

# MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



## Drivers of Maryland's Prison System: Highlights

Based on a Presentation by the Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council – July 29, 2015

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On July 29, senior staff of the Pew Charitable Trusts gave their first presentation focusing on data from Maryland's prison system to the [Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council](#), created in the 2015 legislative session. The Council is charged with developing "a statewide framework of sentencing and corrections policies to further reduce the State's incarcerated population, reduce spending on corrections, and reinvest in strategies to increase public safety and reduce recidivism." Sources for the presentation identified by staff include:

- Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services: Offender-Based State Correctional Information System (OBSCIS) Snapshots, August 2005-2013, July 2014
- [Maryland Judiciary Annual Statistical Abstracts, FY 05-14](#)
- [Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports](#)
- [United States Census Bureau, Population and Demographic Data](#)

The presentation focused on published and unpublished state data over the decade between 2005 and 2014.

### Trends in State Prison Admissions

Overall, prison admissions are down 19% in Maryland over the last decade. During the same time, Maryland's violent crime rate went down 32%, and the property crime rate went down 27%.

In FY 2014, most admissions (58%) were for nonviolent crimes.

In FY 2014, 58% of admissions were people previously on supervision. Data has not yet been analyzed to determine how many readmissions were for technical violations as opposed to new crimes.

Despite a 52% decline in this category, possession with intent to distribute narcotics was still the top offense at admission in FY 2014.

36% of Maryland's prison admissions were from Baltimore City.

Controlling for population growth, most jurisdictions use more prison beds than they did a decade ago.

## Trends in Sentencing

Over the decade, the average sentence length for newly sentenced prisoners increased by 25%. Sentence length grew across all offense types and in most large jurisdictions.

There was a 29% increase in the average sentence length for people on probation whose probation was revoked. Again, data do not break down those reincarcerated for new crimes as opposed to technical violations.

Court Circuits varied significantly in average sentence length in FY 2014 – from 52.8 to 85.4 months.

## Trends in Time Served in Prison

While the majority of drug offenders receive parole, other people are more likely to stay in prison until mandatory release.

Between FY05 and FY14, the average time served for new court commitments increased. The number of offenders who were not released until their mandatory release date increased by 28%. Total time served by new commitments was up in 7 out of 8 [Court Circuits](#). In the 8<sup>th</sup> Circuit (Baltimore City), it was up by **42%**.

The average time people *newly committed* to prison remain there past the date on which they were eligible for parole is **16.5 months**. (Note: For FY 2010, the [Vera Institute](#) calculated the annual cost of retaining a prisoner in Maryland as \$38,383.)

## Who is in Maryland's Prisons?

The number of prisoners over 55 has doubled in the last decade, from 961 in 1875 in 2014. As Commission members speculated, some of this increase – with high attendant costs – is due to the recent failure of Maryland Governors to consider parole for people sentenced to life in prison *with the possibility of parole*, regardless of the recommendations of the state's Parole Commission.



Blacks are overrepresented in the state prison population. **Although they are only 30% of the state's population, they represent 70% of the prison population.**

People who are in prison because their parole was revoked take up 37% of prison beds.

Nonviolent offenders use 35% of prison beds.

For more information visit the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (<http://www.ma4jr.org/>) or the Maryland Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council page at <http://www.goccp.maryland.gov/jrcc/>