



Stop Prison Expansion in Wisconsin

Wisconsin's prison population has experienced astronomical growth in recent years. Between 1980 and 2016, Wisconsin's prison population increased 456% to more than 22,000 people.ⁱ As of December 2018, more than 23,000 people were imprisoned in the state, and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) predicts that the prison population will continue to grow in the near future, surpassing 25,000 people by 2021.ⁱⁱ

We all want to live in safe and healthy communities, and our criminal justice policies should be focused on the most effective approaches to achieving that goal. But the current system has failed us. It's time for Wisconsin to dramatically reduce its reliance on incarceration and invest instead in alternatives to prison, including approaches better designed to break the cycle of crime and recidivism by helping people rebuild their lives.

The Problem:

These trends in incarceration come at a high cost to the people of Wisconsin. Between 1985 and 2017, as the state's prison population more than quadrupled, and spending on corrections from the state's general fund skyrocketed, growing 302% and far outpacing growth in other state spending priority areas such as education. The forecasted increase in Wisconsin's prison population requires nearly \$164 million in additional funds for the DOC's 2019-2021 state budget request.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to the Wisconsin Budget Project, Wisconsin spends more on corrections than the national average, and more than our neighboring states of Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa. This is because we incarcerate a larger share of our population than they do.

The Solution:

- Do not expand the number of beds available in the DOC budget.
- Do not build a new prison.
- Consider utilizing some of the prison population release valves, such as expanding treatment programs, expanding the earned release program, eliminating crimeless revocations, etc. You can look at how specific policy suggestions impact Wisconsin's prison population and associated funding on this tool from the Urban Institute here: <https://urbn.is/ppf>

ⁱ BJS, Corrections Statistical Analysis Tool

ⁱⁱ Wisconsin Policy Forum, Wisconsin's Prison Population on the Rise (10/31/2018). <https://wispolicyforum.org/focus/wisconsins-prison-population-on-the-rise/>

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