

Corrections

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION AND CORRECTIONS

Ohio's prison population increased by threefold since 1980 – mostly in response to tough on crime policies during the War on Drugs. Increased incarceration has not made Ohioans safer or our communities stronger. The state has one of the highest overdose rates in the nation, even though nearly 50,000 people are in prison. People with felonies on their records are blocked from good paying jobs by laws and administrative rules. These barriers have cost the state \$3.4 billion in lost wages.¹ Policies that reduce the prison population could redirect resources towards programs that help reduce crime like treatment, counseling, public education and more.

The budget for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (DRC) will be \$3.9 billion over the fiscal year 2020-21 budget period. This is an increase of \$255.8 million, 7% over the prior two-year budget. Slightly more than 96% of the DRC budget is from the General Revenue Fund (GRF), and so is the budget increase.

Ohio's prisons held 49,031 inmates in June of 2019; at least 11,000 over capacity, according to the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio.² The 132nd General Assembly considered 137 bills – 12% of all bills introduced – that contained provisions to send more people to prison or jail. Of those 137 bills, 22 became law.³

DRC appropriations are expected to pay for approximately 12,462 full-time equivalent staff, which includes the addition of 232 FTE staff over the next two years.⁴ After dropping to a low of 6,279 corrections officers in 2013, an inmate/CO ratio of 7.2:1, that number has inched up to 6,618 in 2019 for a ratio of 6.7:1.⁵ Barring a dramatic reduction in the state's prison population, which is not a stated priority of Ohio policymakers, increasing staffing is necessary to ensure a safer prison system.

More than two-thirds of the increase (\$160 million) goes to institutional operations, the majority of which pays for wages, benefits and related costs. In addition, education services will keep up with inflation with a 4.6% increase (inflation is projected to be 4.5% over the biennium) and Institution Medical Services increases modestly by \$31 million (6.2%).

The DRC budget moves the state's criminal justice system in the right direction by increasing funding for alternatives to incarceration, highlighted below:

FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS, distributed as grants to counties for facilities to divert people from prisons, will get an additional \$10.8 million, (up 6.9% over current funding). The budget earmarks approximately \$3 million each year to support staff retention at these residential facilities. In 2018, the 2,680 beds in 18 facilities were used in the diversion of approximately 7,700 people.

COMMUNITY NONRESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS will get a boost of \$16.4 million (15.6%) that will go to counties to operate supervision and community sanctions programming in lieu of prison or jail for those convicted of felony offenses.

PAROLE AND COMMUNITY OPERATIONS will get a boost of \$10 million (6.1%) to support release and community supervision services, community sanctions assistance and victim services, and the Adult Parole Authority. The

Senate added an earmark of \$250,000 in each fiscal year to provide grants to at least one nonprofit reentry program that meets certain criteria, an addition that remains in the final budget.

HALFWAY HOUSES: Funding in the 2020-21 budget grows by \$11.7 million (8.8%) for halfway houses, which work with people released from state prisons, referred by courts of common pleas or sanctioned because of a parole violation, providing services like drug and alcohol treatment, electronic monitoring and job placement.

Overall, this biennial budget increases funding for DRC, a move toward meeting the needs of an overburdened system. In the long run, however, the goal should be to decrease the agency's budget as policy changes address the urgent problem of over-incarceration.⁶

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

The budget of the Department of Youth Services (DYS), which provides services for youth in the juvenile justice system, will be \$485.9 million over the 2020-21 budget period, up by \$35.9 million or 8% compared to the prior biennium. Virtually all of the DYS budget is from the GRF, and so is the budgetary increase. The budget includes approximately \$90 million per year to house 530 youth in Ohio's three large youth prisons; with additional costs, the total amount to house one young person in a youth prison for a year is over \$194,000. Most of the budget increase supports these facilities. Other increases including additional funding to community correctional facilities as well as to departmental personnel and administrative services.

The county subsidy for programming to divert youth from the correctional system is flat funded. For the five community-based alternatives to incarceration programs that serve youth, three programs (RECLAIM, Targeted RECLAIM, and the Behavioral Health and Juvenile Justice Initiative) were flat funded and two programs saw small increases (Competitive RECLAIM - \$1.1 million increase, Youth Services grant - \$400,000 increase).

The new, \$675 million fund for school wrap-around support for counselors, social workers, and other personnel (Student Wellness and Success Fund) is welcomed by advocates who believe this funding will help prevent youth from getting involved in the court system and slow the school to prison pipeline.

Deeper investment in community-based alternatives programs, including Targeted RECLAIM, the Behavioral Health and Juvenile Justice Initiative, and Competitive RECLAIM, would support effective treatment closer to home for youth.

At least \$1 million is needed to create a plan to begin collecting uniform data in Ohio's juvenile courts; currently, it is unknown how many young people are involved in the juvenile courts throughout the state. This data is necessary to direct focus and funding across agencies to help youth get and stay on a positive path before the juvenile court, with targeted mental health and substance abuse services, family supports, and stable housing.

Endnotes

1. Shields, Michael, "Wasted assets: The cost of excluding Ohioans with a record from work, Policy Matters Ohio, December 18, 2018 at <https://bit.ly/2Rfqukw>
2. Ingles, Jo, "New Report Says Lawmakers Are Contributing To Prison Overcrowding," Statehouse News Bureau, February 19, 2019 at <https://bit.ly/2nm4HtH>
3. Keeshin, Emma, "Why Are Our Prisons So Overcrowded?" Asks Lawmaker As He Votes For Sentence Enhancement Bill, American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, February 19, 2019 at <https://bit.ly/2lt7J6H>
4. Maggie West, Green Book for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, Ohio Legislative Service Commission, August, 2019 at <https://bit.ly/35jfJBh>
5. Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, Staffing reports at <https://drc.ohio.gov/reports/staffing>
6. "Principles for criminal justice reform," Policy Matters Ohio at <https://bit.ly/2o9LQTh> See also "Sentencing Reform through a stronger SB3", Policy Matters Ohio, May 13, 2019 at <https://bit.ly/2VW6qp3>