


FY23-24 BUDGET

TESTIMONY

PA Department of Corrections

Acting Secretary Dr. Laurel R. Harry



As we enter a new fiscal year, led by a new administration and a different landscape in the General Assembly, the PA Department of Corrections takes pride in the legacy left by incredibly thoughtful leaders who put this agency on a path to success. In the last decade, this agency and the field of corrections has undergone massive change. Our population is down tremendously and the cultural and institutional shifts occurring in prisons statewide are creating safer communities by preparing incarcerated individuals for life in the community. Instead of focusing primarily on correcting anti-social behavior, we now look at the whole person and ask ourselves, what does this individual need to succeed and what barriers brought them to us in the first place?

In answering that very important question, we developed a more robust reentry program with resources statewide that covers a variety of services from rental assistance to assistance in reunifying families. We have created a system that provides greater continuity of care, allowing individuals with medical or addiction-related issues to hit the ground running with community treatment. For those who require supervision upon release, we have reinforced our parole agents with the resources they need to provide individualized supervision understanding that no two individuals' circumstances are the same. As you will see throughout this testimony, this department has taken the lead in a nationwide movement to create institutions that not only keep communities safe but enhance that safety by sending men and women home better equipped for society than when they arrived.

In ushering in a new era in corrections, the PADOE has been looking internally at systemic practices that require new approaches. One such approach that required re-consideration was our system of diagnostic tools for assessing an individual's risk of re-offending, for assessing an individual's needs for treatment and supervision, and for developing an individualized case plan. Previously existing tools were incompatible with one another and under-performing in terms of accuracy. The department recently engaged in a process to create a new, unified platform of assessment tools that will more accurately identify the risk and the programmatic/treatment needs of each person in our care, while also ensuring no racial, ethnic, or gender bias in the assessment process.

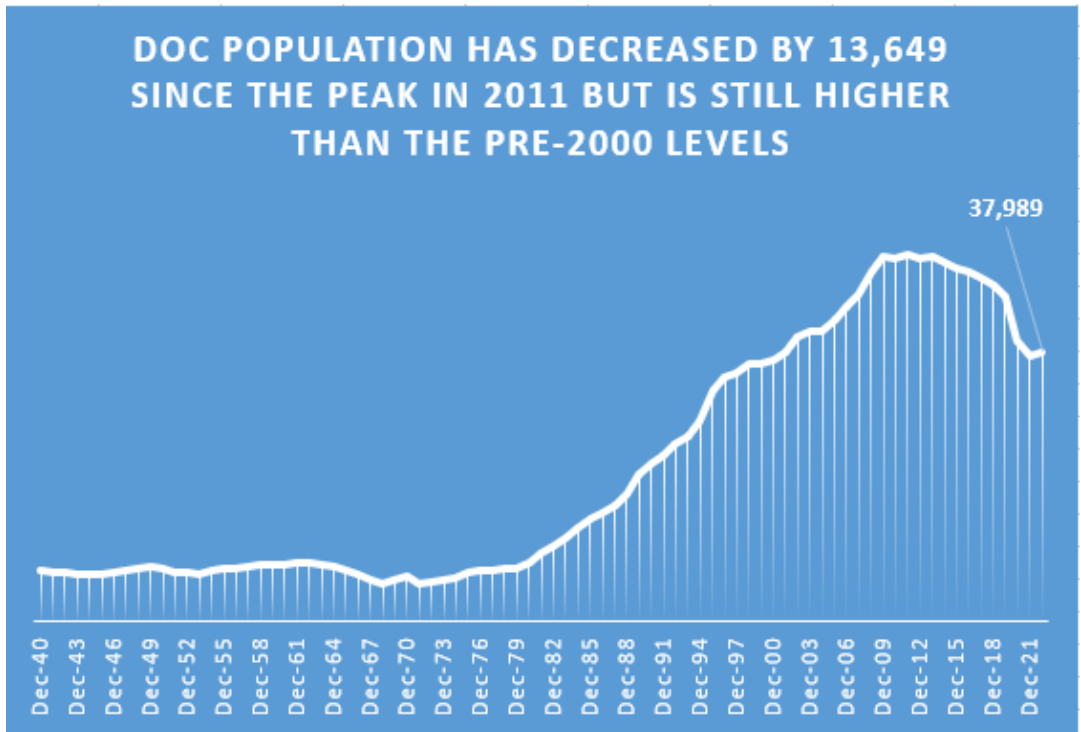
The department also took a deep dive into the pay scales for compensating inmates for the work they do inside state correctional institutions. The rising costs of goods and services affect incarcerated individuals and their families just as much as those in the community, meaning that inmate wages are not going as far as they once did. The department took an important step by raising wages by 20% across the board.

The most critical challenge we have faced in recent years is the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff in the security and medical fields. Last year, we reported a vacancy rate of 7.2% within our correction officer ranks, the backbone of this agency. We continue to work toward solutions. The department created a new recruitment and retention unit, comprising correctional officers from across the Commonwealth, who have been travelling and conducting and participating in job fairs, while working with agency leadership and the Office of Administration to develop a more desirable career in corrections. **We are also focused and committed to improving our staff's wellness.** We understand the difficulties that come with working inside of a correctional facility, such as long hours, no contact with family and friends, mandatory overtime, and the potential for violent encounters. Understanding these challenges means that wellness must be an integral part of our operations if we hope to ward off burnout and keep our staff and officers healthy.

Now we look to the future of this agency and to the new partnerships and collaboration available in state government and beyond. This budget request includes the DOC agency and independent

entities including the Pennsylvania Parole Board (PPB), Sex Offender Assessment Board (SOAB), Office of Victim Advocate (OVA), and the Board of Pardons (BOP). **This budget request of \$2,892,125,000 will allow the department and agencies within our budget to continue the critical work we do each day.**

The department expects to see a shift in commitments as courts begin to reach pre-pandemic operational levels. After a challenging three-year period, our budget request maintains our dedication to fiscal responsibility. We have seen increases in personnel and operational costs,



due to vacancies and supply chain costs respectively. Our budget request will allow us to fulfill our obligations and will be used in maintaining the safety of our institutions and communities.

While we are well within the new normal, we continue to navigate the last vestiges of COVID-19 policies. The prison population is at the lowest level we have seen since 2001 despite a small increase over the last year. As of December 2022, the prison population was 37,989. Our lower population allows us to manage emergency situations and adapt quickly to outbreaks, while continuing to account for new commitments and parole violators who may enter the system with symptoms of illness or positive COVID-19 tests. We also continue to receive federal reimbursement for certain costs to the department for medical and overtime costs, which will be discussed in more detail below.

JRI2 IS PROJECTED TO INVEST \$12.9M OVER THE NEXT 3 YEARS

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT INITIATIVE 2

- ◆ Through JRI2, the department continues to work toward reducing the population of individuals who are incarcerated or under supervision through safe common sense policies and translating the savings into greater investments in the criminal justice system.

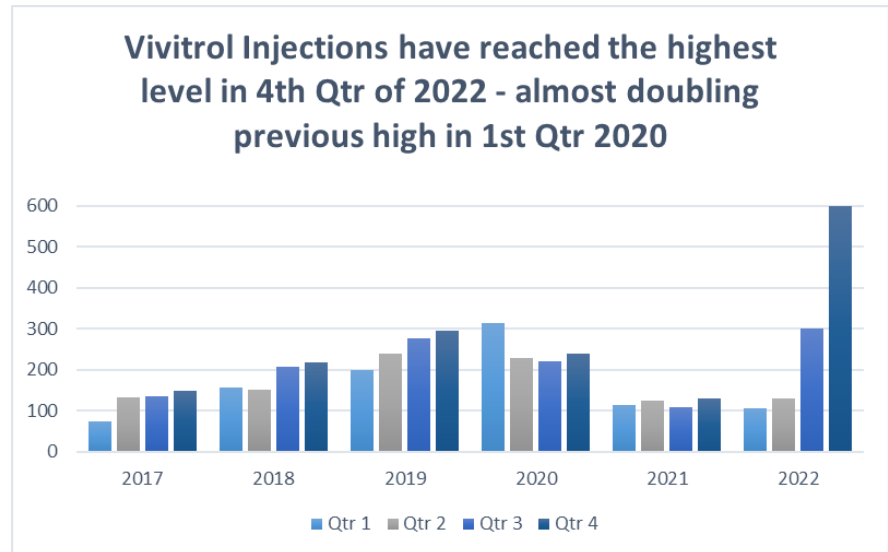


- ◆ JRI2 is projected to invest \$12.9 million over the next three years. This figure is lower than original projections due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to implement all JRI2 programming.

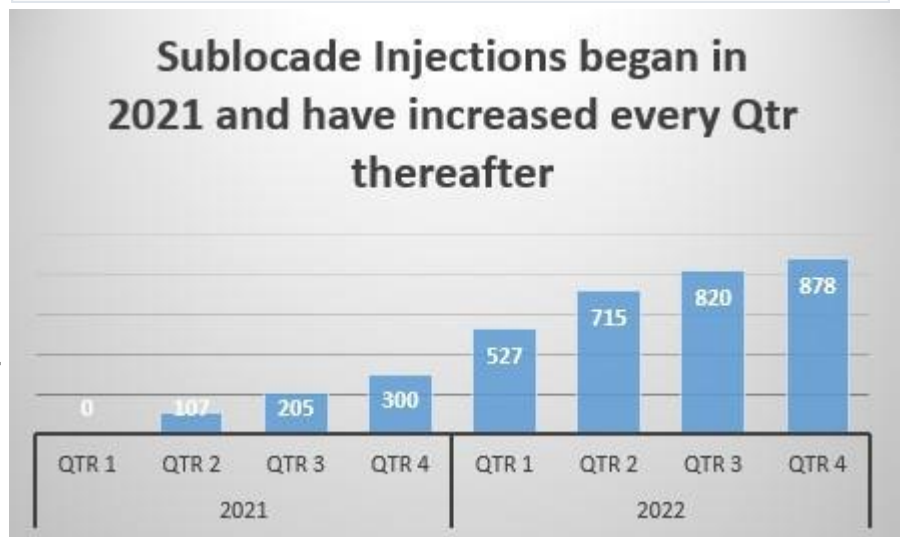
RESPONSE TO OPIOID EPIDEMIC

- ◆ Since 2010, the new admissions with an opioid addiction more than doubled, and a quarter of prison admissions who identify a “drug of choice” indicate heroin or opiate prescription drugs.
- ◆ Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), first piloted in FY13-14, has expanded to all 24 SCIs. MAT promotes behavioral, psychological, and emotional stabilization for individuals diagnosed with opioid use disorder.

- ◆ Through December 2022, 1,207 Vivitrol injections have been provided to 1,136 inmates. At the end of the 3rd quarter of 2022, PADOC expanded the MAT program to allow for all inmates who have a substance use disorder to request Naltrexone. The large increase in both the injectable and oral Naltrexone is due to the expansion.



- ◆ In 2022, the DOC expanded the use of Sublocade (injectable buprenorphine), offered through monthly injections to reduce diversion. In 2022, 2,940 Sublocade injections were administered.



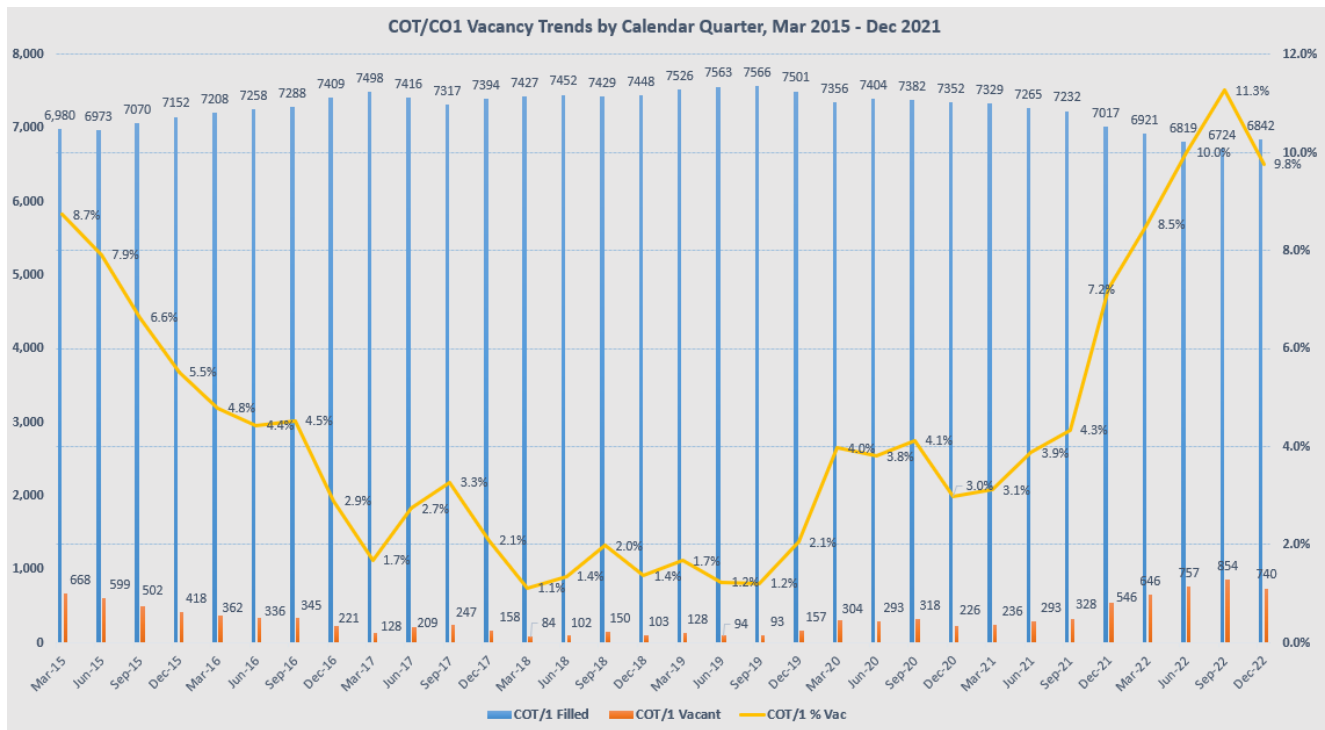
- ◆ We are focusing resources on **continuity of care for MAT participants** as they transition to the community. MAT social workers in the Bureau of Community Corrections (BCC) coordinate with institutional staff and Single County Authorities for a smooth transition that sets reentrants up for success. We have also ensured that every parole agent has been provided with Naloxone for use in cases where they arrive on the scene of an overdose.

- ◆ Inmates are enrolled in **Medical Assistance prior to release**, and for those who lack coverage during the transition, the Vivitrol Mobile Unit continues to provide stop-gap services, including drug screenings and Vivitrol injections, across the Commonwealth.

- ◆ We continue to leverage federal funding to expand MAT and pilot innovative responses to the opioid epidemic. State Opioid Response and Residential Substance Abuse Treatment – federal grant sub-awards via the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) – support medication costs, staffing, and the Vivitrol mobile unit. The department expects to exceed the currently available grant funding and has requested additional funding in this year’s budget to cover those expected costs.

STAFFING/VACANCIES/OVERTIME

- ◆ The DOC initiated centralized hiring for correctional officers in 2016, which decreased the vacancy rate to 1.1% at its lowest point; however, the DOC has been experiencing significant vacancies in recent years, which is exacerbated by the inability to replace and retain employees.
- ◆ Our current staffing issues affect numerous areas of responsibility, but the main areas of concern include correctional officer positions, nurses, and field agents. As of December 2022, the

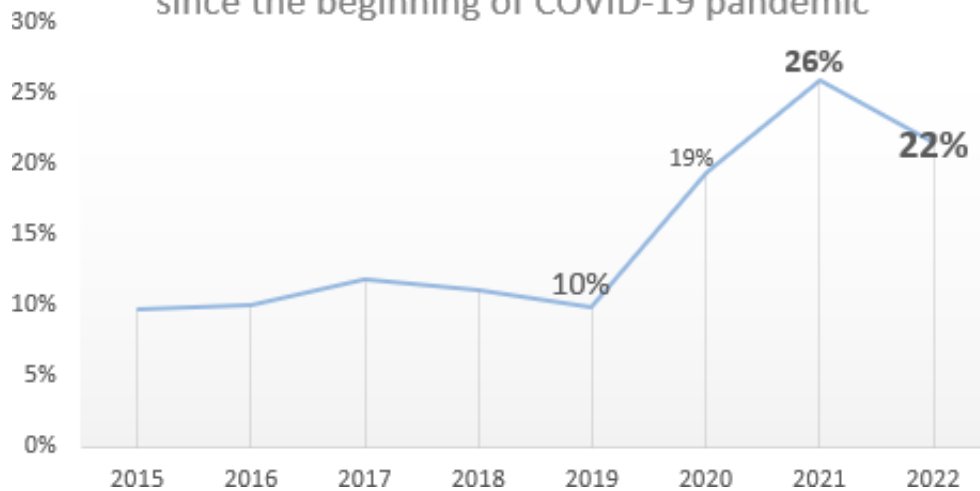


complement of correctional officers was 8,696. Nurses comprise 765 positions and field agents 995 positions. The corresponding vacancy rates were 8.5% for COs, 15.2% for nursing, and 2.8% for field agents.

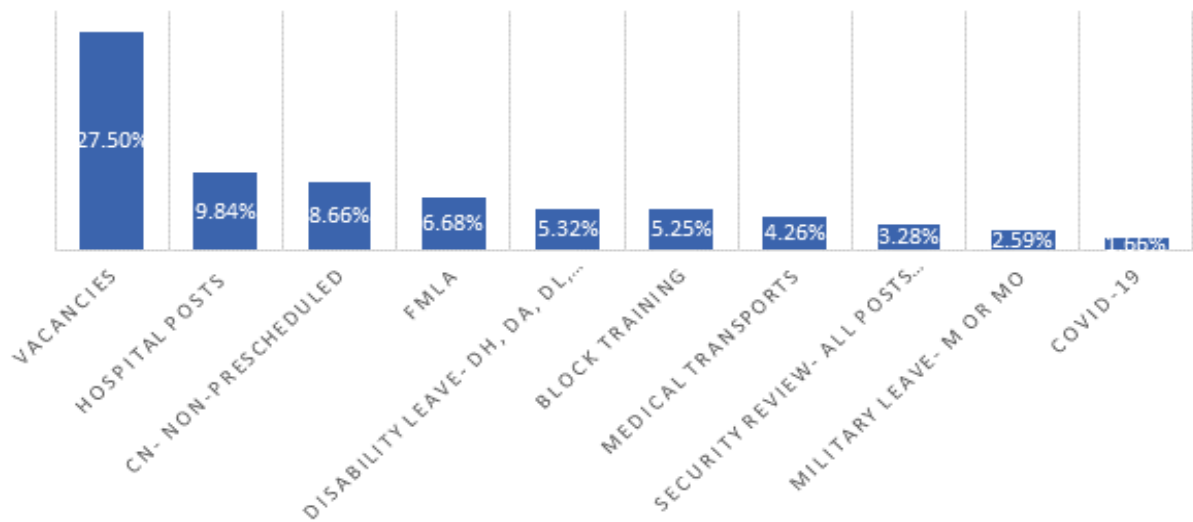
- ◆ Despite higher-than-normal vacancy rates, the department’s reduction in the incarcerated population has led to the lowest rates of officer to inmate ratios. Prior to COVID our institutions hovered in the range of 1 CO to 4.8 inmates to 1 CO to 5.6 inmates. The ratio is currently 1 CO to every 4 inmates.
- ◆ The correctional officer and nursing positions require 24/7 coverage. This is accomplished through either voluntary or mandatory overtime. The projected overtime for the SCI fund is \$148 million, which was budgeted for \$100 million for Fiscal Year 22-23. Mandatory overtime increased to over 22% in the past year. Historically this has been less than 10%.

- ◆ In October of 2022, the department created a new Recruitment and Retention team led by a corrections captain with a team of fifteen active CO Lieutenants. This unit focuses on recruiting corrections officer trainees, parole agents and community corrections center monitors, and retaining them through some of our more challenging times. The unit works with each SCI to understand their needs and then travels the state engaging potential employees and students at job fairs, universities, and other public events.

Mandatory OT Rates have more than doubled since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic



TOP 10 OVERTIME DRIVERS



- ◆ The DOC continues to work to improve recruiting efforts and look at innovative retention programs. The DOC also regained command of the hiring process, removing red tape, and ensuring that prospective candidates are processed and onboarded in a timely manner.

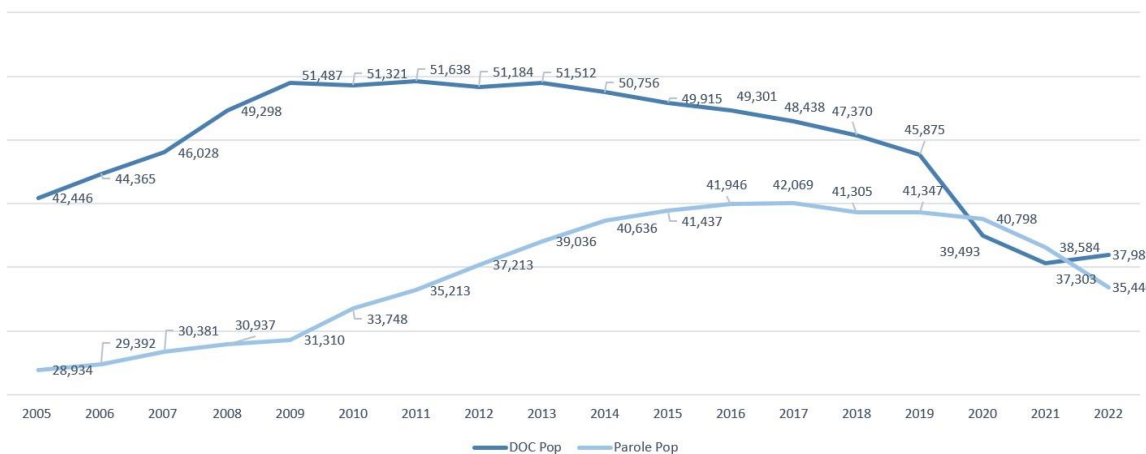
INMATE RISK ASSESSMENT

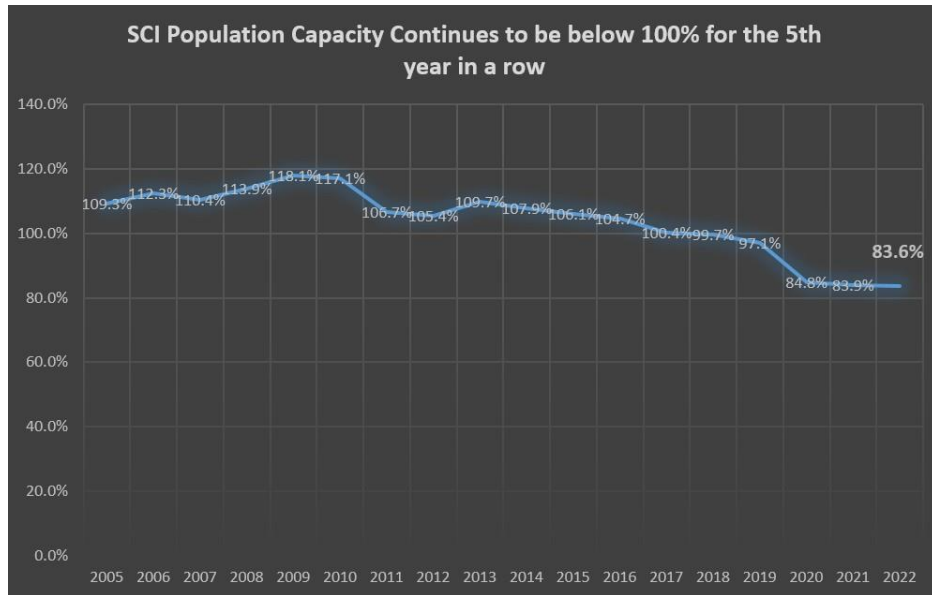
- ◆ This project is funded by a \$5.5 million multi-year contract that was awarded in mid-2020 to Vant4gePoint.
- ◆ The end-result of this product will be a new risk/needs assessment and case planning protocol that will allow for more seamless transitions as an inmate/reentrant moves through the corrections/parole continuum.
- ◆ It differs from other “off-the-shelf” options in that this tool will be highly customized. This customization will result in a level of predictive accuracy higher than industry standards as well as a several staff efficiencies gained as they conduct assessments, develop case plans, make referrals, assign programming, and deliver programming that are not possible under current system limitations.
- ◆ A team of DOC staff and Vant4gePoint staff has devoted a substantial amount of time customizing the assessment’s inputs and analyzing potential results to ensure that the tool is not only as accurate as possible, but that it also eliminates racial and gender bias.
- ◆ The department has begun implementation of the product and continues to provide training and guidance to the field to help reduce the time investment required by the new product.
- ◆ Because the new diagnostic and classification tool relies heavily on criminal history, the department has hired a team of 20 personnel to the new Criminal History Verification Unit. This team ensures that criminal history information received or provided by incarcerated people is full and accurate.

DOC AND PAROLE POPULATION REDUCTION

- ◆ The DOC population rose slightly over the last year; however, prison and parole populations are on a downward trend. This is due to a dramatic decrease in prison admissions. With fewer people in prison, there are then fewer people to be released onto parole, causing the parole population to decline as well.

Inmate Population is Increasing while the Reentrant Population continues to Decrease

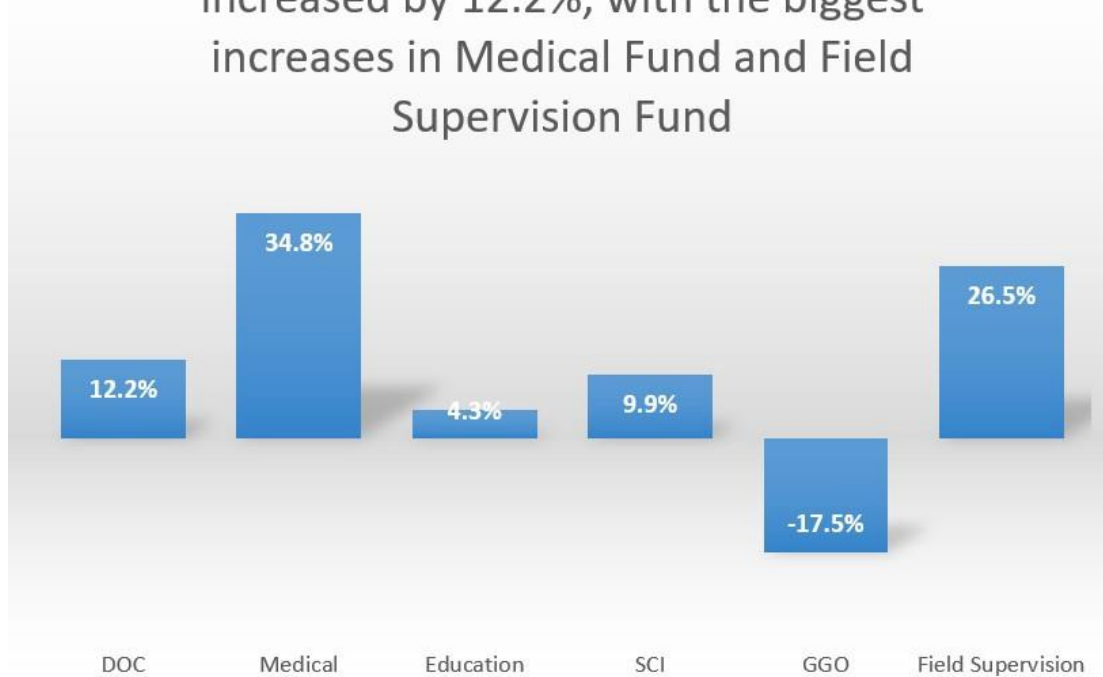




DOC BUDGET STEWARDSHIP

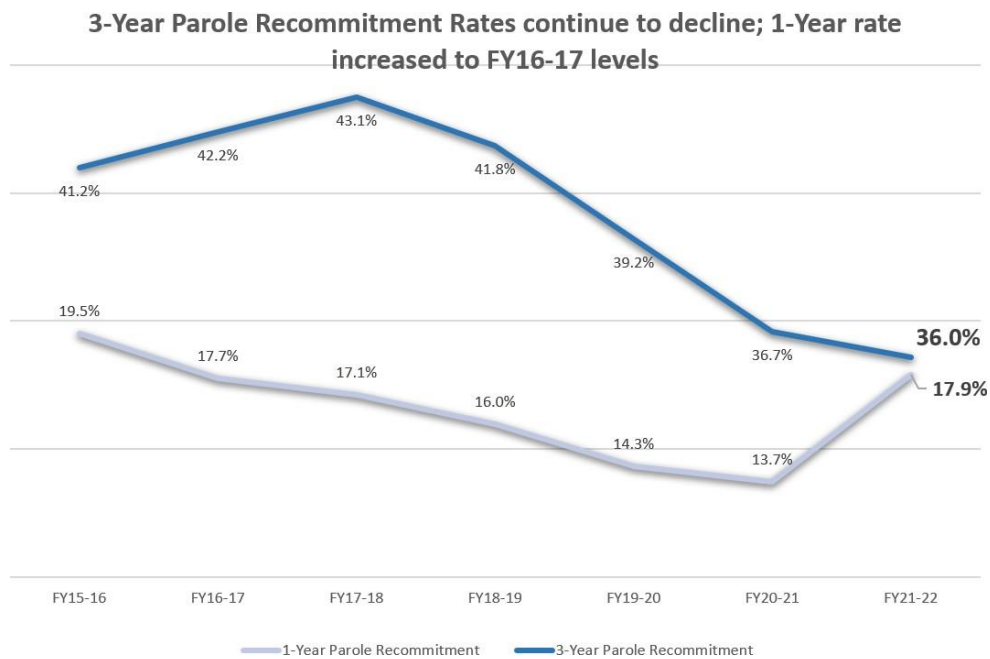
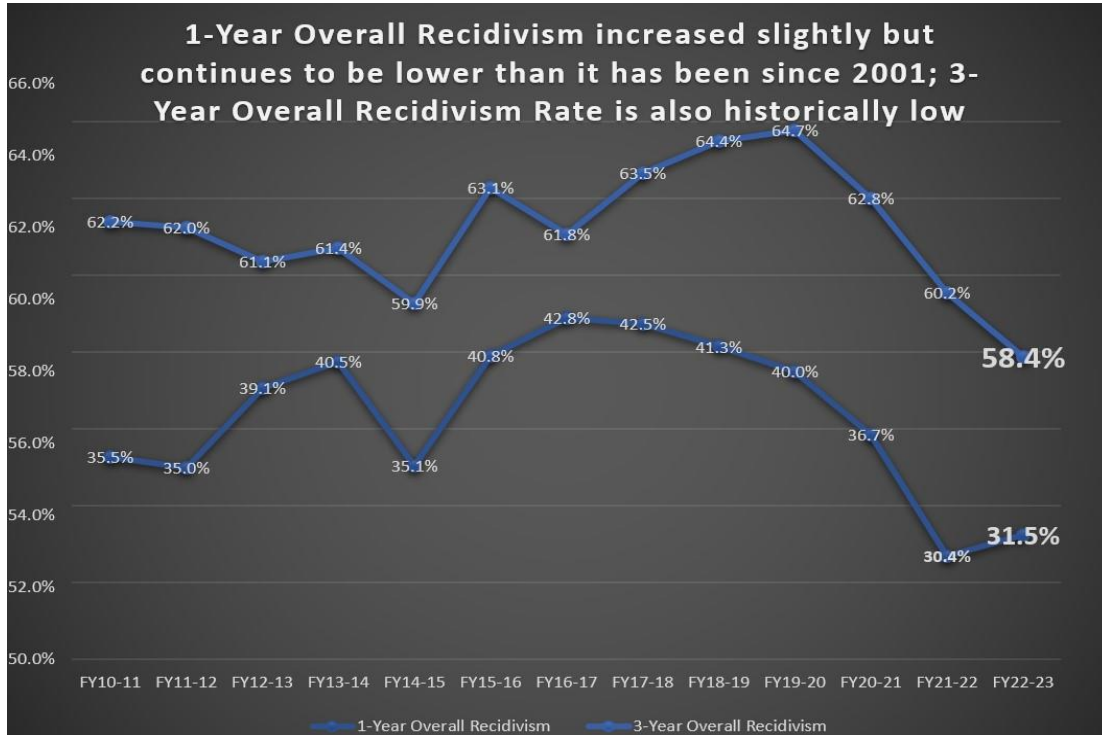
- ◆ The DOC has faced many challenges over the last several years including fighting COVID-19 and increasing services to inmates with higher levels of risk, mental health issues, and substance use disorders (SUD). Despite these challenges, the DOC has managed to hold the budget expenditures to **only 2.4% growth over the last 5 years**.

Over the past 5 years, the DOC Budget has increased by 12.2%, with the biggest increases in Medical Fund and Field Supervision Fund



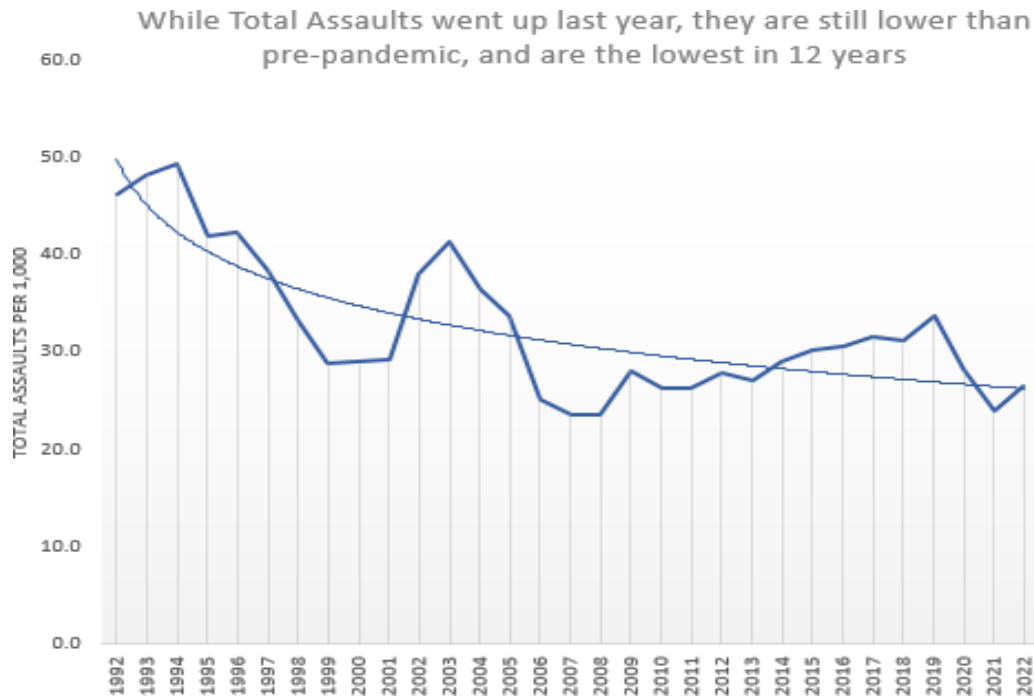
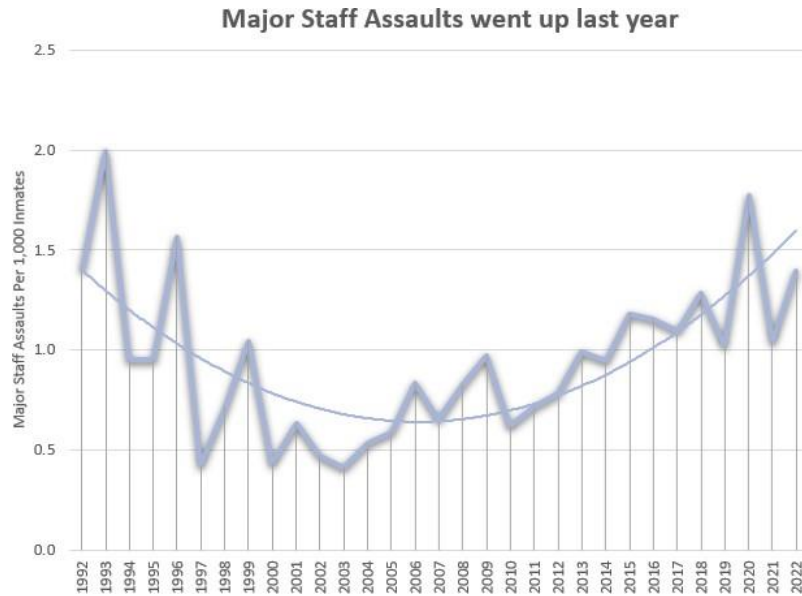
RECIDIVISM

- ◆ The **one-year and three-year overall recidivism rates have been declining.**
- ◆ Parole recommitment rates are also **down** for the fourth year in a row. For more detailed recidivism information and data, please see the attached recidivism report published in 2022.



PRISON VIOLENCE

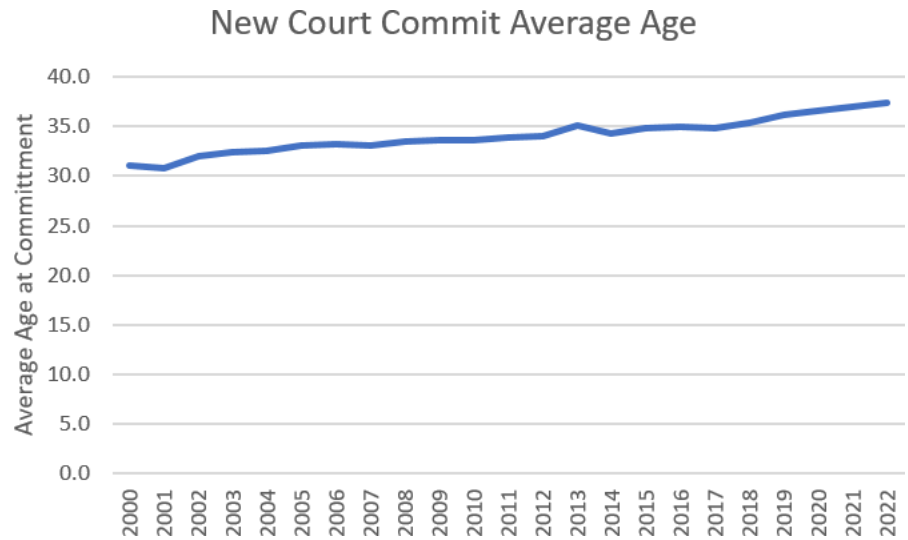
- ◆ As institutions return to normal operating procedures, major staff assaults and overall assaults were slightly up over the last year. Major staff assaults are inmate-on-staff assaults that result in outside medical treatment. Inmate-on-staff assaults are tracked separately from inmate-on-inmate assaults but they are combined to calculate overall assault numbers. Major staff assaults are a sub-set of staff assaults.



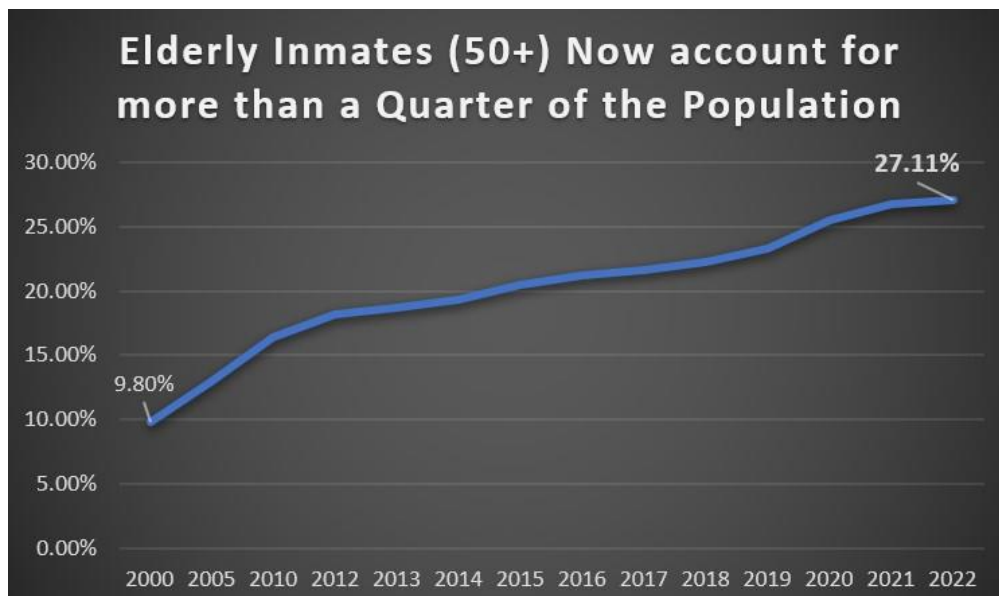
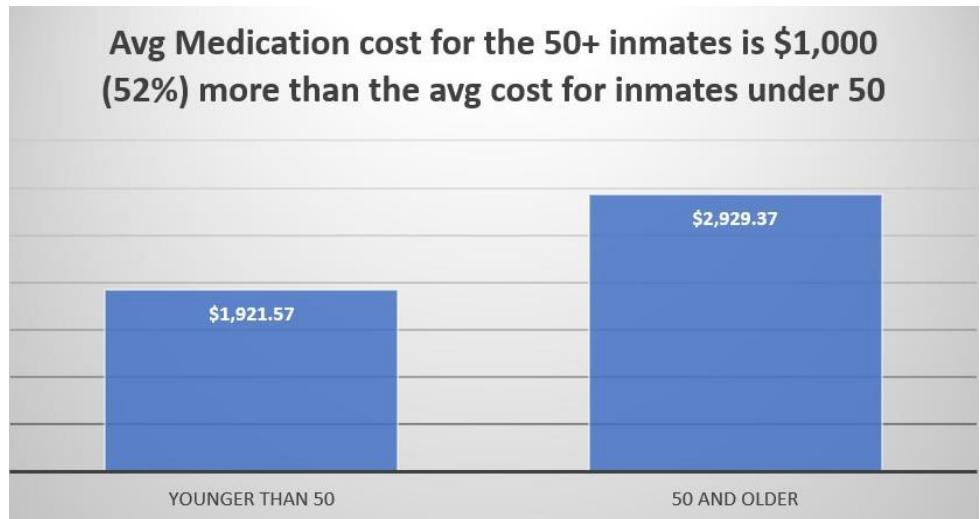
ELDERLY POPULATION, HEALTH CARE COSTS

- ◆ As of December 31, 2022, there were **10,300 inmates over the age of 50**, 27.11% of the total population. That percentage has steadily increased since 2000. Additionally, we have three special long-term care units, combining both skilled and personal care at SCI Laurel Highlands, SCI Waymart, and SCI Muncy.

- ◆ We have also seen that over time, the average age of an individual at commitment is raising from year to year. The current average age at commitment is 37 years old, up from 31 years old in 2000.

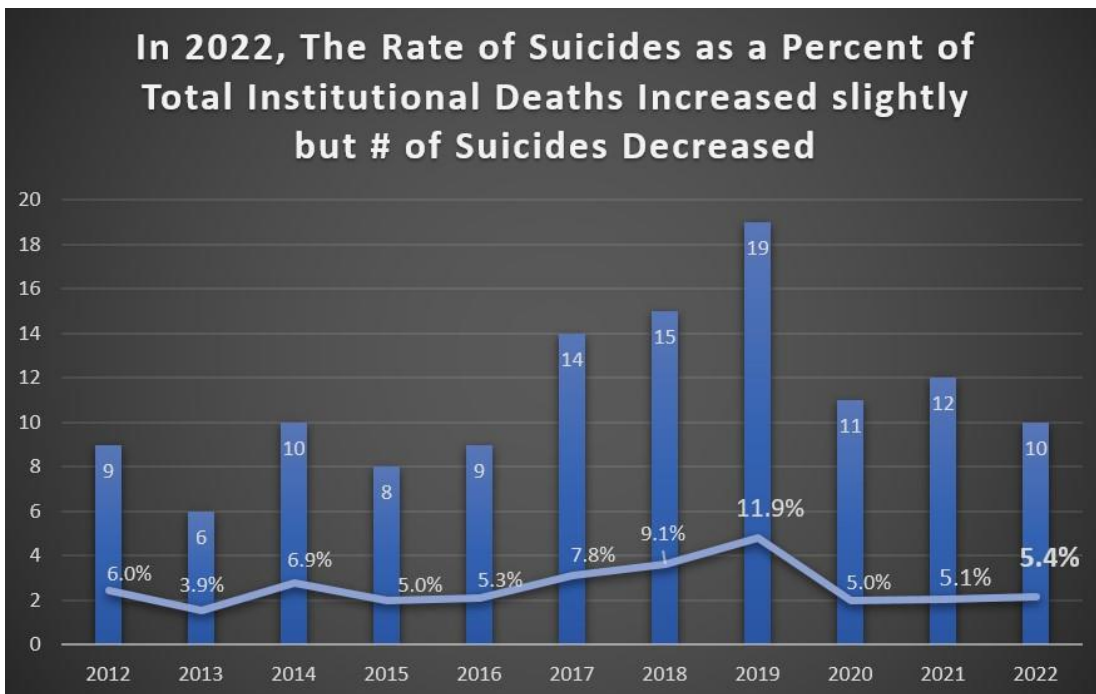
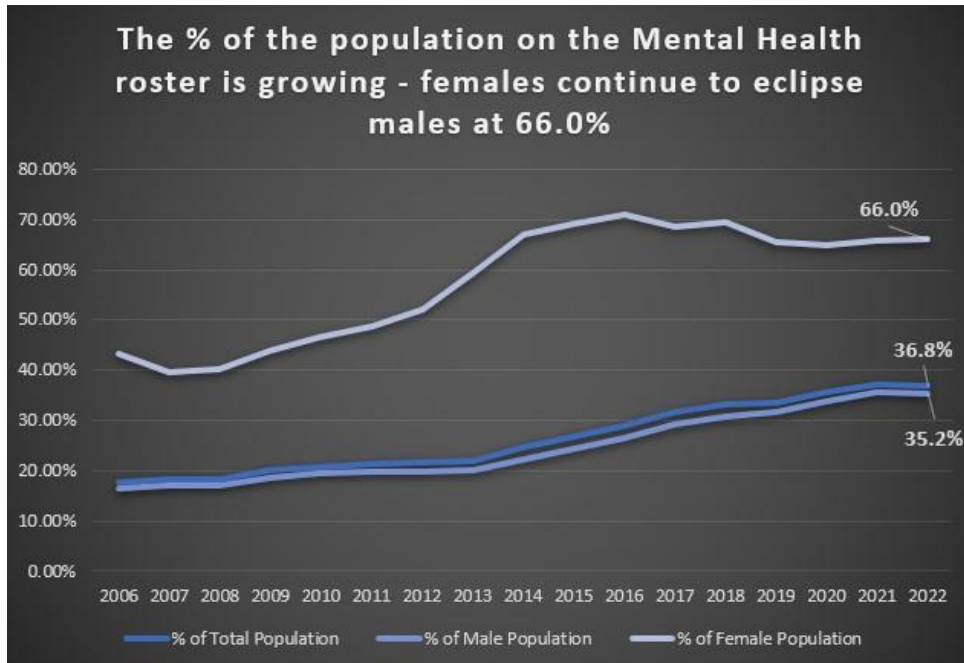


- ◆ Nearly all incarcerated elderly inmates are on medication that costs the DOC \$34M annually. The average annual medication costs per inmate for all inmates under 50 is approximately \$1,921, while it is \$2,928 for inmates over 50.



MENTAL HEALTH

- ◆ Approximately **36.8% of our entire population is being treated for a mental illness**, with 7.6% diagnosed with a serious mental illness (SMI). Of our male population, 35.2% are actively receiving mental health treatment, with 7.4% (2,574) being diagnosed with an SMI. Among the female population, 66% (1,207) are currently receiving treatment and 12.3% are diagnosed with an SMI.



- ◆ Suicides were down in 2022, and are occurring 50% less than 2019 levels.

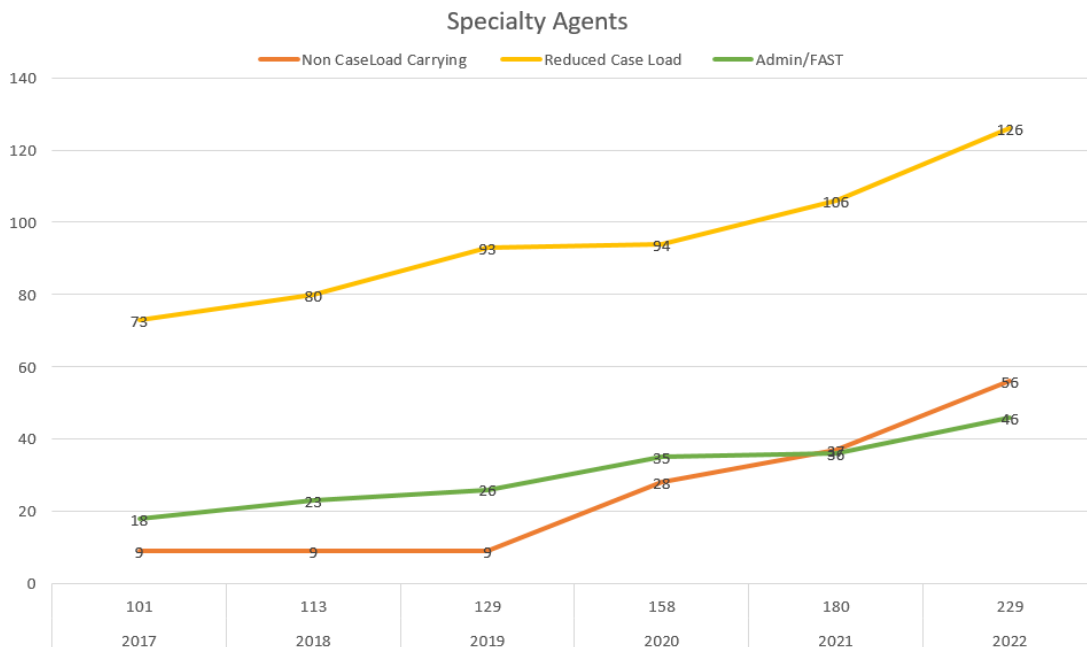
INMATE VISITATION

The Department quickly implemented a temporary video visitation solution in March 2020 when all in-person visits were canceled due to COVID-19. The Department then shifted to a more permanent inmate visitation system in late 2020, and focused efforts in 2021 on expanding availability and accessibility. This transition has improved the overall delivery of visitation to provide a one-stop-shop for all visiting needs, to include: scheduling, management of visitations, notifications, and connectivity. As shown below, you can see the Department is committed to these connections. Of note, the increase in video visits from 2021 and 2022 is over 260,000.

Visit Type	2021	2022
Video Visits Conducted	521,888	790,371
In-Person Visits Conducted	40,232	76,709
Total Visits Conducted	562,120	867,080

Parole Field Supervision

The history of Parole Field Supervision is adaption. The department was prompted to change the mission of its field agents in the interest of both safety and justice. One of the more significant changes leading to increased budget consideration, is the addition of specialized caseloads for agents. Parole Field Supervision has developed a number of non-case carrying specializations for agents in the areas of K9 searches, training, inter-agency taskforce collaboration, and more. Simultaneously, case-carrying agents may now receive caseloads focused on parolees who are sex offenders or who may have mental health or drug and alcohol related issues. Our agents are able to provide supervision with more understanding of the needs of the individuals on their caseload. The specialization of our agents across the board is leading to better quality supervision and safer communities.



Office of Reentry

Over the last decade, the Office of Reentry has been revolutionizing the way we prepare reentrants for the community. The office continues to ensure that individuals who come to us leave better than when they arrived. This is done through education, treatment services, housing coordination, workforce training programs, and other creative programming outlets for incarcerated or reentering individuals to develop skills and acquire support.

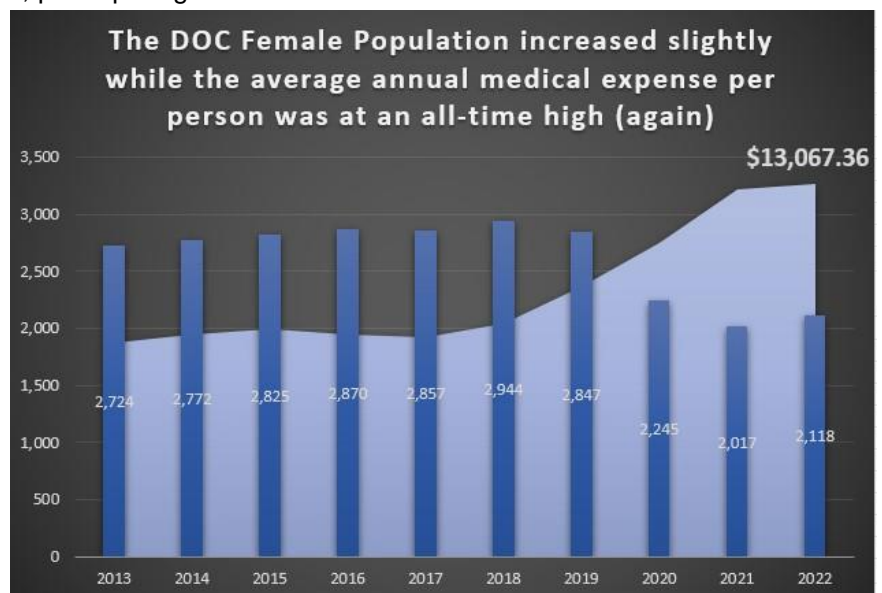
This past year, the Division of Correctional Education worked hard to prepare its students and was able to achieve an 80% pass rate for the GED test, which is higher than the national pass rate of 75%. The education division also issued 459 Commonwealth Secondary School Diplomas during that time. The department also provides a robust catalog of vocational offerings for qualified individuals interested in building upon their skills while incarcerated. As we look forward to expanding course offerings through Pell, we continue to support courses through our existing relationships with Bloomsburg University, Eastern University, Lehigh Carbon Community College, University of Scranton, Villanova University, and Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

In the area of housing assistance, the Bureau of Community Corrections provides a temporary housing option for individuals transitioning into the community. They assist reentrants with their job searches, housing placement, and continuity of care needs while the reentrant resides in a center. However, there are times when an individual is deemed Hard-to-Place (HTP) due to their demographics and criminal history. To help alleviate last-minute placements in less than ideal locations, the Office of Reentry collaborated with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Aging to create and implement a new training program for staff who work with HTP individuals. HTP individuals have historically had a difficult time finding housing post-release. Our social workers and counselors work diligently to make connections with community providers; however, there is no obligation on the end of the provider to accept individuals, especially those who have a history of violence, sexual offenses, or arson. The new training for DOC staff focuses on the policies related to supporting HTP individuals and the various resources and supports available through our sister agencies involved in the process.

Recently, the DOC received \$1.1 million from the United States Department of Justice to implement performance based contracts to expand its existing Housing Assistance Program to reentrants without earned income. Beginning in July 2023, participating vendors will receive federally funded outcome payments for placing eligible individuals in housing and for reduction in recidivism.

FEMALE POPULATION

- ◆ After years of remaining mainly flat, the **female population has risen slightly in 2022 (5%)**. **Medical costs continue to increase** and the cost per day is around **\$29 more than male inmates (\$53/day vs. \$24/day)**.



- ◆ To support women in our custody and promote trauma-informed programming, the department recently established a **Doula Pilot Program at SCI Muncy** in partnership with the Department of Human Services using grant funding from several external sources. The program has served 15 women with 4 who have returned to the community. Expansion of the program is underway with the addition of a lactation room at SCI Muncy and expansion of doula services to SCI Cambridge Springs in western PA.

SECOND CHANCE PELL

- ◆ Expanding higher education remains a top priority. **We look forward to expanding access to more students.** The Wolf Administration, DOC, US Department of Education, and our PASSHE partners **advocated for Pell to be reinstated for all individuals behind bars** who want higher education.
- ◆ On December 21, 2020, the **United States Congress lifted the 1994 ban on federal student aid for incarcerated individuals.**
- ◆ We will soon have preliminary results of a randomized controlled trial that examined Pell grant funded higher education in prison and its effects on recidivism and post-release employment.

FIRST CHANCE ACT

- ◆ The **DOC will be the first in the nation to help at-risk children who are living in regions with statistically higher incarceration rates and school dropout rates,** as well as high crime rates by allocating a portion of contracts to a First Chance Trust Fund to be managed by PCCD.
- ◆ DOC contracts over \$5M will have language included to contribute at least 1% of the annual contract amount to the fund each fiscal year.
- ◆ Over the last year the department was able to invest **\$1,020,755.52** in the fund thanks to several recently established contracts.
- ◆ PCCD will establish targeted grants and scholarships that will provide access to programs and education, giving at-risk youths a “First Chance” at breaking the cycle of incarceration and crime.

FINAL REMARKS

Over the past year, the department has worked to get back to business as usual. Most COVID-19 mitigation policies have come to an end and we have learned valuable lessons along the way, making the DOC and our communities safer.

The **dedicated staff** at the DOC have been relentless in their duties. We continue to evaluate every aspect of our operations, ensuring that what we do and how we do it is evidence-based and trauma informed. Over the last year we have collaborated with corrections departments around the world to rewrite the rules and set Pennsylvania on a track to less recidivism and more rehabilitative practices. This includes examining our use of restrictive housing, supporting reentry programs, and working toward a prison-to-work pipeline never seen in this country.

The department is also making great strides in our community-based efforts. We are bolstering our efforts to ensure that reentrants have safe housing with the hiring of a statewide housing coordinator

and by making changes and continuously evaluating our reentry service lot contracts. As described previously, the department is also ensuring that supervision is occurring in the most individualized manner possible. Every justice-involved individual comes from different circumstances and has gone through traumatic events on their path back to the community. We recognize those challenges and we are putting agents in place that can support people through the parole process and hold them accountable without being unduly burdensome.

Over the last three years, change has come rapidly to the DOC. Staffing continues to be a concern, especially as our officers and agents continue to work a record number of hours through **voluntary and mandated overtime shifts**, and they **patrol night and day** to account for reentrants in increasingly more dangerous environments. **Our staff have answered our call time and time again.**

We are extraordinarily proud of the hard work of those in the field, but we must still prepare for what is to come in the future.

As we move forward, the department is excited to continue to be a part of the transformation of criminal justice in the Commonwealth. Safer communities, safer institutions, and more support for our population is our goal. We are looking at creative ways to effect change in critical areas such as high recidivism rates, growing community violence, and ending the cycle of incarceration. This cannot be done without all sectors of the criminal justice field working together. This department will ensure that the funding allocation for FY 2023-24 and beyond will go toward common sense evidence-based programming, and will support the 17,000 staff that work day and night to make the Commonwealth a better and safer place for Pennsylvanians to build businesses and raise families.