

PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

2020-2021

ANNUAL REPORT

September 2021

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“PPI is one of the most imaginative research groups illuminating the dark recesses of our carceral landscape”

-Pete Brook
Prison Photography

Executive Director's letter

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter, we're 18 months into a global pandemic that has infected one out of every three people in prison and killed more than 2,700 incarcerated people. When I wrote this letter for last year's annual report, I had hoped that more than a handful of states would embrace decarceration as a strategy to slow the spread of the virus, and I expected states to finally understand that the high density of correctional facilities made mass incarceration a threat to the health of incarcerated people, to correctional staff, and to the entire nation. When the vaccines were still in development, it was obvious that states should prioritize incarcerated people for vaccination and that they would need to ensure that staff wore masks and would accept the vaccine.

Unfortunately, despite the passage of time and the growing human cost, states are still largely failing to make the bold choices necessary, and much of our work has been calling out those failures. At the same time, some states have taken some positive actions — including steps towards minor decarceration — that need to be made permanent. This will be a long struggle, but I remain hopeful that the work we're doing in the midst of this crisis is laying the foundation for an end to mass incarceration in a post-pandemic world.

I co-founded this organization 20 years ago this week to take on a single hidden part of the criminal justice system's wide reach: the insidious practice of prison gerrymandering. That early work gave us the data and storytelling skills to provide the big picture of *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie*, and take on the greedy industry and sheriffs that thought it ok to charge children of incarcerated parents \$1/minute for a simple phone call.

Today, the Prison Policy Initiative exists to tell data-driven stories like these to make the moral case for ending mass incarceration. And as we witnessed again this year, our work is expanding the breadth and depth of support for decarceration and other state-level reforms. For example, we produced:

- The first national estimates of the extent to which the deplorable conditions inside of prisons and jails accelerated COVID-19 caseloads even outside of facility walls (page 7).
- Research showing that not only is pretrial reform and ending money bail the right thing to do, it also has no demonstrable effect on local crime rates (page 15).
- A 50-state report on the ways people in local jails are denied their right to vote, and policy strategies to increase ballot access (page 14).
- A report about the forty-three states that bar people with any felony conviction from being on a jury, essentially excluding 1 in 3 Black men (page 5).

The non-profit, non-partisan Prison Policy Initiative produces cutting edge research to expose the broader harm of mass incarceration, and then sparks advocacy campaigns to create a more just society.

In addition to laying the messaging groundwork for journalists and advocates across the country, this year our work has been instrumental in pushing forward reforms in states, including:

- Iowa responded to our advocacy work and lowered the cost of phone calls home from jails, saving families with incarcerated loved ones \$1 million per year (page 16).
- Connecticut and Illinois, became the 10th and 11th states to end the practice of prison gerrymandering by which the legislative districts that contain prisons are able to exert disproportionate influence over the legislative process. (Subsequent to the close of our fiscal year, Pennsylvania also committed to ending prison gerrymandering and Montana is poised to as well.) (page 18).

Our strategy during this year of national crisis was to produce as much of the data and analysis that we thought our movement needed and to do so as quickly and powerfully as we could. You all responded with unprecedented financial support.

Our mission is unchanged, but how we work — in scale, scope, and structure -- is now very different. When the pandemic struck, we were a staff of six working from a small office in Western Massachusetts. Today, we are a staff of 13 spread across three time zones. We've been able to recruit new senior staff to double the capacity of our Communications department, and add more staff to our research and prison gerrymandering teams. A one-time major gift allowed us to create a new Advocacy department to maximize the political impact of our publications and offer more direct research and messaging support to state and local advocates on the ground. And in September, one of the nation's leading experts on the exploitation of incarcerated people and their families will be joining our full-time staff to help us further expand our work in this area.

With this new support, comes a responsibility to properly steward this investment and resist the temptation to grow too fast. We're treating the design of our new positions and departments with the same care and methodical planning as we do with our research and advocacy work. We want to make sure that our new work meets the movement's needs, that we will meet your expectations for impact and efficiency, and is sustainable, so stay tuned for more.

All of the research, organizing, and advocacy successes highlighted in this annual report were possible because of our community of supporters who in a normal year give us the resources to continue our work and in this last extraordinary year, gave us the ability to think big and act even bigger. For that, I — and everyone in the movement who relies on our research — thank you.

Sincerely,



Peter Wagner
Executive Director
September 10, 2021

Who we are

The non-profit, non-partisan Prison Policy Initiative produces cutting edge research to expose the broader harm of mass incarceration, and then sparks advocacy campaigns to create a more just society.

The Prison Policy Initiative was founded in 2001 to document and publicize how mass incarceration undermines our national welfare. Our growing team of interdisciplinary researchers and organizers, along with student interns and volunteers, shapes national reform campaigns from our remote workspaces and our headquarters in western Massachusetts.

Staff

- Naila Awan, *Director of Advocacy*
- Wanda Bertram, *Communications Strategist*
- Emile DeWeaver, *Senior Strategist, Advocacy*
- Andrea Fenster, *Staff Attorney*
- Tiana Herring, *Research Associate*
- Aleks Kajstura, *Legal Director*
- Jenny Landon, *Development & Communications Associate*
- Wendy Sawyer, *Research Director*
- Peter Wagner, *Executive Director*
- Leah Wang, *Research Analyst*
- Mike Wessler, *Communications Director*
- Emily Widra, *Senior Research Analyst*

Part-time staff

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- Bernadette Rabuy, *Senior Policy Analyst*

Student interns and volunteers

- Stephen Raher, *Volunteer network*
- Sheila Tipton, *Probono Counsel*

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- Bob Machuga, *Graphic Design*
- Jordan Miner, *Programming*
- Matt Mitchell, *Programming*
- Kevin Pyle, *Illustrations*

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- Alexi Jones, *Policy Analyst*
- Ginger Jackson-Gleich, *Policy Counsel*

*Organizations for identification purposes only.

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Pulling back the curtain on mass incarceration

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/national>

We develop powerful ways to help the public understand that mass incarceration is both unprecedented and counterproductive.

With creative research strategies, engaging graphics, and highly-readable reports, we give organizers, advocates, and policymakers the facts they need to push for the end of mass incarceration.

Slamming the Courthouse Door: 25 years of evidence for repealing the Prison Litigation Reform Act

Incarcerated people often face abusive, discriminatory, and unlawful conditions of confinement: so why aren't more of these experiences brought to court? Using data visualizations, this

report explains the impact of the Clinton-era Prison Litigation Reform Act, which for 25 years has blocked incarcerated people from bringing and winning federal civil rights lawsuits. Our analysis makes the case for Congress to repeal the Prison Litigation Reform Act.



John Pfaff
@JohnFPfaff

Excellent reminder from @PrisonPolicy today that while everyone has been yelling about the fairly-defunct 94 Crime Bill, the far more consequential Prison Litigation Reform Act has been quietly eviscerating prisoners' rights for 25 years now.

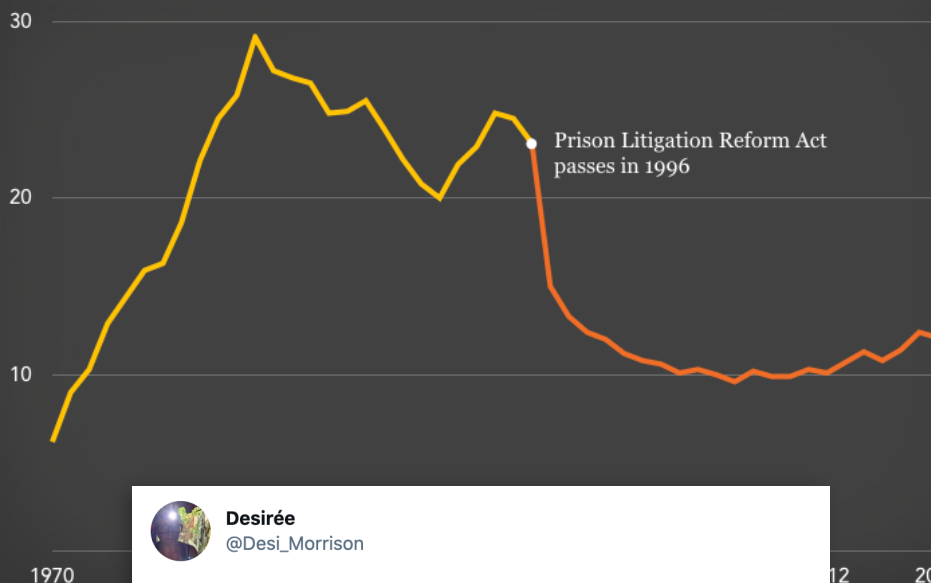


David Menschel
@davidminpdx

The Prison Litigation Reform Act, passed at the height of the incarceration boom of the 1990s, is one of the worst laws of the 20th century and is one of the main reasons prison conditions are so barbaric. Here's a great summary of a terrible law.

The Prison Litigation Reform Act slammed the courthouse door

Civil rights lawsuits filed per 1,000 incarcerated people, 1970-2018



Desirée
@Desi_Morrison

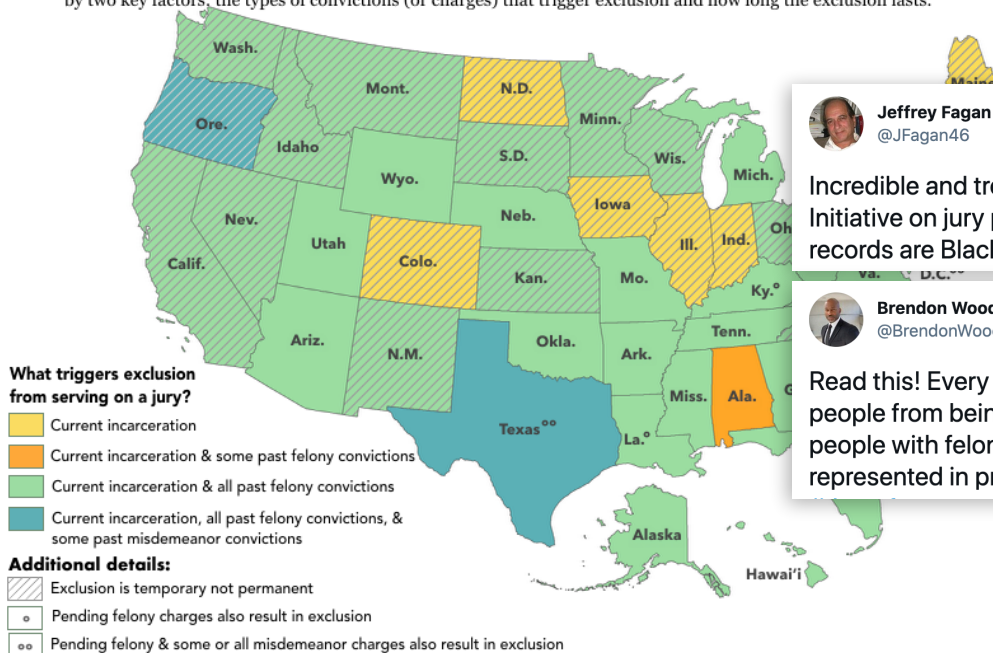
I had never heard of the PRLA before. Imagine having zero means to address your own mistreatment. You simply have to take it.

Rigging the jury: How each state reduces jury diversity by excluding people with criminal records

Our 50-state report reveals that forty-three states bar people with any felony conviction from being on a jury, essentially excluding 1 in 3 Black men. We explain how excluding people with criminal records makes juries less racially diverse, why jury diversity is essential to the fairness of a trial, and what must be done to fix this unfair system.

Every state has some form of jury exclusion

State laws barring people with criminal convictions—or pending charges—from serving on juries vary greatly by two key factors: the types of convictions (or charges) that trigger exclusion and how long the exclusion lasts.



Jeffrey Fagan @JFagan46
Incredible and troubling report from the Prison Policy Initiative on jury pool bias. Over 1/3 of people with felony records are Black and are ineligible from jury service.

Brendon Woods @BrendonWoodsPD
Read this! Every state uses criminal records to exclude people from being on juries. Nationally, more than 1/3 of people with felony records are Black. We are over represented in prisons & under represented on juries.

The promise — and peril — of Biden’s criminal justice platform

Biden’s criminal justice platform has some laudable goals, but its effectiveness will hinge on implementation. We analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of Biden’s pre-election plans for clemency, reentry support, drug courts, and juvenile justice reform.

Winnable criminal justice reforms for 2021

Each year, we develop a list of winnable, high-impact criminal justice reforms that are ripe for passage in state legislatures, and send the report to several hundred state legislators who have a track record of championing progressive changes to the justice system. Our 2021 report includes 27 policies, including specific ways to expand alternatives to policing and incarceration, reduce the footprint of probation and parole, and more.

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT ELECT

What a Biden administration could mean for criminal justice reform

By Candice Norwood

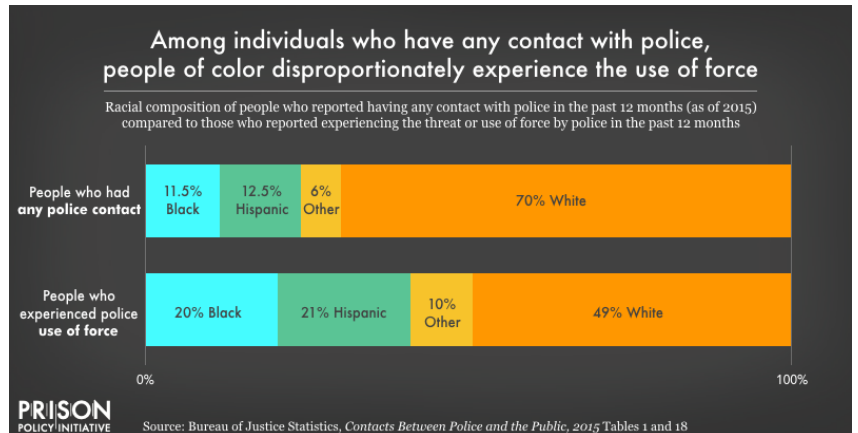
Politics Dec 14, 2020 12:42 PM EDT

Joe Biden will face pressure when he takes office as president of the Department of Justice. But while he'll...

Visualizing the racial disparities in mass incarceration

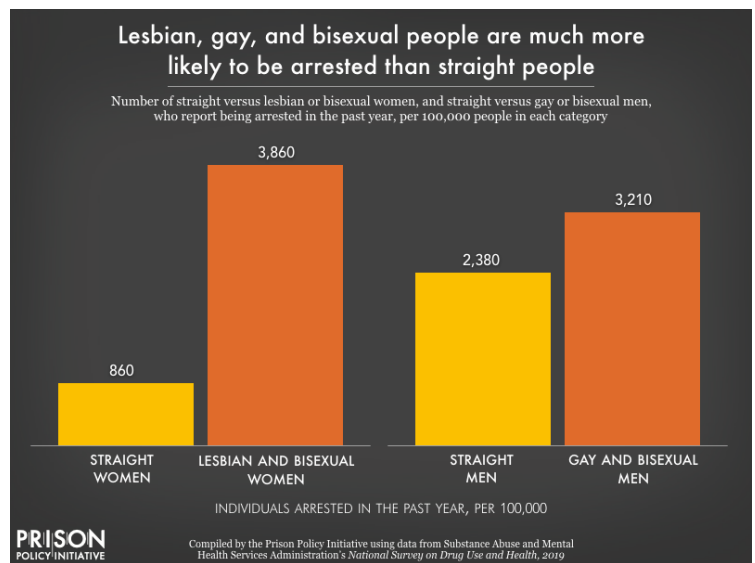
Racial inequality is systemic in every stage of the criminal justice system

— but racial disparity data is often frustratingly hard to locate. We compile the key data available into a series of easily digestible graphs, focused on juvenile justice, jails and pretrial detention, prisons and sentencing, and reentry. The series is designed to provide an accessible snapshot of the racial injustices in our criminal justice system. We also address a few frequently asked questions about the accuracy and availability of criminal justice race and ethnicity data.



Visualizing the unequal treatment of LGBTQ people in the criminal justice system

LGBTQ people are overrepresented at every stage of our criminal justice system, from juvenile justice to parole. In this briefing, we compile the existing research on LGBTQ involvement with the criminal justice system, and use a new national data set to provide the first national estimates for lesbian, gay, or bisexual arrest rates and community supervision rates.



Advocating for a humane response to COVID-19

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/virus>

We're using data and advocacy to push for reforms that help minimize the harms to incarcerated people, correctional staff, and their communities during the pandemic.

Even before the news broke of the first coronavirus death behind bars, we were sounding the alarm about the imminence of a human tragedy inside prisons and jails. Since the start of the pandemic, we've been publishing critical resources that advocates, community leaders, lawmakers, and reporters need to demand that elected officials put public health before punishment, and prioritize saving the lives of justice-involved people.

Mass Incarceration, COVID-19, and Community Spread

It was clear for months that correctional facilities were COVID-19 hotspots, but how much did these 'superspreader' conditions affect neighboring communities? Our research provides the first estimates of how mass incarceration impacted COVID-19 caseloads, both inside and outside of correctional facilities. Our findings reveal that over half a million cases of COVID-19 in the summer of 2020 — or roughly 13% of all cases — were attributable to mass incarceration. This report shows that conditions inside of prisons and jails accelerate the spread of COVID-19, and strengthens the call for lawmakers to depopulate prisons to stop further preventable deaths.

BuzzFeed News

The Bachelor Ring Gabbie Hanna Fake Vaccine Cards Keysto

How Do You Social Distance In Prison? You Don't. You Get COVID.

In crowded cells, where COVID is running rampant, appeals for clemency for thousands of prisoners have gone unanswered or flat-out rejected.

By **Melissa Segura**

Posted on January 21, 2021, at 6:29 p.m. ET

...ability to socially distance, COVID-19 cases have exploded, with at least 1 in 5 inmates infected. A new report from the Prison Policy Initiative found that crowded jails and prisons led to more than half a million additional COVID-19 cases nationwide — or about 1 in 8 of all new cases — over the summer, including cases both inside and outside correctional facilities because the virus spreads via prison workers to the world beyond bars. At least 2,144 inmates and 146 corrections staff have died from the disease, according

reason

CORONAVIRUS

Study: Prison COVID-19 Spread Led to Hundreds of Thousands of Community Infections

Thanks to poor management and massive rates of incarceration, people are dying both inside and outside prisons.

SCOTT SHACKFORD | 12.21.2020 3:00 PM

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Protesters March Against TUSCO Sheriff, Demand COVID-19 Jail Data

A group of about 50 protestors circled the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse and Sheriff's Office Saturday demanding the release of the data.

Ryan Phillips, Patch Staff [+](#)

Posted Sat, Dec 19, 2020 at 3:21 pm CT | Updated Sat, Dec 19, 2020 at 3:28 pm CT

Yancey focused a major part of her speech to the crowd of demonstrators on the safety of the jail's staff, saying they are put at risk every day to then go back out into the community and expose their families and others. The group also cited a recent report from the Prison Policy Initiative, claiming that incarceration contributed to 301 cases of COVID-19 in Tuscaloosa County from May 1 to Aug. 1.

Calling for incarcerated people to be prioritized in COVID-19 vaccination plans

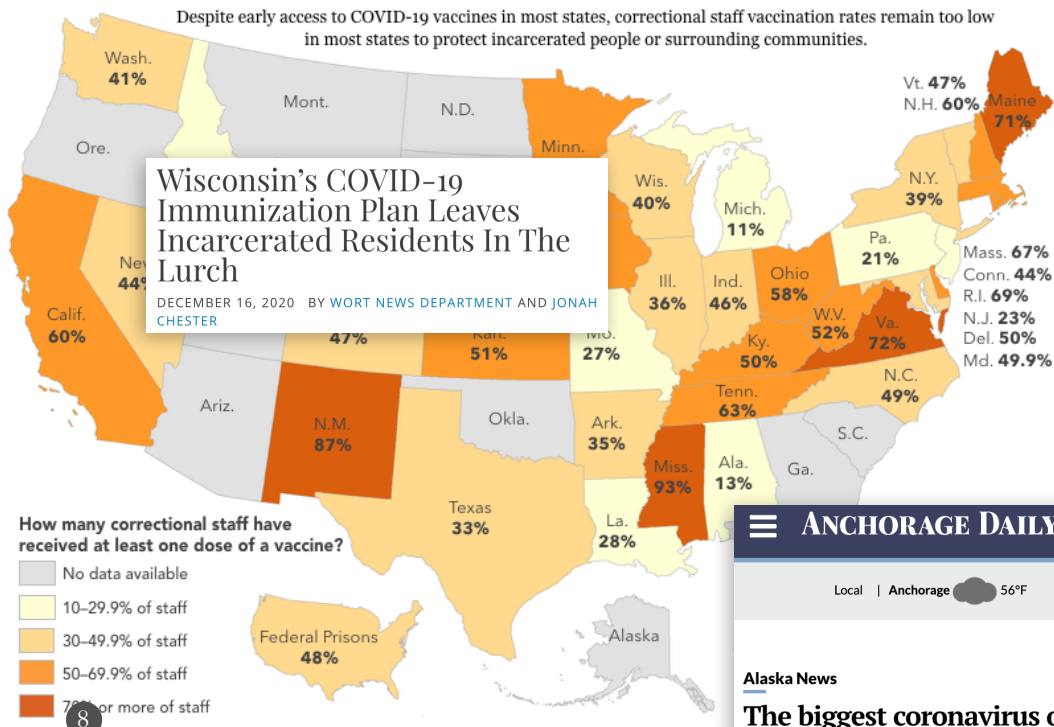
In early December 2020, when states were publicizing their vaccine plans, we asked — are incarcerated people being prioritized in the vaccine rollout? In a short report, we analyzed 48 states' vaccination plans and laid out when incarcerated people and correctional staff would be vaccinated. **This report was cited in investigative pieces** in Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida, Oklahoma, New York, Wisconsin, Alaska, Maryland, and Massachusetts, among others, as well as in national outlets like *The New York Times* and NPR.

Mapping the rollout of the vaccine to incarcerated people and corrections staff

We analyzed data from 38 state prison systems and found that in the spring of 2021, the majority of correctional officers were declining the COVID-19 vaccine, even as in many states incarcerated people weren't yet eligible. This analysis shows that it's simply not true that 'offering' the vaccine to correctional officers amounts to protecting incarcerated people or the public from the rapid spread of the virus in correctional facilities. Incarcerated people were not prioritized in the vaccine rollout, and so even as the vaccine became widely available to the general public, only 55% of incarcerated people were vaccinated, and several states had vaccination rates as low as 20%.

Less than half of prison staff are vaccinated in most states

Despite early access to COVID-19 vaccines in most states, correctional staff vaccination rates remain too low in most states to protect incarcerated people or surrounding communities.



St. Louis Public Radio | The World | 3:00 PM All Things Considered

Missouri Prison Staff Offered COVID Vaccine Soon, But Most Inmates Have To Wait

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When Will New York Vaccinate People in Prisons and Jails?

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Prisons' vaccine effort leaving Arkansas inmates out

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'A death sentence': US prisons could receive Covid vaccines last despite being hotspots

FLORIDA PHOENIX

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Frail, elderly, and frontline workers in FL are in Phase 1 for vaccines, unless they are in prisons

ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS

Local | Anchorage 56°F

Alaska News

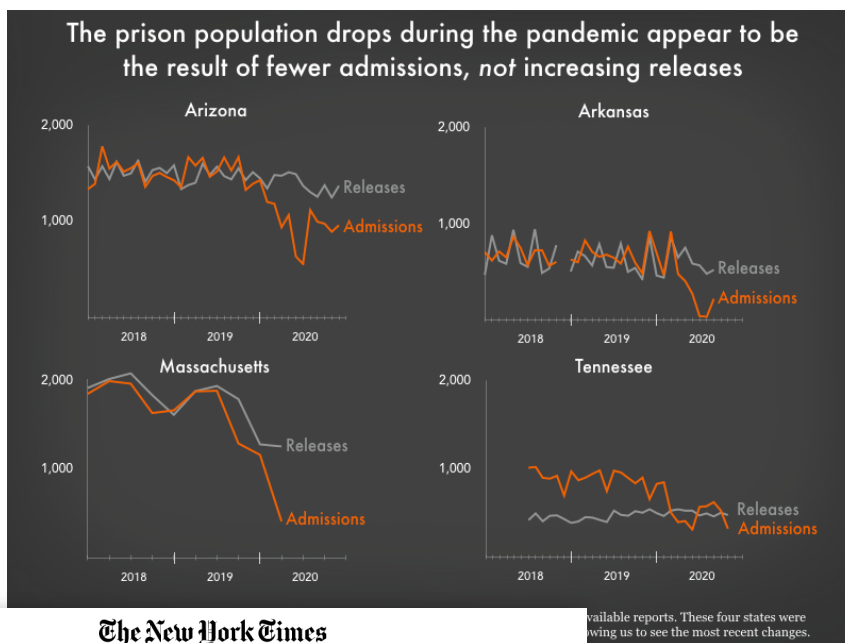
The biggest coronavirus outbreak in Alaska is unfolding in a prison. Will the incarcerated be prioritized for vaccines?

Just how overcrowded were prisons before the pandemic, and how overcrowded are they now?

Throughout the pandemic, state leaders often claimed to be doing everything they could to reduce prison populations to slow the spread of COVID-19. Our December 2020 briefing proved this simply wasn't true: Even at the height of the pandemic, 10 state prison systems and the federal Bureau of Prisons were operating at over 100% capacity.

How much have COVID-19 releases changed prison and jail populations?

Throughout the pandemic, we published regular updates explaining the population fluctuations in prisons and jails. Our most recent update shows that while prison populations declined by 17% by early 2021, very little of the drop was actually due to COVID-19 releases. The cause was reduced prison admissions — ironically leading to higher populations in local jails. We show that there were actually fewer people released from prison in 2020 than in 2019.



OPINION

America Is Letting the Coronavirus Rage Through Prisons

It's both a moral failure and a public health one.

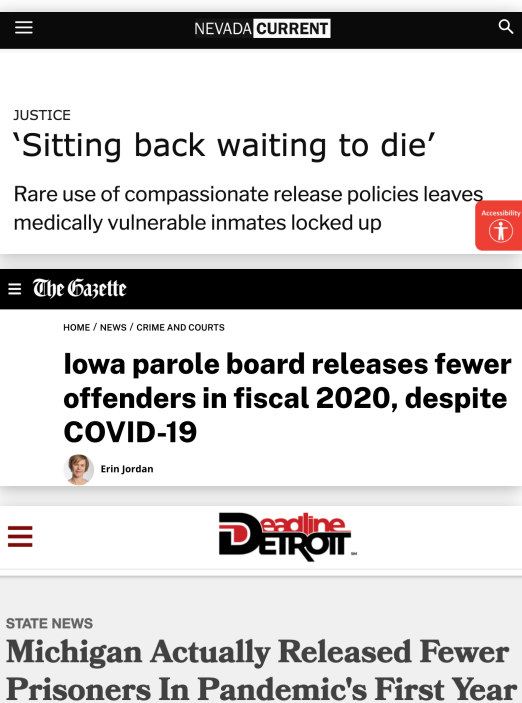
Nov. 21, 2020

While many jails saw a population drop during the first few months of the pandemic, the numbers of people being held in jails began climbing again over the summer, according to a [September briefing](#) by the Prison Policy Initiative, which analyzed 451 county jails. "In 88 counties, jail populations are higher now than they were before the pandemic" the briefing notes.

Parole boards approved fewer releases in 2020 than in 2019, despite the raging pandemic

Separate from releases generally, we also found that parole boards were especially restrictive during the pandemic. Anyone going before the parole board has already completed their court-ordered minimum sentence, so it would make sense for boards to operate with a presumption of release. Disturbingly, our research found that instead of releasing more people to the safety of their homes, parole boards in many states held fewer hearings and granted fewer approvals during the ongoing, deadly pandemic.

State	Number of parole hearings (percent change 2019-2020)	Percent approved (percent change 2019-2020)	Total approved for release (percent change 2019-2020)
Alabama	-37%	-36%	-59%
Connecticut	-27%	22%	-11%
Hawaii	-12%	18%	5%
Iowa	8%	-4%	4%
Michigan	-2%	-3%	-5%
Montana (2)	-7%	-2%	-9%
Nevada	-16%	3%	-13%
New Jersey	-2%	15%	13%
New York	-27%	0%	-27%
Oklahoma	24%	-42%	-28%
Pennsylvania (3)	-9%	-7%	-15%
South Carolina	-7%	-5%	-12%
South Dakota	-3%	14%	10%



Prisons shouldn't be charging medical co-pays — especially during a pandemic

Most state departments of correction eliminated medical co-pays for incarcerated people when the pandemic hit, but our survey in December of 2020 found that states were beginning to roll back those changes, even as the pandemic raged on. We singled out the states that reinstated co-pays for criticism, and reminded the public that unconscionably low wages in prisons make even \$2 or \$5 medical co-pays entirely too expensive.

Half of states fail to require mask use by correctional staff

The failure of states to meaningfully reduce prison populations in the face of the pandemic is disastrous enough — but in August of 2020, six months into the pandemic, state prison systems were failing at the most modest mitigation efforts imaginable: requiring correctional officers and incarcerated people to wear masks. Our analysis found that even as the pandemic peaked in communities across the country, half of states did not require mask use by correctional staff.

We're also continuing to expose the ways that incarceration destroys people's health — pandemic or no pandemic. Our recent work includes:

- A report calling attention to **the trauma caused by witnessing violence in prison**. Our work publicizes the findings of an academic study that found prisons are “exposure points” for extreme violence that undermines rehabilitation, reentry, and mental and physical health.
- Research briefings uncovering **the enormous damage caused by solitary confinement**, including data that shows any amount of time spent in solitary increases the risk of death after release from prison, including by suicide, homicide, and overdose.
- An analysis of why formerly incarcerated people — and the children of currently incarcerated people — are at especially high risk of **food insecurity** (especially during a pandemic).
- A research roundup explaining how **incarceration both creates and worsens symptoms of mental illness** — and those effects can last long after someone leaves the prison gates.

Measuring the impact of mass incarceration on women

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/women.html>

Even as the incarceration rate of men drops, women's incarceration rates have stagnated and are even rising in many places. We use data to expose the injustice of their experiences.

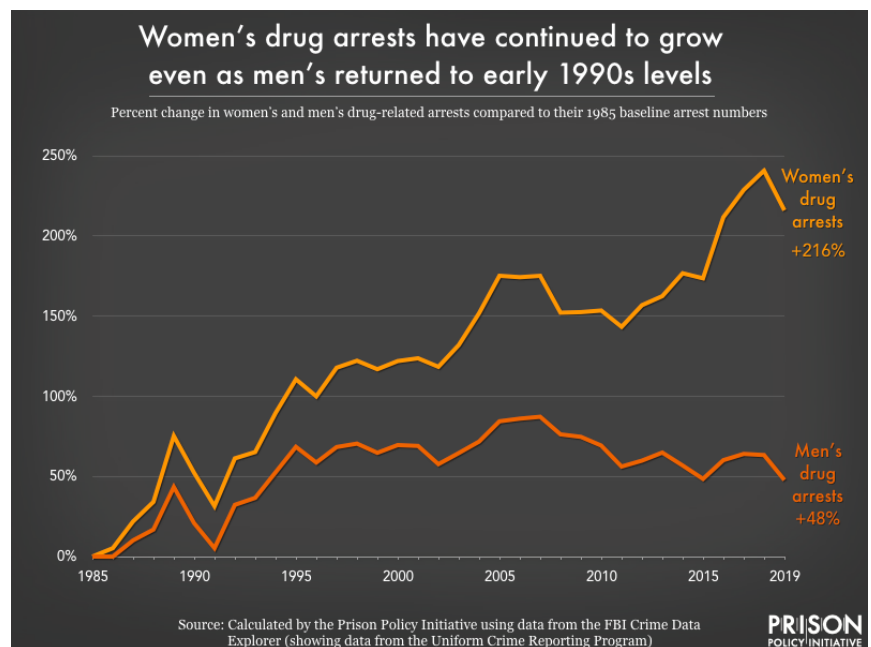
Women's incarceration has grown at **twice the pace of men's incarceration** in recent decades, and has disproportionately been located in local jails. Understanding the specific gendered experiences of incarcerated women is key to ending the enormous harms of mass incarceration.

Since you asked: What role does the war on drugs play in the rising incarceration of women?

From 2009 to 2018, the number of women in city and county jails increased by 23% — even as men's jail populations dropped. In this briefing, we find that one cause of the rising number of women in jail is the war on drugs: More than a quarter of women in jail are held for drug crimes, and over the last 35 years, drug related arrests increased nearly 216% for women.

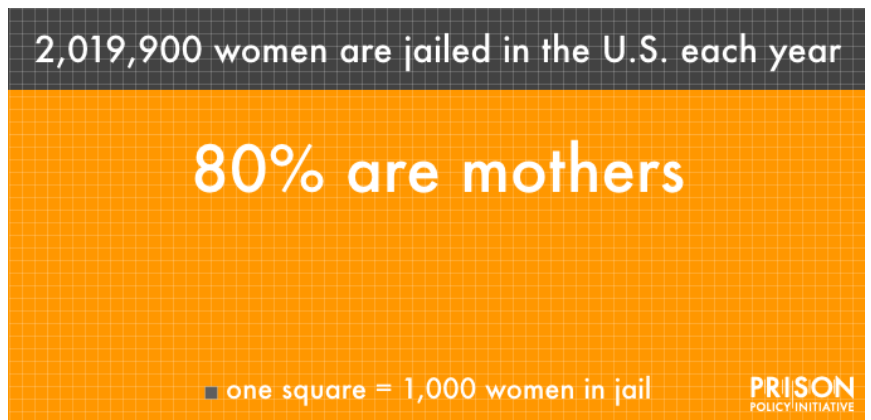
Decarceration — and support on the outside — is the answer, not therapy behind bars

Sometimes, we hear from people with less experience in criminal justice that incarceration will actually help certain groups of people — like women who use drugs or suffer from mental illness. We explain why building new prisons for women will not lead to better outcomes, even with gender-responsive and trauma-informed programming.



Prisons and jails will separate millions of mothers from their children in 2021

People behind bars are not nameless “offenders,” but beloved family members and friends whose presence — and absence — matters. To mark Mother’s Day, we published a research briefing reviewing the most important statistics about the incarceration of mothers. Key data includes: Over half of all women in U.S. prisons are mothers, as are 80% of women in jails; plus, an estimated 58,000 people every year are pregnant when they enter correctional facilities.



Shining a light on local jails

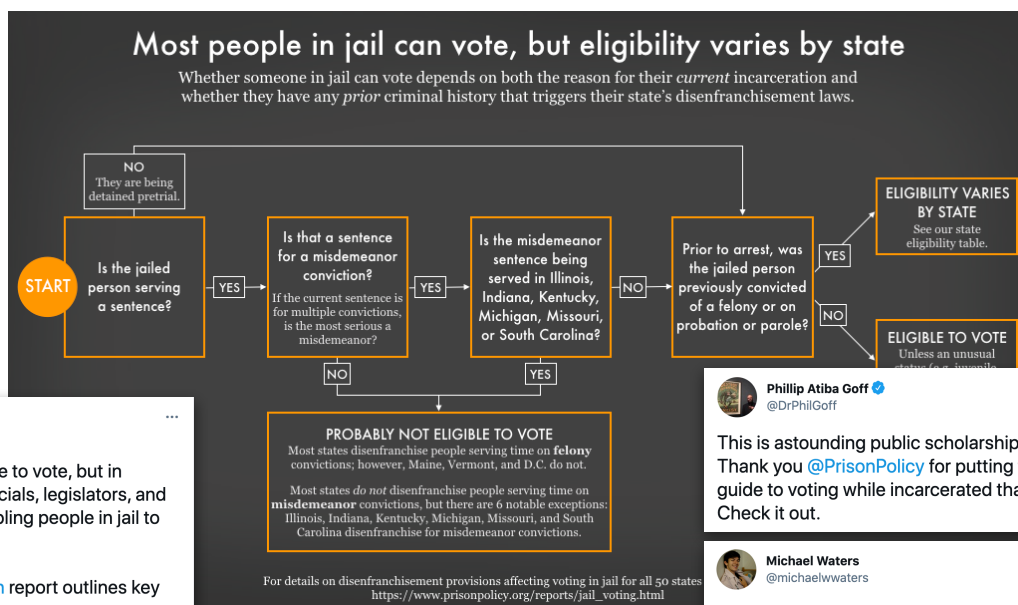
<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/jails.html>

One out of every three people who were behind bars last night was confined in a jail, two out of every three correctional facilities are jails, and almost every person (95%) released from a correctional facility today was released from a jail: We make sure that their stories make it into the national criminal justice dialogue.

Despite the harsh conditions and sprawling impact, jails are often overlooked when it comes to criminal justice reform. We're putting the need for jail reform directly into the national conversation.

Eligible, but excluded: A guide to removing the barriers to jail voting

Most of the 746,000 people in local jails are eligible to vote, but very few have access to the ballot. Many of these voters are held pre-trial because they are too poor to afford bail and have not legally lost the right to vote; nonetheless, they are de-facto disenfranchised by numerous issues that prevent them from casting a ballot. Before the November 2020 election, we teamed up with Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr.'s Rainbow PUSH Coalition to create a 50-state explainer on who is eligible to vote and how to enhance voting access for people in local jails.



Chesa Boudin 博微思 @chesaboudin

Most people in jail are legally eligible to vote, but in practice, they can't. Advocates, officials, legislators, and sheriffs all play a critical role in enabling people in jail to vote.

New @PrisonPolicy & @RPCoalition report outlines key strategies.

Phillip Atiba Goff @DrPhilGoff

This is astounding public scholarship and public service. Thank you @PrisonPolicy for putting together the best guide to voting while incarcerated that I've ever seen. Check it out.

Michael Waters @michaelwwaters

one of the cruelest facts from this report on voting from jail and prison:

in most states where you need an excuse to vote by mail, "I'm detained in jail" is not a recognized option

Technical difficulties: D.C. data shows how minor supervision violations contribute to excessive jailing

Nationally, 45% of annual prison admissions are due to violations of probation or parole, and yet these violations are often overlooked as policy targets for reducing incarcerated populations. In this briefing, we hone in on data from D.C. to show why so many people who are on probation and parole end up being re-incarcerated, and offer solutions to the costly, cruel, and ineffective systems of community supervision that wind up sending too many people back behind bars.

Jail incarceration rates vary widely, but inexplicably, across U.S. cities

Why do some places incarcerate people at much higher rates than others? Surprisingly, our research finds that cities jail people at rates that have little to no correlation to their violent crime rates, police budgets, or jail budgets. These variations mean that a person's chances of being jailed can depend on something as arbitrary as the city they live in.

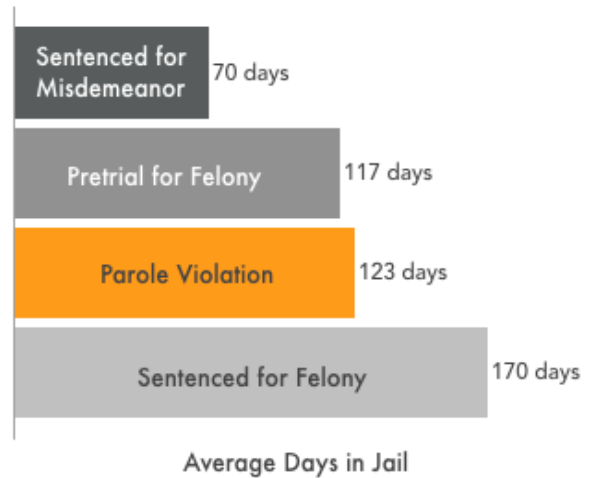
New BJS data reveals a jail-building boom in Indian country

Across the country, local governments are responding to overcrowding in their jails by building more jail space rather than working to reduce incarceration. We explain new data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics showing that this trend is especially visible on tribal lands.

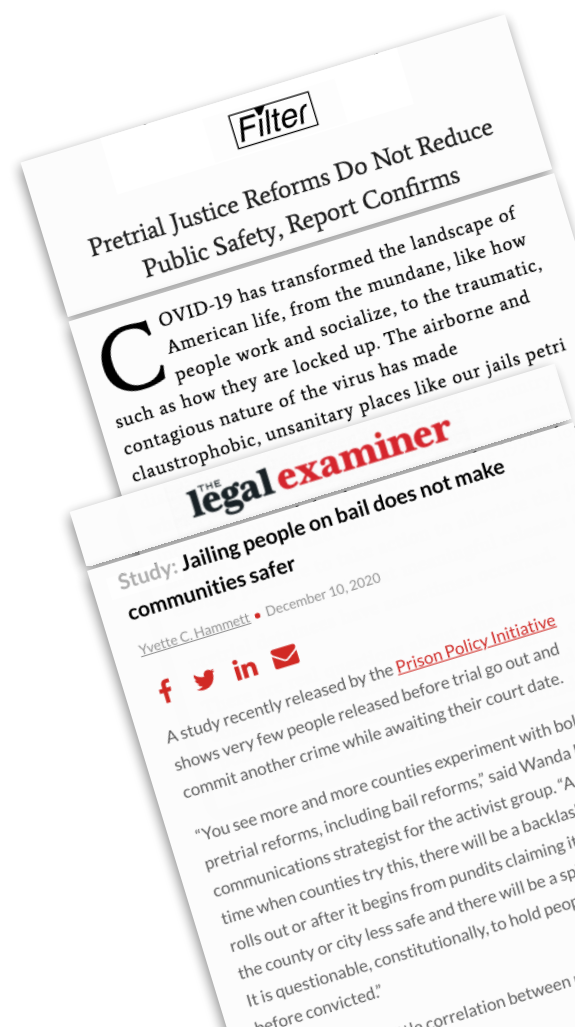
Releasing people pretrial doesn't harm public safety

When cities and states enact pretrial reform, there is often political backlash centered on the perceived danger of releasing people who can't afford bail. Our data proves those talking points wrong: in the four states and nine cities and counties where there is data about public safety before and after pretrial reforms, we found that all but one saw decreases or negligible fluctuations in crime after reforms.

Women in D.C. are jailed longer for parole violations than they are for misdemeanor sentences



Source: D.C. DOC's Facts and Figures for April 2020



Reducing the cost of prison and jail phone calls

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/phones>

Some children have to pay up to \$1/minute to talk to an incarcerated parent. Why? Because prisons and jails profit by granting telephone contracts to the company that will charge families the most. We use data to uncover corruption and pressure states to lower phone call costs so families can afford to keep in touch.

This year, a pandemic and recession forced families to rely even more on expensive phone calls — at the very moment when they could least afford it. But our movement for phone justice also picked up some key victories in states including Iowa and New York.

We've saved Iowa consumers \$1 million per year on jail phone calls

Predatory jail phone companies were squeezing profit from families with an incarcerated loved one in Iowa. After identifying Iowa as a place with expensive calls and a viable pathway for change, we successfully pressured officials to regulate the prices of phone calls from jails — and the new rules will save people with jailed loved ones \$1 million per year. Now, we're taking our successful Iowa strategy to other states, including California.



County jail inmates finally see lower phone bills

After long review, rates of nearly \$1 a minute are gone

By Erin Jordan, The Gazette

After a two-year review, the Iowa Utilities Board is forcing companies that provide phone service for county jail inmates to lower rates from as high as \$1 a minute to a quarter or less.

Once all the new tariffs are approved, the savings to Iowa families with jailed loved ones is expected to be more than \$1 million a year, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, a national nonprofit advocacy group that has been working in Iowa and other states to lower jail phone costs.

Until recently, Bremer County had the highest jail phone rates in the state at \$14.10 for a 15-minute call, which included \$3.74 for the first minute and 74 cents after.

Their service provider, Securix, lowered rates to 21 cents a minute — meaning a 15-minute call now will cost just \$3.15. The Utilities Board has not yet approved Securix's new tariff, but has instructed the company and other providers to keep rates at 25 cents per minute or less for prepaid calls. The board has so far approved new, lower rates for five companies — Prodigy, Net-Work Communications, International Corporation, Combined Public Communications, ICSolutions and Global Tel*Link. The board unanimously approved Tuesday after no discussion, calls for charging 22 cents a minute for prepaid calls from the Black Hawk County Jail, 16 cents a minute from the Scott County Jail and 11 cents a minute from the Eldora Training School in Eldora.

▶ CONTINUED

▶ FROM PAGE 1A

STAYING CONNECTED

COVID-19 has caused Iowa prisons and jails to suspend in-person visits, leaving people behind bars with fewer ways to connect with their families and friends. That contact is critical to reducing recidivism, studies show.

A study of 255 former prisoners participating in prison reentry programs in six states from 2004 to 2007 found phone calls with family were most consistently connected with lowering rates of reoffending later, the Institute for the Public Interest reported in 2016. But if phone rates are too high, families and inmates will talk less.

"At a time when the cost of a typical phone call is approaching zero, we thought it unconscious that Iowa families were being forced to pay astronomical rates to call their loved ones or lawyers," Prison Policy Initiative staff attorney Andrea Fenster said. "Incarcerated people and their families are some of the poorest people in the country."

A Des Moines woman told The Gazette in December 2019 she had to pay \$1.00 a minute after

Jail phone rates fall in Eastern Iowa

The Iowa Utilities Board has pushed private service providers to lower phone rates for people incarcerated in county jails. This chart shows the change from 2018 to 2021.

County	Provider in 2018	Cost of 15-minute, in-state call in 2018	Provider in 2021	Cost of 15-minute, in-state call in 2021
Benton	CPC	\$4.50	CPC	\$3.00
Bremer	Securix	\$14.10*	Securix	\$3.74
Buchanan	Reliance	\$6.00	Reliance	\$3.75
Cedar	CPC	\$4.50	TurnKey	\$3.75
Fayette	CPC	\$7.50	TurnKey	\$3.75
Iowa	Lattice	\$3.75 collect, \$3.15 prepaid	Reliance	\$3.75
Johnson	Reliance	\$7.50	CPC	\$3.75
Jones	Reliance	\$3.75	Reliance	\$3.75
Linn	NCC	\$4.50	Reliance	\$3.75
Tama	CPC	\$4.50	Reliance	\$3.75
Washington	Reliance	\$7.50	Reliance	\$3.75

* In 2018, Securix charged \$3.74 for the first minute and 74 cents for each additional minute — the most expensive rate in the state.

Sources: Sheriff's offices and Prison Policy Initiative

"How do I tell our 4-year-old son, 'Daddy loves you. He just can't call?' " Skylar Pinegar said in 2019. "My husband is my son's favorite person, so this time is very hard on him."

PANDEMIC BREAKS

Many Iowa jails have made it cheaper for offenders to make calls and do video visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Johnson County Jail provides free phone calls for the first 10 days a person is incarcerated and then charges \$0.15 per minute after that.

TurnKey Corrections, which provides services to jails in Johnson, Iowa and other counties, usually charges 39 cents a minute for off-site video visits, but has lowered that to 25 cents a minute because of COVID-19. The Linn County Correctional Center is providing each person held there with one free eight-minute call per day and free postage for up to seven letters per week. "We are currently offering two free 15-minute (video) visits per week," said Gardner.

Our investigation into New York jail phone rates sparks legislation

New York county and city jails are legally allowed to choose phone contracts that charge consumers the most and kicks the most revenue back to the jail — costing some of the poorest residents of New York State more than \$13 million a year. After we published this report detailing the exploitive phone call costs in jails across the state, the New York legislature introduced bills that would prohibit kickbacks and lower the cost of calls.

People in jails are using more phone minutes during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite decreased jail populations

Family members of incarcerated people told us they were spending more money to stay in touch during the pandemic. Our analysis proved it. We found that people in jails spent 8% more time on the phone in 2020 than they did in the year prior — likely attributable to the suspension of in-person visitation. More time spent on the phone means higher bills for families struggling to make ends meet, and increased profits for billion-dollar tele-communications companies like Securus (and for jails themselves, because as we describe above, they often receive kickback profit from exploitive phone contracts).

POLITICO
CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Making a Phone Call from Behind Bars Shouldn't Send Your Family into Debt

Covid-19 has forced lawmakers to take a harder look at the prison telecom industry. It's long been due for a makeover.

Why are jail phone calls so expensive?

BY TYLER KENDALL
OCTOBER 13, 2020 / 7:07 PM / CBS NEWS

FOX 47 NEWS
Your Neighborhood

Mid-Michigan jails charge as much as \$22 for a 15-minute phone call. They keep a lot of that money.

REUTERS
MEDIA AND TELECOMS
SEPTEMBER 23, 2020 / 4:16 PM / UPDATED 10 MONTHS AGO

Locked up during COVID-19: Costly phone calls strain families

7 MIN READ

By Avi Asher-Schapiro

NEW YORK (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Like many Americans with aging parents, Dominique Jones-Johnson started checking in more regularly with her father when the coronavirus pandemic broke out - but unlike most families, the cost of calls strained her budget to the breaking point.

Her father, Charles Brown Jr., is incarcerated for aggravated rape, burglary and "crimes against nature" - she said he was falsely accused of all charges - in the Louisiana State Penitentiary, where a 15-minute phone call costs \$3.15.

By May, these local calls - which would have been free for most people living in the state - had cost the family nearly \$400.

"They're making me pay to incarcerate myself," Charles Brown Jr. told the Thomson Reuters Foundation earlier this month. A week later, he contracted COVID-19 and is no longer able to speak with his daughter.

Protecting our democracy from mass incarceration by ending prison gerrymandering

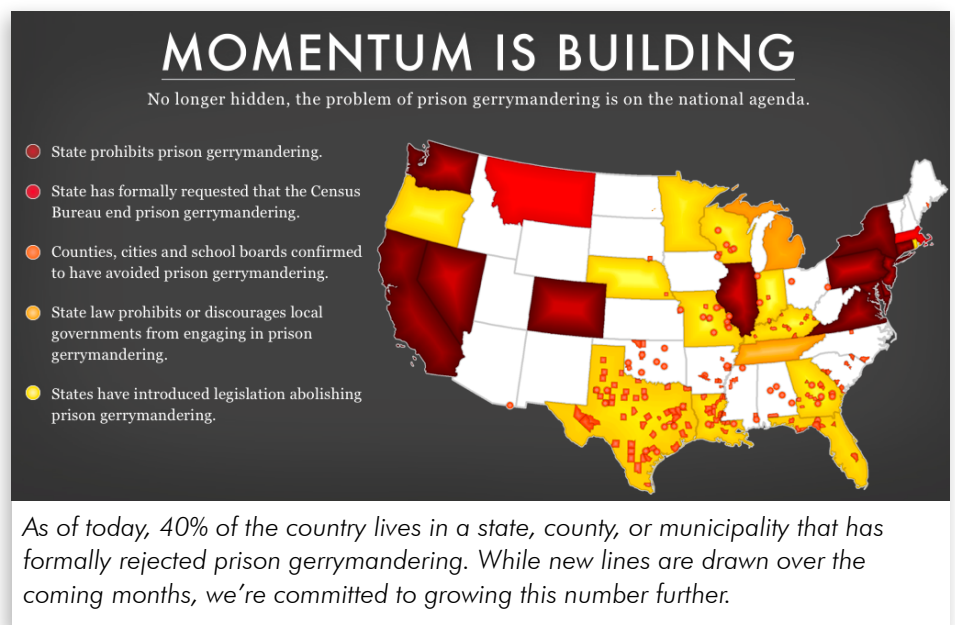
<https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/>

The Census Bureau's practice of counting more than two million incarcerated people where they are imprisoned awards undue political clout to people who live near prisons at the expense of everyone else.

When our work began in 2001, no one knew what prison gerrymandering was, never mind how it distorts our democracy and criminal justice system. Today our work is sparking legislation in states across the country, winning victories in the courts, and making the problem of prison gerrymandering a key issue for lawmakers, voting and civil rights advocates, researchers, and journalists.

This year's highlights:

- We helped **Connecticut, Illinois** and **Pennsylvania** end prison gerrymandering. In this redistricting cycle, eleven states will count incarcerated people as residents of their hometowns for redistricting, not as residents of their prison cells.
- We continue our work to end prison gerrymandering state by state in the legislatures: **Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, and Rhode Island** all considered bills to end prison gerrymandering this year.
- We continue to explain how prison gerrymandering impacts political representation and not federal funding, a common misconception that holds back efforts to eliminate the practice.



Supporting our work

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/donate>

The generous support of visionary foundations and individual donors has allowed the Prison Policy Initiative to grow from the idea of three enterprising students in 2001 into an innovative and efficient policy shop at the forefront of the criminal justice reform movement in 2021.

Our work is supported by a handful of foundations and a network of generous individuals who allow us to seize timely new opportunities, like our work advocating for a humane response to COVID-19 (p. 7), and to produce groundbreaking material that reshapes the movement for criminal justice reform, like our *Whole Pie* series which presents the essential big picture view of the disparate systems of confinement that make the U.S. the number one incarcerator in the world.

If you would like to contribute to our work, you can donate online or send a paper check to PO Box 127 Northampton, MA 01061.

If you are a current supporter of our work, we ask you to allow us to count on your support in the future by becoming a monthly sustainer. Just go to <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/donate>, select an amount and then how often you'd like it to repeat.

And if you ever have any questions about how to support our work or how your gift is being used, please don't hesitate to contact us at 413-527-0845 ext. 306.

We thank you for making our work — and our successes — possible.

Prison Policy Initiative budget report for 2020-2021 year

Income

Grants & Gifts

Large Foundations*	\$2,616,000
Individual Donors	\$619,225
PPP Loan Forgiveness	\$97,528

Earned Revenue

Honoraria and consulting fees	\$32,250
Interest	\$29,589

Total Income **\$3,394,592**

Expenses

Salaries, benefits, employment taxes for 10.75	\$973,416
Consultants	\$55,683
Computers	\$18,249
Rent	\$9,900
Supplies	\$9,813
Internet hosting, telephone, etc.	\$7,400
Printing and postage	\$3,572
Travel	\$0
Other (Accounting, Bank charges, insurance,	\$14,803

Total Expenses **\$1,092,836**

*Several of these foundation grants are for work that extends outside of the fiscal year and/or for long-term expansion of our work.

In this fiscal year, we were honored to receive an outpouring of support, much of it expected to be on a one-time only basis. We are therefore being as careful and methodical with the designing of new positions as we are in our research and advocacy work. Projecting forward to a time when our new staff will be with us for an entire fiscal year, we expect the current (2021-2022) fiscal year to have a budget of approximately \$2.2 million.