced more than once to probation supervision, each new probation sentence is counted separately. Oregon calculates its recidivism rates based on the total number of releases.

11. See Figure 1 of the Appendix.

Texas¹²

Three-year recidivism rate for 2005 prison releases	Three-year recidivism rate for 2007 prison releases	Decline in recidivism rate
27 percent	24 percent	11 percent

- In 2007, the Texas Legislature significantly increased funding to expand the capacity of existing treatment programs and alternatives to incarceration, including transitional housing for parolees, in-prison treatment for substance abuse, and outpatient substance abuse treatment for people under probation supervision.

- Policymakers supported the implementation of a system of graduated sanctions for parolees, allowing for the diversion of technical violators of parole to an Intermediate Sanction Facility rather than returning them to prison.
- Over a longer period, recidivism rates in Texas have improved from 31.2 percent for 2000 releases to 24.3 percent for 2007 releases—a decline of 22 percent.¹³

Comparing Recidivism Rates

This brief focuses on comparing the change in an individual state's recidivism rate from one period to another, as opposed to comparing that rate to another state's recidivism rate, or to the rate of recidivism nationally.¹⁴ There are several reasons for this focus: First, each state determines its own definition of recidivism and its own methodology for calculating recidivism. For example, some state measurements of recidivism account only for reincarceration, while others include reconvictions that do not result in a prison or jail sentence. In Texas, for instance, parolees who are temporarily placed in an Intermediate Sanction Facility as an alternative to incarceration are not counted as recidivists, a distinction that has a significant impact on the state's recidivism rate.

In addition, the composition of each state's prison population is distinct. Incarcerated populations can vary by risk level. For example, a state that sentences to prison large numbers of people who are at low risk of reoffending will logically have a lower recidivism rate than a state that uses its prison facilities for people who are at higher risk of reoffending. The organization of a state's correctional system can also influence its recidivism rates, as is the case for Vermont, which operates a unified correctional system where the state is responsible for prison and jail operations and there is no county jail system.

Because of these and other factors, comparing recidivism rates from state to state or comparing a state recidivism rate with the national average is discouraged. In addition, national recidivism data should be used only to understand larger trends and developments in recidivism, not to determine specific areas for future improvement or investment.

¹² Texas defines recidivism as a return to criminal activity after previous criminal involvement. The state calculates separate recidivism rates based on rearrest and reincarceration for its state prison, state jail, treatment facility, and sanction facility populations. Individuals who violate the conditions of their parole and are sanctioned to an Intermediate Sanction Facility are not counted as recidivists; they receive a modification of their conditions of supervision instead of a revocation to prison. The recidivism rate included in this report is for

reincarceration of releases from state prisons only, and it is calculated by tracking reincarceration within a three-year period after release. Texas calculates the recidivism rate for state prison reincarcerations based on the total number of releases.

¹³ See Figure 1 of the Appendix.

¹⁴ The statistics provided in this report are focused on prison releases only.

Vermont¹⁵

Three-year recidivism rate for 2005 prison releases	Three-year recidivism rate for 2007 prison releases	Decline in recidivism rate
44 percent	41 percent	6 percent

- In 2008, the Vermont General Assembly approved House Bill 859, a comprehensive set of policies aimed at reducing recidivism and corrections costs, which included the expansion of transitional housing options and job training programs, improvements in pilot screening and assessment processes, the reorganization of several prisons, the establishment of a facility for male offenders with substance abuse treatment needs, and the expansion of a diversion program providing intensive community supervision.

- There has been an expansion of substance abuse programming, including increased capacity of community-based substance abuse treatment providers and recovery centers, as well as the addition of a residential treatment option.
- Based on early successes, the state legislature has set a goal of reducing the state's recidivism rate to 30 percent by 2015. Realizing this goal would represent a 27-percent decline in recidivism from Vermont's most recent recidivism rate of 40.9 percent for 2007 releases.
- Over a longer period, Vermont saw an 11-percent improvement in its recidivism rate, from 46.2 percent for 2002 releases to 40.9 percent for 2007 releases.¹⁶

States Everywhere Committed to Reducing Recidivism

In December 2011, the Council of State Governments Justice Center co-organized a national forum on reentry and recidivism that was attended by leaders from all 50 states, in partnership with the Association of State Correctional Administrators, the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Public Welfare Foundation, and the Pew Center on the States. Corrections directors, reentry coordinators, legislators, and judges worked together at this historic event to develop concrete strategies to reduce recidivism in their states. In the weeks after the event, leaders of the state departments of corrections in 43 of 50 states completed a survey, with results reflecting an overwhelming commitment to reducing recidivism, as well as a need for continued assistance in this area.

- Nearly all of these states currently measure recidivism, with 80 percent producing annual recidivism reports that show year-to-year trends.
- More than 80 percent of the 43 states have developed or are currently developing a plan to reduce recidivism.
- Leaders in 29 states have either already set a recidivism-reduction target or anticipate setting a target in the near future.
- A majority of these states have identified specific action items to advance their recidivism-reduction plans.
- Nearly all states identified types of technical assistance that can help them set achievable recidivism-reduction targets and connect with other states to share information about their successes and challenges in reducing recidivism.

¹⁵ The Vermont Department of Corrections recently refined the state's definition of recidivism and tracking methods to provide a more accurate picture of who is reoffending and why. Vermont defines recidivism as a conviction for an offense committed after release from incarceration. The state calculates its recidivism rate by tracking individuals who are released after a sentence of more than one year of

incarceration and who return to prison within three years of release for a conviction of a new offense or a violation of supervision resulting in an incarceration sentence of at least 90 days. Although individuals may reoffend more than once in a given year, only the first incidence of reoffense is reflected in the recidivism calculation for that year.

¹⁶ See Figure 1 of the Appendix.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Statewide Recidivism Rates for 2000 – 2008 Releases¹⁷

To provide a broader view, below is recidivism data gathered for 2000 to 2008 release cohorts.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Kansas	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	38.6%	34.2%	32.9%	33.7%
Michigan	43.5%	41.9%	39.3%	39.1%	40.8%	40.5%	36.4%	33.2%	31.5%
Mississippi	28.6%	29.7%	28.6%	30.3%	n/a	30.6%	29.4%	27.9%	27.7%
Ohio	39.0%	39.0%	38.8%	39.5%	38.9%	38.4%	36.4%	34.0%	31.2%
Oregon	30.9%	30.6%	29.0%	31.1%	31.5%	29.8%	28.2%	27.5%	27.7%
Texas	31.2%	28.2%	28.5%	28.2%	28.0%	27.2%	26.0%	24.3%	n/a
Vermont	45.5%	43.9%	46.2%	42.4%	43.2%	43.7%	45.0%	40.9%	n/a

Figures in **bold** are used elsewhere in this document.

Figure 2: Reductions in Recidivism and Numbers Returned to Prison

	PERCENTAGE-POINT CHANGE BETWEEN 2005 AND 2007 RELEASES	PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN RECIDIVISM RATE FOR 2005 AND 2007 RELEASES*	NUMBER RELEASED IN 2007	NUMBER FEWER RETURNED TO PRISON FOR THE 2007 RELEASE GROUP**
Kansas	-5.7%	-14.8%	5,063	289
Michigan	-7.3%	-18%	11,805	862
Mississippi	-2.7%	-8.8%	8,608	235
Ohio	-4.4%	-11.5%	29,042	1,278
Oregon	-2.3%	-7.7%	5,987	138
Texas	-2.9%	-10.7%	41,808	1,212
Vermont	-2.8%	-6.4%	5,025	141

Figures in **bold** are used elsewhere in this document.

*Percentage change in recidivism rate is calculated by dividing the percentage-point change by the initial recidivism rate, which yields the percentage by which the recidivism rate changed.

**This figure is determined by subtracting the number of individuals who returned to prison in the latest data-year from the number that *would have returned* had the state not reduced its recidivism rate. The number is calculated based on a single release cohort, but if the number of people released and recidivism rates were to remain constant, the number would also represent an annualized average.

17. The states discussed in the following tables use a tracking period of three years after release from incarceration. For example, the recidivism rate for 2000 releases was calculated using data from 2000 through

2003 and the rate for 2008 releases was calculated using data from 2008 through 2011.

Sources

Much of the data on statewide recidivism included in this report was provided by state departments of corrections. Additional data came from *State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America's Prisons* (Washington, DC: The Pew Center on the States, 2011) and "Reforming a System: An Inside Perspective on How Ohio Achieved a Record-Low Recidivism Rate" by Gary Mohr, Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (*National Reentry Resource Center Newsletter*, March 12, 2012). The states featured in this report noted that they had received support in developing and implementing recidivism-reduction strategies from various organizations, including the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Pew Center on the States, the Council of State Governments Justice Center, and the National Institute of Corrections.



The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The CSG Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven, evidence-based

strategies to increase public safety and strengthen communities.

The CSG Justice Center's Justice Reinvestment Initiative to address corrections spending and public safety is a partnership with the Public Safety Performance Project of the Pew Center on the States and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. These efforts have provided data-driven analyses and policy options to state leaders in 16 states.

For more information, visit www.justicecenter.csg.org.



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and corrections that protect public safety, hold offenders accountable, and control corrections costs. For more information, visit www.pewcenteronthestates.org.