



**Pennsylvania
Department of Corrections
2025-26 Budget Testimony**



Creating Success, Inside and Out

Introduction:

In keeping with Governor Shapiro's standard to improve government efficiency, innovation and service, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections strives to build from the successes achieved in 2024 and continue its proud tradition as innovators in the field of corrections. With support from Governor Shapiro and the General Assembly's 2024-25 appropriation, the department "got stuff done" including:

- Issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) and drafted policies to provide body worn cameras for parole field agents as authorized by Act 53.
- Reduced the vacancy rate for correction officers from 9.3% in January 2023 to 4.8% by the end of January 2025.
- Created a statewide staff wellness coordinator to focus on improving retention by building a healthier organizational culture, reduce stressors and increase job satisfaction.
- Expanded the 340B federal prescription drug reduction program by becoming a covered entity under the program, resulting in an additional estimated annual savings of \$30M.
- Addressed overtime by temporarily closing the equivalency of more than 18 housing units across 13 institutions enabling the reallocation of security staff to address vacancy rates, avoiding an estimated \$7M in overtime expenses in 2024.
- Formed a Violence Reduction Task Force to address the increased incidents of violence in the facilities.

The above initiatives are a few examples of the extraordinary work our dedicated staff was able to accomplish despite challenges that continue to persist. We now request that the General Assembly approve Governor Shapiro's budget request of \$3.297B for the department and the independent boards supported by the department to continue our great work, meet the evolving needs of our population, uphold public safety, and fully address the fiscal challenges noted below.

Fiscal Challenges of 2024 and Beyond:

In spite of the department's efforts to limit spending, the department routinely faces fiscal challenges from sources outside its control, including:

- Cumulative inflation of approximately 17.5% since 2020.
- Contractual raises awarded to the H1 bargaining unit, adding approximately \$54M in labor costs in FY2025-26.
- Higher staff-to-incarcerated person ratios, due to less densely populated facilities.
- Litigation and regulatory driven expansion of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), potentially tripling enrollment.
- Regulatory elimination of phone call commissions, removing \$3M in revenue used to support incarcerated individual activity.
- Aging infrastructure in need of approximately \$250M in upgrades and increased need for emergency repairs while awaiting planned capital projects.

- Washout rate of new hires leading to lost training investments; negating the full potential savings and overtime offsets associated with new hires.
- Health needs associated with the rapidly aging population.
- An increasing percentage of incarcerated individuals classified at the Custody Level 4 (CL4)/close supervision level, and who engage in the greatest rates of violence.

Budget Drivers:

It is easy to draw a connection between a correctional agency's incarcerated population and cost per incarcerated person per day as metrics for the responsible management of its budget. However, there are more complex undercurrents to what truly drives correctional spending. Although the department's institutional population dropped by more than 2,800 individuals since June of 2020, the department is currently still securing the same number of facilities, fulfilling the same essential service needs, and covering the same utility costs that perpetually exist, regardless of the population density.

Moreover, as the largest Commonwealth employer, the department's budget is heavily allocated towards personnel expenditures, with a need for over 22 million security staffing hours to meet the needs of the population across the 24 prisons. Over 73% of all funds within the agency are allocated towards personnel; however, when it comes to the correctional institutions, nearly 79% of all costs are associated with personnel expenditures.

When remaining funds are required to be allocated towards non-discretionary matters such as medical care, mental health care, food service, maintenance and utility costs; little discretionary money remains to generate savings. Comparatively, the similarly situated Ohio and New York state systems operate with approximately 59% and 64% of their budgets confined to payroll expenditures respectively; leaving opportunity for discretionary savings. Because such a large percentage of the budget has been cabined to personnel, the Department has essentially been operating with a cost to carry budget that includes increases to maintain services affected by inflation.

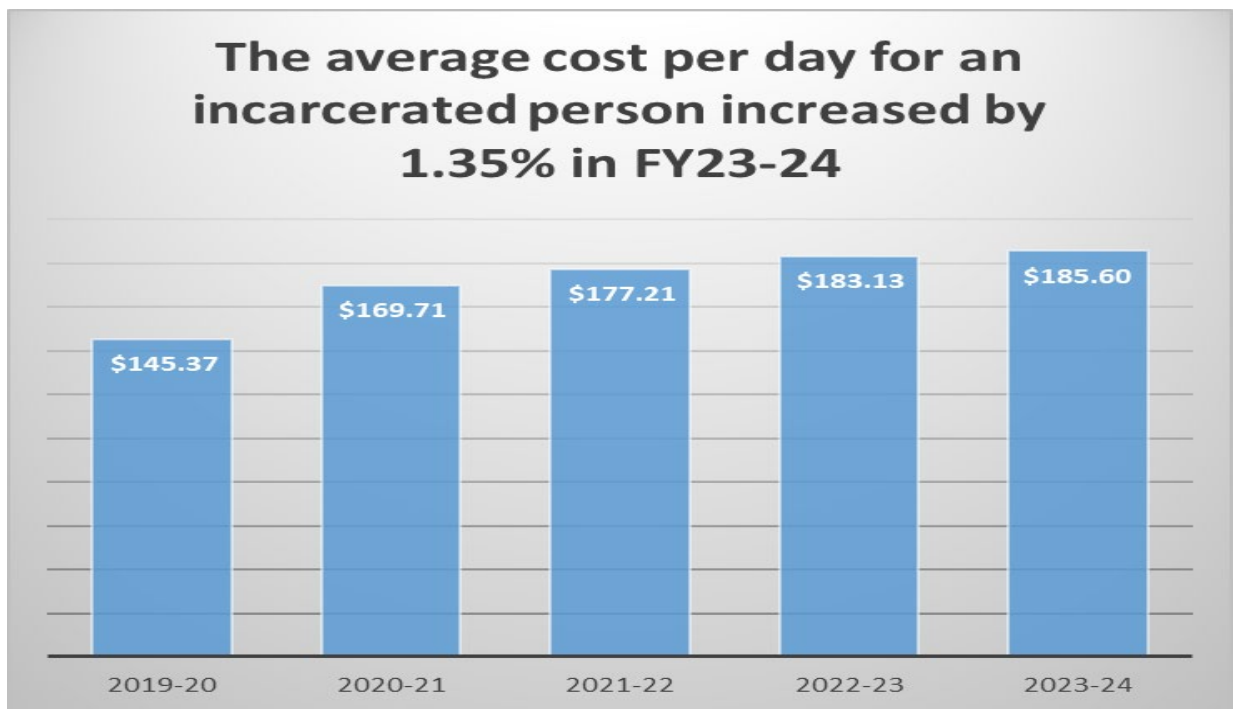
The department is subject to unpredictable changes that often arise without warning and without opportunity to secure the funding to ensure successful implementation. In 2024, the department was financially affected by an FCC ruling that created a \$3 million funding gap for incarcerated person services, an aggressive DOJ interpretation of the need for provision of MAT to a significantly wider swath of the population, and litigation driven reforms to increase out-of-cell opportunities for our Security Level 5 (SL5), commonly known as restrictive housing, populations. While a budget may anticipate funding needs under current business practices, outside drivers and legislation may change the trajectory of spending instantaneously.

Finally, despite a decreasing population, the specialized needs of those committed to our care continue to rise. Beginning with mental health reforms from a decade ago that led to specialized mental health units, the department continues to find the need to provide specialized services to meet the unique demands of segments of the population. Specialization often requires additional focused resources in a dedicated area to both protect and meet the needs of the targeted population in a safer setting, with amplified costs. Several examples of where the need for specialization has grown in recent years to affect today's budget are in the Neuro-Developmental Residential Treatment Unit (NRTU) that was developed to meet the needs of incarcerated persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual Disabilities, the Neuro-Cognitive Care Unit (NCCU) to care for those with memory disorders, Veterans

Service Units (VSUs) to effectively serve those who served this country, House of Healing/House of Hope units to provide trauma services for incarcerated women, and Senior Life Enhancement Programs (SLEPs) to meet the needs of the growing over 50 population.

Budget Stewardship:

Over the past five fiscal years, the average cost per incarcerated person per day has risen by an average annual rate of 5.53% from \$145.37 to \$185.60. This average cost per day is derived from four main components of caring for the incarcerated individual, including the average of security costs to house the population, medical costs for the essential health care needs of the population, food costs to nourish the population, and programming costs to habilitate and educate the population. When adjusting for inflation, costs have risen by \$7.23, despite a higher staff-to-incarcerated person ratio associated with population reductions, increased food costs, and the greater need for specialty care.



Over the past five fiscal years, the average cost per day for a parolee increased by an annual rate of 11.14%. However, when adjusting for inflation, the actual costs have risen by \$2.93, mainly associated with specialization of supervision and a decrease in parolees under supervision. While this shift increases the cost per parolee, it contributes to manageable caseloads and effective supervision.

The average cost per day for a reentrant increased by an average of 11.14% over the last 5 years



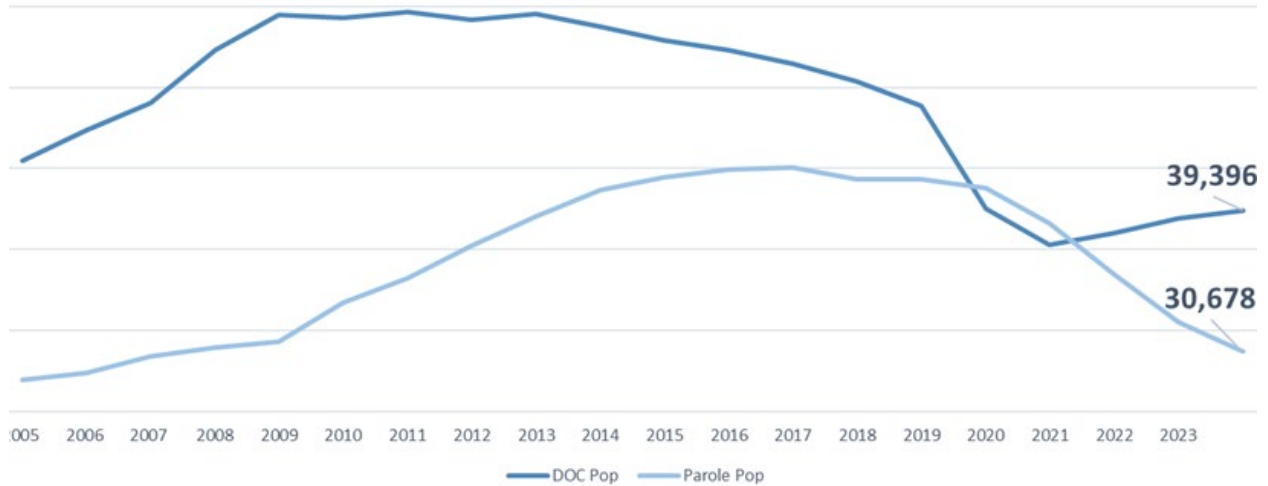
Population Trends:

Custodial Population:

The custodial population is split between those housed in a State Correctional Institution (SCI) and those housed in a Bureau of Community Corrections (BCC) state or contract center while participating in the State Drug Treatment Program (SDTP). Although the department anticipated a slight increase in the custodial population to 40,645 by February 2025, the custodial population sat at 39,396 as of December 31, 2024, with only a modest increase of 454 over the most recent one-year period. Post Justice Reinvestment Initiative 2 (JRI2), the composition of the institutional population appears to be changing, with higher percentages of the population classified at the close supervision level and a greater percentage of individuals serving minimum sentences of ten years or more.

Reducing and leveling out the prison population is a positive outcome that can be celebrated. However, as previously noted, it does leave the department's facilities less densely occupied, and consequently, operating with a higher staff-to-incarcerated person ratio. The department consolidated facility populations to increase efficiencies and temporarily closed the equivalent of 18 housing units to reduce staffing needs by approximately 113 posts per day. However, achieving further efficiencies remains difficult without a more significant reduction of the operational footprint that aligns with the custodial population.

Incarcerated Person Population is leveling out while the Reentrant Population continues to Decrease

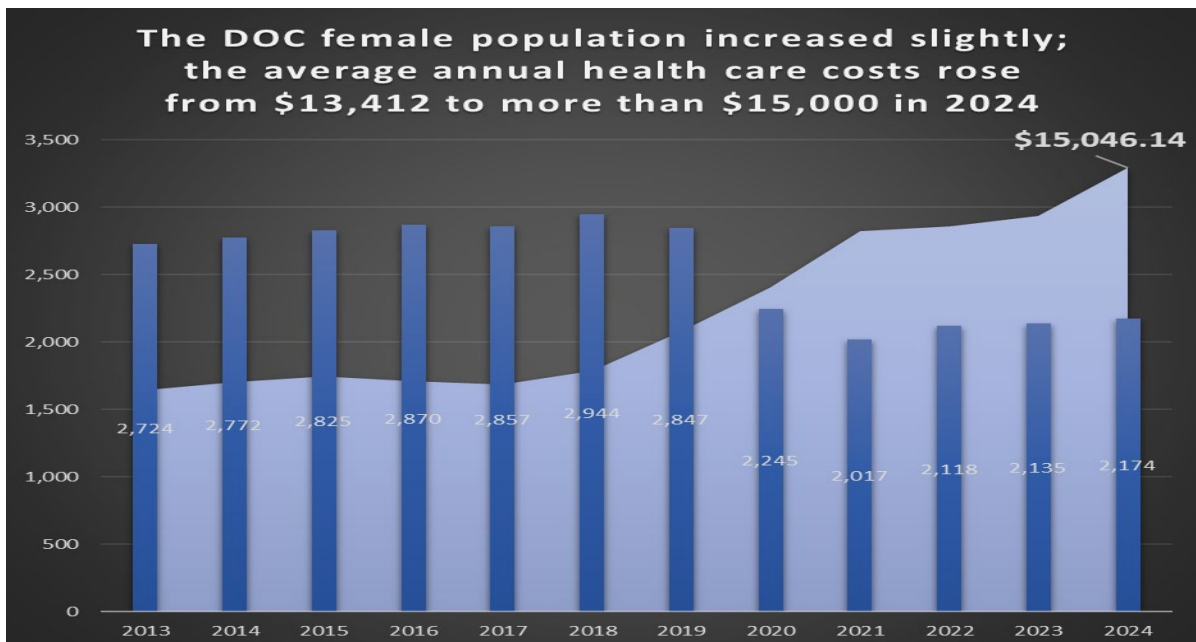


Parole Population:

The parole supervised population continues to rapidly decline. The decline is likely related to the continued decreases in the incarcerated population, drop in the parole grant rate, and the increased length of sentence making less incarcerated persons available for parole.

Female Population Trends:

The female population increased slightly by year end 2024 to 2,174, up from 2,135 at the of 2023. The average annual medical costs for this population rose from \$13,412.93 to \$15,046.14.



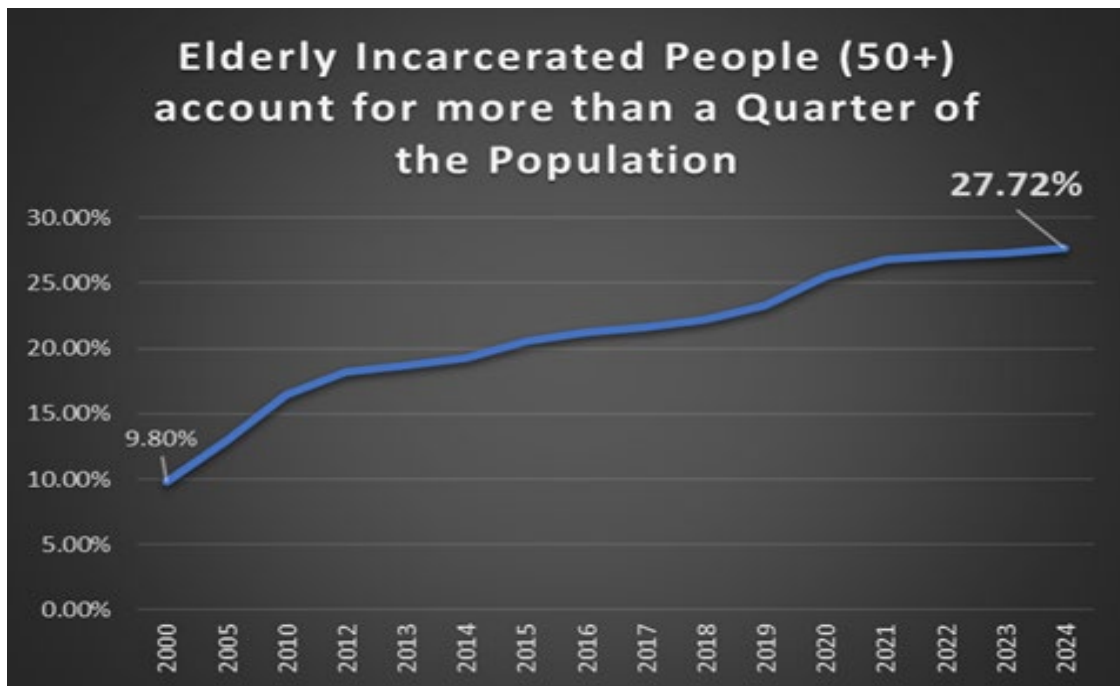
The department continues to support its female population with specialized services at SCIs Cambridge Springs and Muncy, including trauma-informed therapeutic communities, Doula programs – serving 18 pregnant mothers in 2024, parenting support groups, and specialty vocational programming opportunities designed to return these women to the community ready to contribute to the workforce.

Aging Population:

As of December 31, 2024, there were 10,926 incarcerated persons (27.7%) over the age of 50 confined to our facilities, reflecting the continued aging trend of our population. This marks an increase of just over 300 individuals in this age category during 2024 and nearly 1,000 more since 2021. The 65 and older demographic is also expanding, now representing 6.58% of the population (2,587 individuals compared to 2.8% (1,418) a decade ago and just 0.9% (317) at the turn of the century.

As the incarcerated population continues to age, the demand for onsite infirmary care, hospice care, chronic care, medications (at an average 49.6% higher cost), and specialty medical care outside our facilities continues to rise. This results in higher medical costs and increased overtime expenditures for the staff accompanying individuals to community health care appointments and hospitalizations. Likewise, the department has experienced an increased need for internal specialty housing services, with roughly 431 incarcerated persons requiring housing in skilled, personal, and memory care units at SCIs Laurel Highlands, Muncy, Rockview, and Waymart.

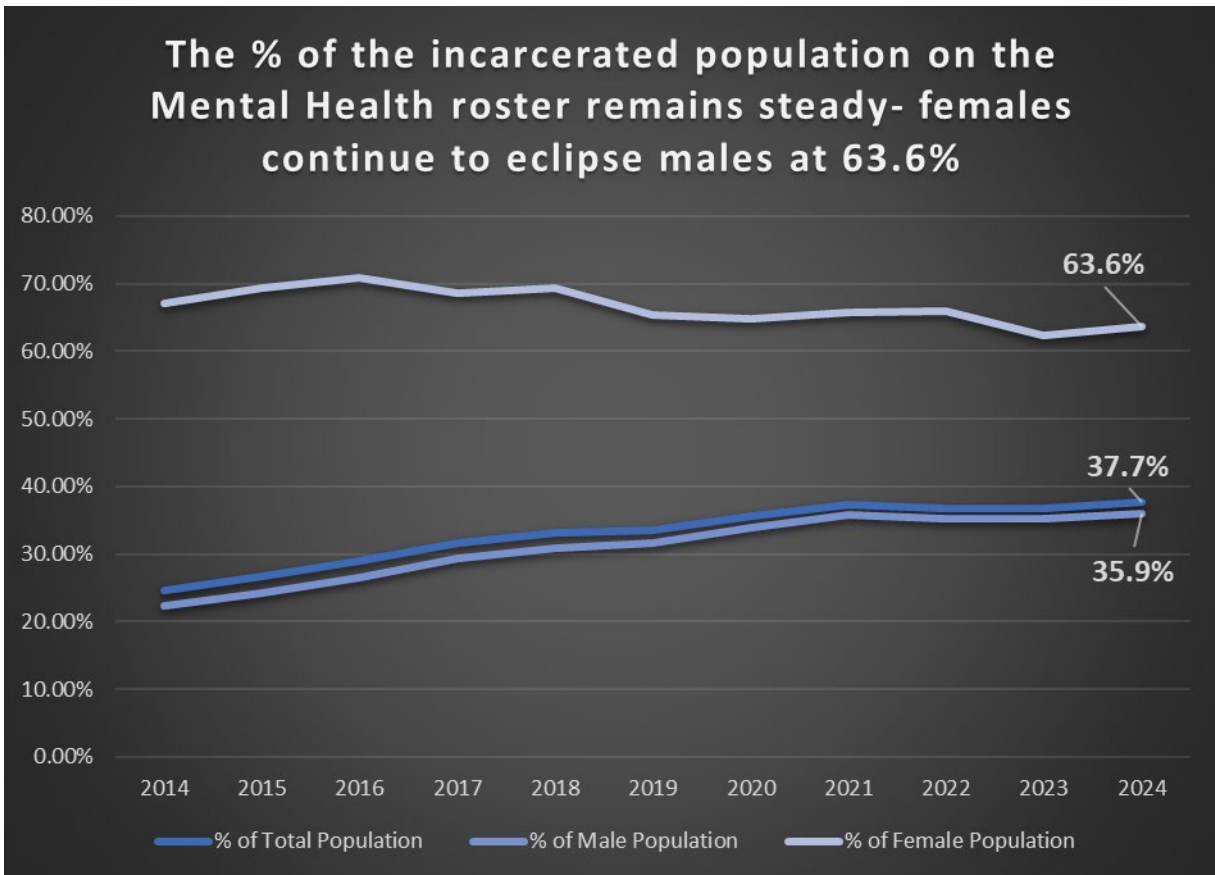
At present, the department has 165 male skilled care beds; however, routinely accommodates nearly 100 individuals in need of such a bed within infirmaries while awaiting availability. To keep pace with the needs of this elderly demographic, the department began efforts in 2024 to add 60 skilled care beds at SCI Waymart, anticipating their opening in 2025. Additionally, while 12 beds are allocated to care for those with severe memory issues, there are roughly 175 individuals diagnosed with dementia and neuro-cognitive disorders who could benefit from this specialized housing.



The aging incarcerated population appears to be related to longer sentences, with 36.4% of individuals currently serving a minimum sentence of ten years or more, compared to 26.2% in 2014. At the same time, the average age of a new commitment has risen from 34.3 to 38.0, while the healthier under 30 population has nearly halved, dropping from 30.2% to 15.7% during the last decade.

Mental Health Needs:

Approximately 37.7% of the institutional population is being treated for a mental illness, with approximately 7.5% diagnosed with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI). Among male individuals, 35.9% are receiving mental health treatment, and 7.1% have an SMI diagnosis. Among female individuals, 63.6% are receiving mental health treatment, and 14.7% have an SMI diagnosis.



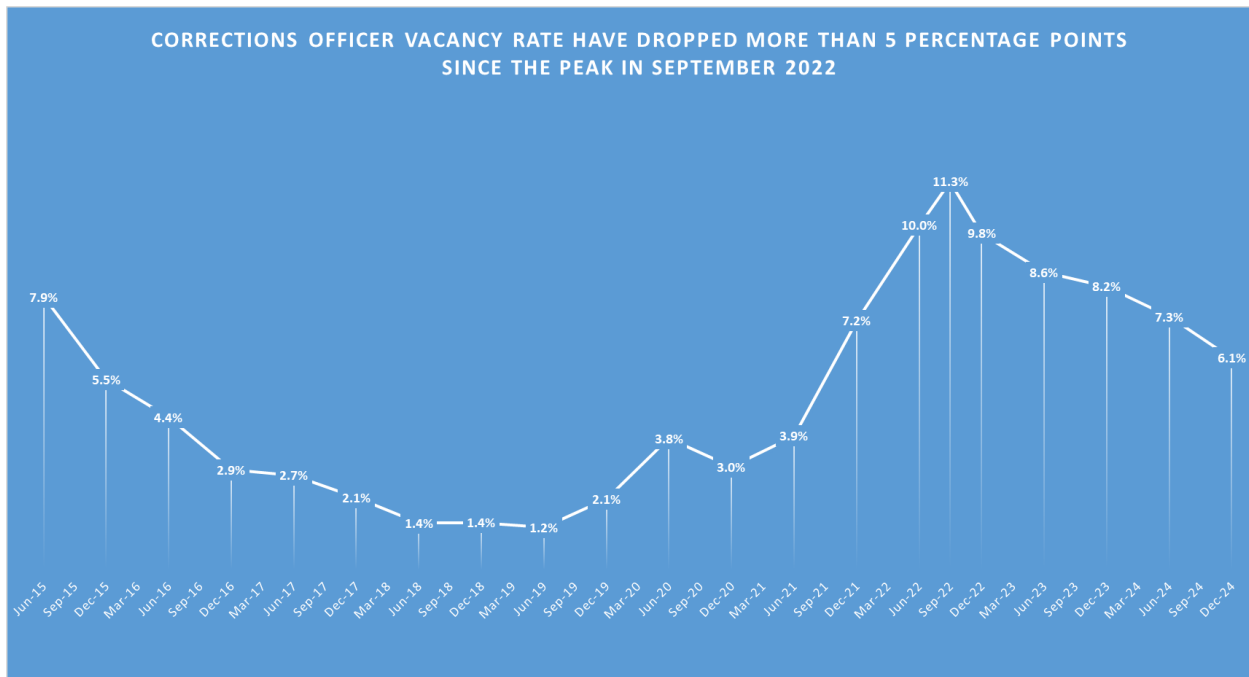
Staffing:

Under Secretary Harry’s leadership, the department continues to make significant progress on the staffing front. While staffing deficits exist across various classifications, the most significant budgetary impact stems from vacancies within the corrections officer classification. Though less substantial in comparison, nursing vacancies also generate overtime and contribute to turnover within that classification.

With the support of the Shapiro Administration, helping to facilitate out-of-state recruitment and hiring corrections officers under the age of 21, the department’s Recruitment and Retention (R&R) team and human resource staff have combined to reduce the corrections officer vacancy rate from 9.8% at the

start of his term in January 2023, to 4.8% by the end of January 2025. While 25.3% of new corrections officers leave within the first nine months, only 4.7% of those under the age of 21 left during the same time period. Likewise, nursing vacancy rates also dropped from 15.2% in January 2023 to 10.8% by the end of January 2025, despite competing with external employers who may offer greater incentives.

The R&R team engaged with the public at over 750 events (including high schools, colleges, military events, and job fairs), promoting the benefits of and opportunities for public service with the department. At the same time, the department’s human resource staff worked diligently to expedite onboarding, reducing the time to fill by another 10 days in 2024.



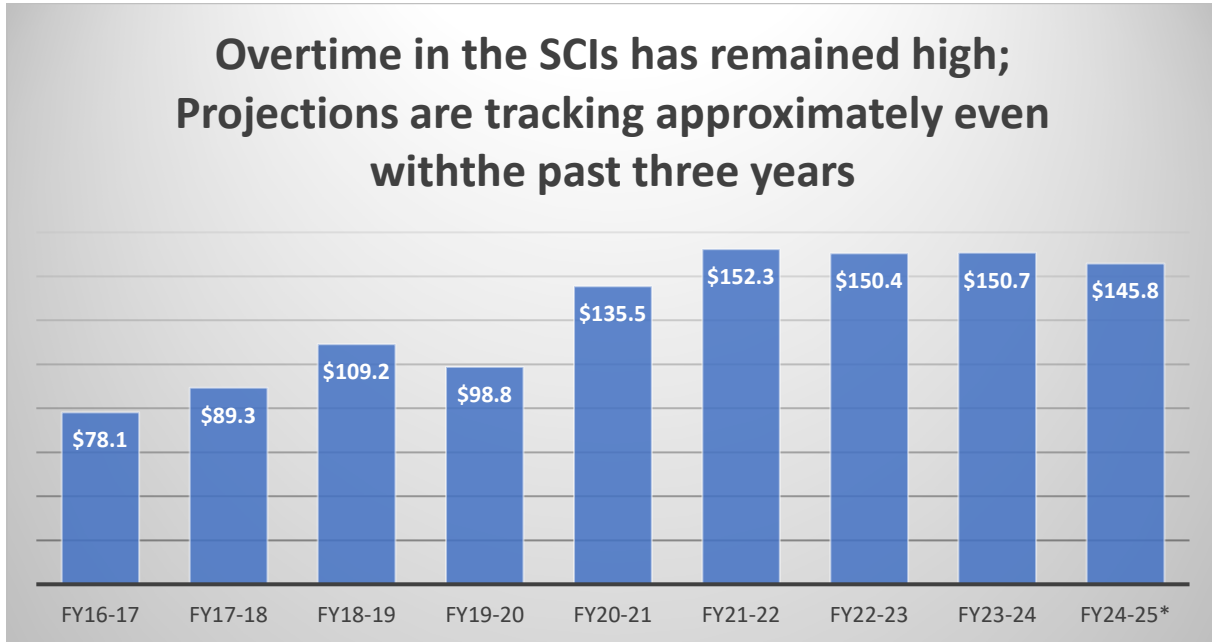
Overtime:

The department’s overtime budget has historically been scrutinized. Despite implementing recommendations from the Auditor General’s 2012 Special Performance Audit and the 2017 Legislative Budget and Finance Committee’s (LBFC’s) Overtime Study, overtime expenditures remain high. Because security staffing is required 24/7 year-round, it represents the highest driver, with nearly 93% of all overtime expenditures allocated to this function. Overtime represented roughly 12.2% of all security hours worked between FY2019-20 and FY2023-24. This is consistent with trends observed in the last two years of the 2017 LBFC study, where overtime represented 12.5% of security hours worked in FY2014-15 and 11.7% of security hours worked in FY2015-16. The LBFC report attributed this reliance on overtime to vacancies associated with a 2014 hiring freeze and understaffing linked to the implementation of mental health settlement programs.

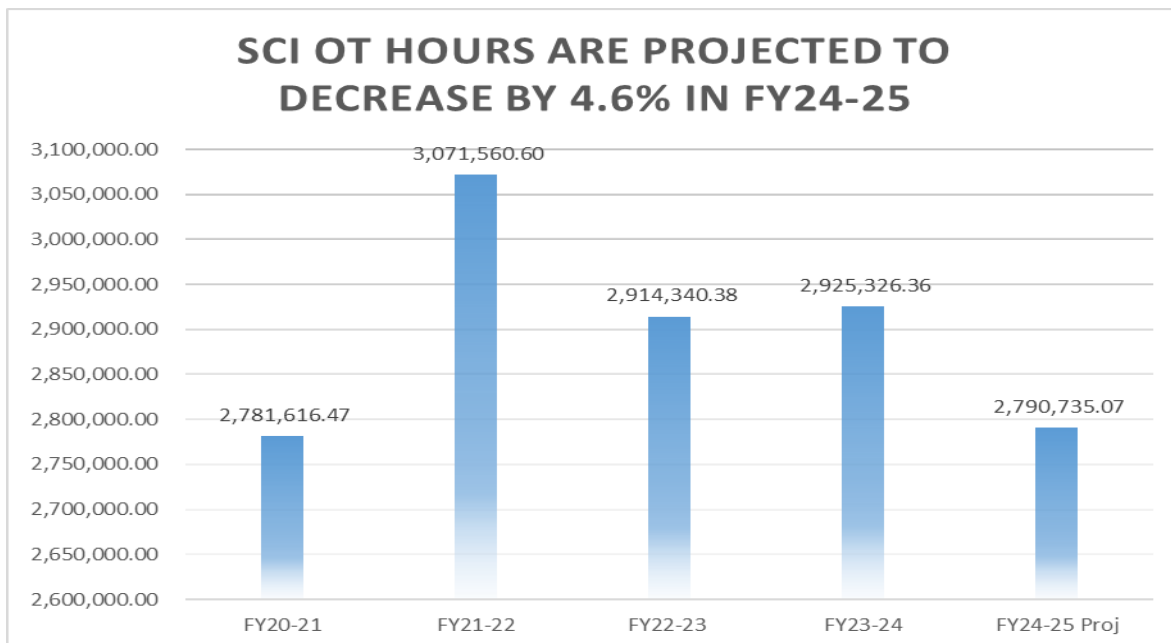
Despite the department’s temporary closure of housing units, overtime remains necessary at a high rate relative to overall security hours worked. With vacancy rates mirroring those at the conclusion of the

LBFC study, overtime needs are expected to persist until such time that vacancy rates drop to the optimal range of 2% or less.

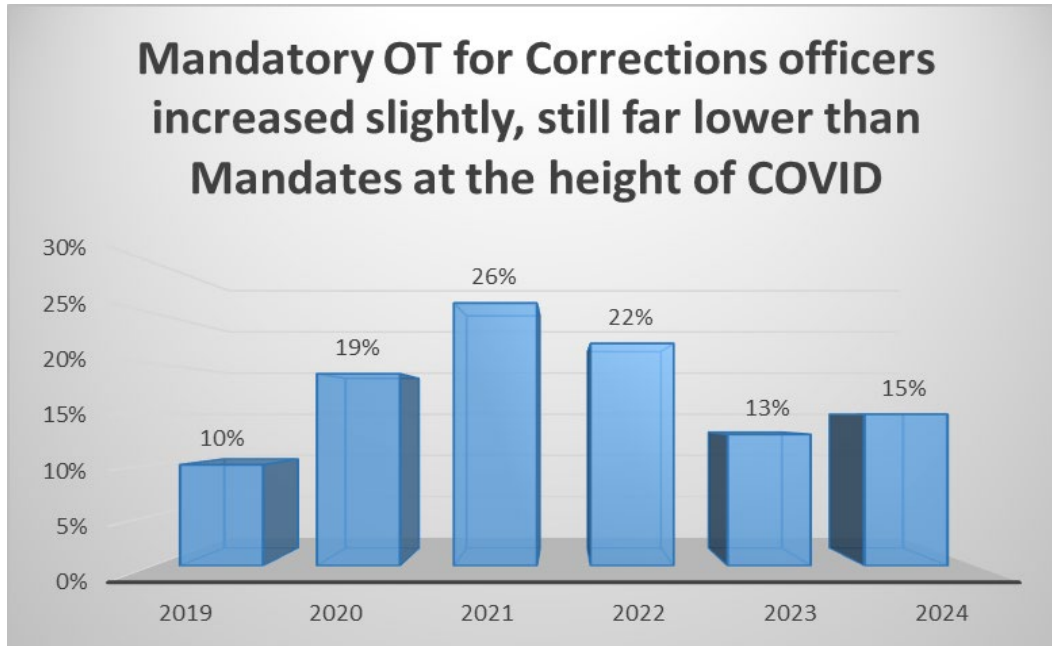
Overtime projections for the SCI fund for FY2024-25 is \$145.8M, only slightly exceeding the budgeted \$142.6M.



While total SCI overtime hours are projected to decrease by approximately 134,000 hours, the average overtime cost per hour rose by 3.24% from \$51.25 in FY2023-24 to \$53.19 in FY2024-25, highlighting the ongoing challenge of reducing overall overtime expenditures.



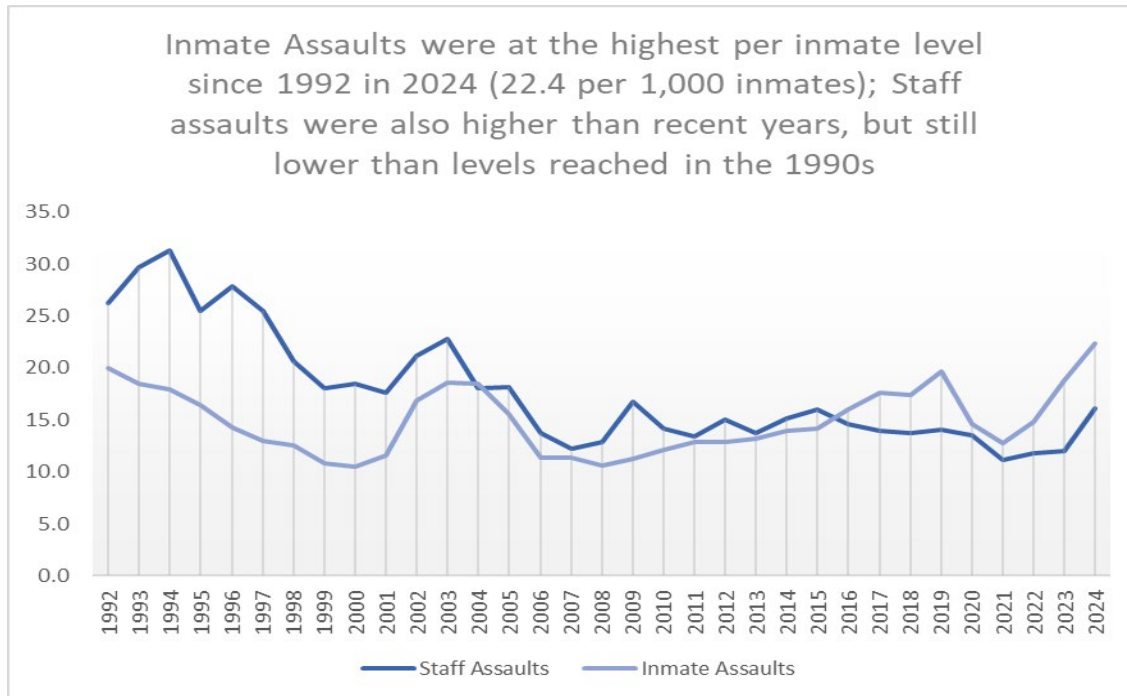
Mandatory overtime increased slightly to 15% in the past year. The department's goal is to hold mandatory overtime to 10% or less of the total overtime hours worked.



Prison Violence:

In 2024, violent incidents increased by 21.6%, totaling 2,617 incidents. While this remains below the pre-pandemic spike in 2019, the overall rate of violence per 1,000 incarcerated individuals has risen due to a smaller incarcerated person population.

The incarcerated person-on-staff assault rate climbed to 16.1 per 1,000 individuals, up from 12.5 in 2023 and 14.2 in 2019. Similarly, the incarcerated person-on-incarcerated person assault rate increased to 22.4, exceeding 19.5 in 2023 and 19.8 in 2019. Additionally, the rate of individuals found guilty of incarcerated person-on-incarcerated person fighting misconducts reached 52.3, significantly higher than 43.9 in 2023 and 46.3 in 2019. This rise in violence culminated in four incarcerated person-on-incarcerated person homicides in 2024.



To address the rising trend in violence, the department formed a Violence Reduction Task Force in October 2024. The task force takes a comprehensive approach to reducing violence and has formed subcommittees to focus on key areas, including data categorization/collection, incarcerated person-on-incarcerated person violence, incarcerated person-on-staff violence, staff-on-staff violence, and staff-on-incarcerated person improper uses of force.

The department also participated in a recently concluded seven-state violence study, which identified gang-affiliated activities by members of Security Threat Groups (STGs) as the primary driver of prison violence. Pennsylvania’s report identified five main triggers for violence: disrespect, cellmate incompatibility, strong arming/preying on weaker individuals, illicit markets/debts, and conviction of a sexual offense.

In addition to the creation of the taskforce, the department continues to utilize its Violence Reduction Initiative (VRI) protocol and has deployed special teams to conduct three facility searches in response to violence. Additionally, a successful pilot program replaced incarcerated person padlocks with a lighter, less dangerous version to reduce potential weapons. Based on its success, this initiative will be expanded across more facilities.

To further enhance violence prevention efforts, the department has introduced DEESCALATE training for staff, equipping them with additional tools to verbally deescalate confrontations with incarcerated persons. A new pilot program is also underway to front-load violence prevention programming for individuals identified as violence-prone, aiming to proactively reduce violent incidents.

Visitation:

Maintenance of family and community ties stabilizes an incarcerated individual’s institutional adjustment and improves the odds of successful reentry. A recent department analysis demonstrated that receiving **any** type of visit lowered the odds of recidivism, with those receiving video visits slightly outperforming those who received in-person visits. The department is proud to announce that it yet again increased connection between the incarcerated and their loved ones. The number of in-person contact visits facilitated in 2024 rose by 13.5% and video visits increased by 3.6%. Because of video visits, the incarcerated population is now visited five times more frequently per year.

Visit Type	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	OTY % Change
Video Visits Conducted		476,495	787,493	862,637	893,304	4%
In-Person Visits Conducted	206,758	35,024	64,985	81,949	93,033	14%
Total Visits Conducted	206,758	511,519	852,478	944,586	986,337	4%
Avg # of Visits/Incarcerated Person	4.5	13.7	22.4	24.3	25.0	3%

Focusing on Reentry at the Time of Entry:

The Bureau of Reentry Coordination provides a focused approach to ensuring that upon entry to our system, incarcerated persons are provided with needs-based tools to achieve parole and succeed in the community. Efforts are focused in the areas of educational services, treatment programming, and reentry supportive services that assist the incarcerated population during their stay with the department and beyond.

The Division of Correctional Education continues to prepare its students for reentry by achieving a GED pass rate of 84%, eclipsing the national pass rate of 73%. In 2024, 1,017 incarcerated persons earned their GED or Commonwealth Secondary Diploma. Additionally, the department partners with ten higher education institutions where incarcerated students earned 52 degrees in 2024, with Restorative Justice as the major course of study.

Corrections research clearly shows that reducing recidivism is contingent upon accurate identification of the risk to reoffend and addressing the needs related to that risk. The Division of Treatment Services utilizes the STRONG-R risk assessment, an innovative tool designed to more accurately assess and target programming needs during incarceration. This tool also minimizes human error and addresses the shortcomings of previous tools, targeting a more precise evaluation across all segments of our population. First deployed in December 2022, the STRONG-R assessment has been used to assess, over 131,000 individuals as of January 2025.

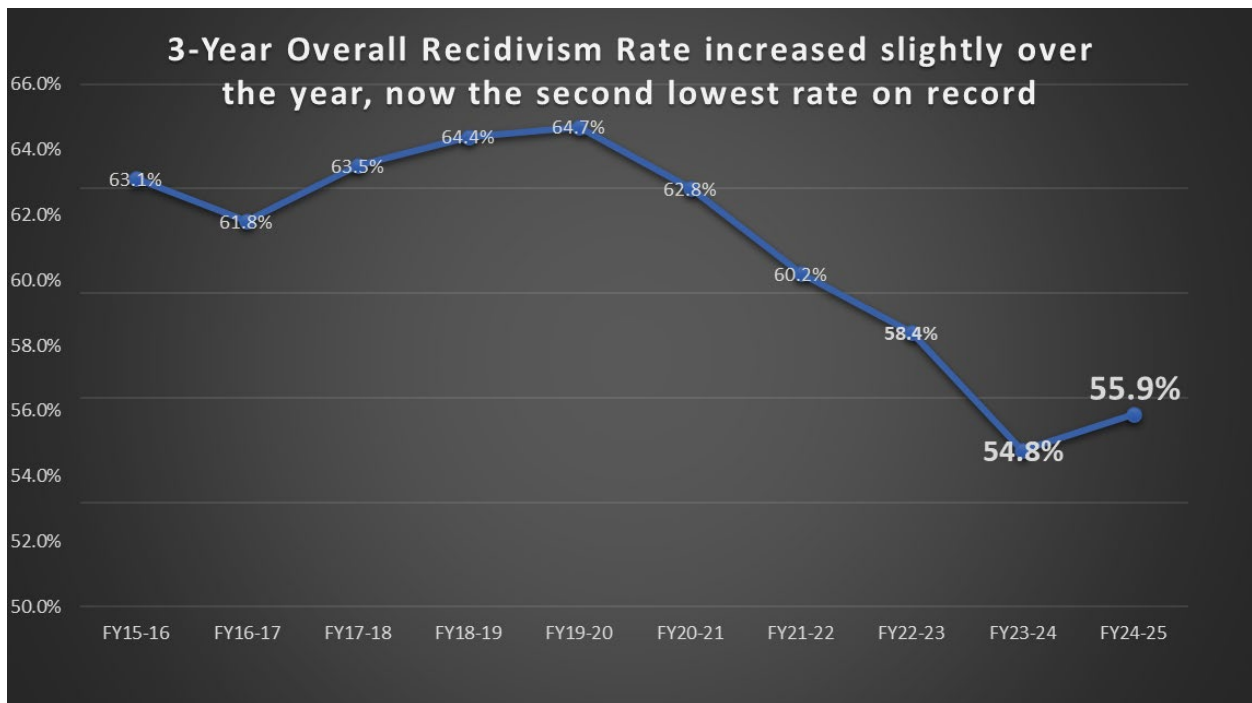
The Bureau of Community Corrections (BCC) provides programming and residential services to those participating in the SDTP program and also affords temporary housing to those transitioning into the community on parole supervision. BCC assists reentrants with job searches, housing placement, and social service connections to meet their needs.

Meaningful employment that affords a reentrant the income necessary to sustain themselves is essential to reducing recidivism and offering hope that one can thrive without resorting to criminal activity. The department's Workforce Development Specialist continues to cultivate relationships with "second chance employers" by educating employers on the benefits of hiring reentrants, skills acquired through the department's vocational programs, and expanding the prison to work pipeline. The department is an active participant in the Commonwealth's HIRE committee to develop employment opportunities for our reentrants. During 2024, these efforts included expanding a partnership with the Philadelphia CareerLink to provide onsite services in the Philadelphia area community corrections sites, engaging with approximately 400 reentrants. The success of this effort will lead to expansion of the program to the Pittsburgh area community corrections sites in 2025. Likewise, partnerships with Alliance Salons, ABC Construction, and Aramark continue to provide employment opportunities for reentrants.

A segment of our population is ultimately categorized as "Hard-to-Place" (HTP) in community settings because of their unique circumstances, generally involving complexities in their medical and behavioral health needs, minimal social supports, and housing challenges. The department's HTP Coordinator partners with the DHS and the Department of Aging to coordinate reentry planning for these individuals. During 2024, 196 individuals required the assistance of the HTP coordinator, representing an increase of 12% over 2023. This rising trend underscores the growing need for these critical services, particularly as an increasing number of aging individuals serve longer sentences. However, advancing legislation (House Bill 282) to implement the Commonwealth's recently approved Section 1115 demonstration waiver aims to support targeted segments of the HTP population and may help address these needs.

Recidivism and Desistance:

The latest three-year recidivism rate is 55.9%. One-year recidivism and six-month recidivism rates are 33.9% and 20.3%, respectively.

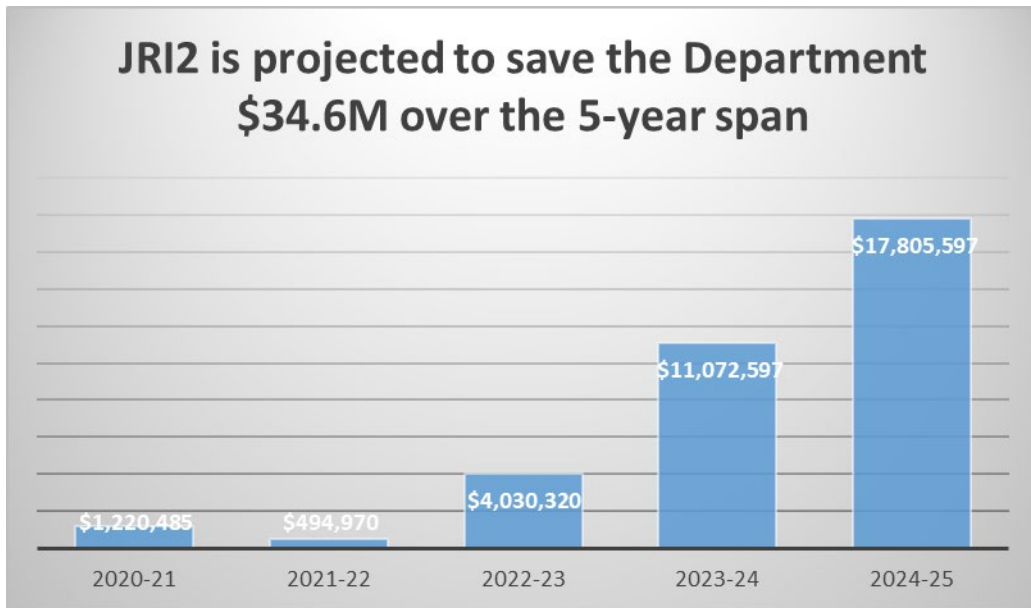


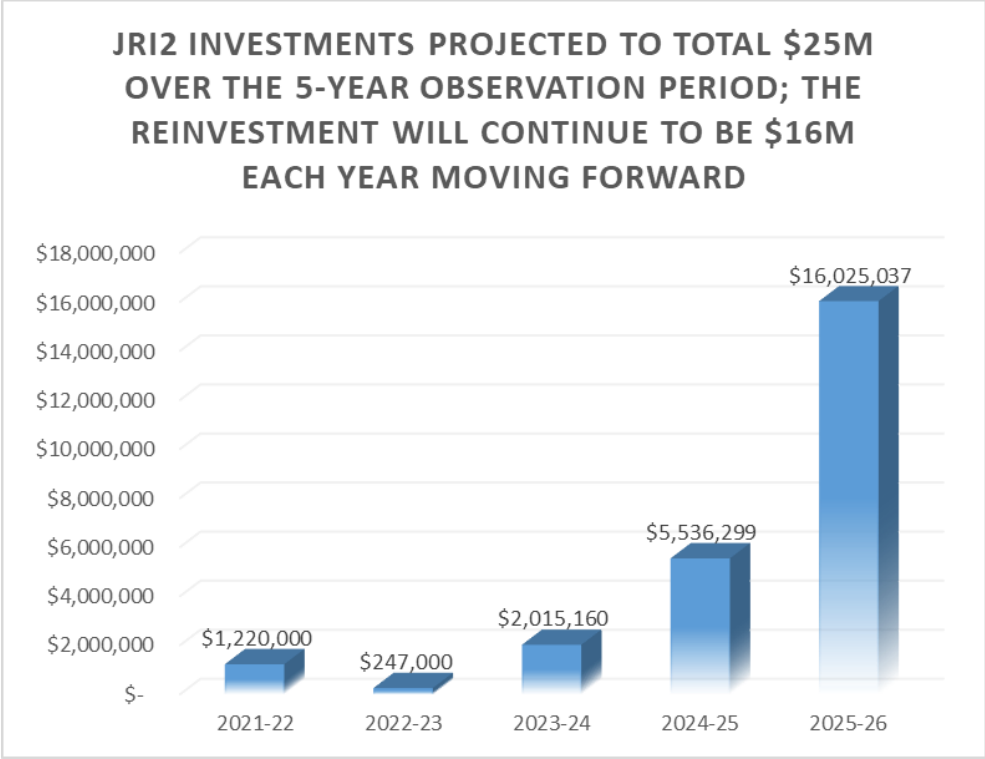
Although recidivism is a straightforward metric, it does not fully capture the department's success. Therefore, it is also important to measure desistance, or the process by which an individual slows down or stops offending over time. Desistance is measured by three factors, **Deceleration** (slowing the frequency of offense), **De-escalation** (reducing the severity of offenses), and **Cessation** (completely stopping criminal behavior).

Reducing future criminal behavior is at the core of the department's mission. To advance this goal, the Office of Reentry and Bureau of Planning and Research launched the agency-wide Recidivism and Desistance Initiative in January 2025, also known as "10/2030." This initiative aims to reduce recidivism by ten percentage points by 2030. It also recognizes SCIs, CCCs, and Parole District Offices that exceed their semi-annual and annual recidivism and desistance goals.

Justice Reinvestment (JRI2):

JRI2 made fundamental shifts in sentencing, diversionary placements, and parole supervision, generating savings that are reinvested into our communities. The placement of individuals in Short Sentence Parole (SSP) and SDTP programs has translated into both enhanced public safety and reduced incarceration costs. The chart below reviews savings and projections from FY2020-21 through FY2024-25, which is the last year for anticipated JRI savings.





Focusing on the Future:

The department was one of three agencies to participate in a new pilot project known as the Resource Evaluation and Mission Alignment Project or REMAP. REMAP is a data-driven initiative designed to evaluate programs for effectiveness and alignment with statutory mandates, strategic goals, and the Department’s mission, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used as effectively as possible.

The REMAP process informed the Administration’s recommendation to close two state correctional institutions and two community corrections centers, which, if implemented, will potentially result in annual cost savings of over \$100 million. The proposed closures will redistribute resources to meet the department’s operational needs and support the rehabilitative needs of the incarcerated population, all while ensuring the safety of staff, individuals in custody, and communities.

Final Remarks:

In keeping with the Shapiro Administration’s direction to “get stuff done” and the leadership of Secretary Dr. Laurel Harry, the department continues to set the standard for transforming criminal justice in both the Commonwealth and in the nation. While challenges remain, the department is actively working to tackle those challenges head-on.

Our dedicated staff make the personal sacrifices necessary to guarantee public safety and creatively strategize innovative ways to move beyond the “lock them up and throw away the key” solutions that overwhelmed our system in the early part of this century. The drops and stabilization in the incarcerated

population serve as clear indicators of the success of the department's programming, reentry, and supervision efforts over the last decade.

Moving forward into FY2025-26, the department strives to focus on improving its efficiencies while maintaining the same level of excellence. As we move beyond historic vacancy rates and stabilizing the workforce, we can renew our focus on the fundamentals of improving safety for our staff and the residents of this Commonwealth, while providing our incarcerated persons and reentrants with the tools and opportunities to thrive when they return to Pennsylvania's communities.