

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT AT-A-GLANCE

Revisiting Correctional Expenditure Trends in Massachusetts

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Last May, MassINC released *Getting Tough on Spending*, a detailed study of correctional budget trends between FY 2011, an apex for the state’s incarcerated population, and FY 2016, the most recent fiscal year for which final expenditure data were available. With policymakers debating wide-ranging changes to the state’s criminal justice system, the report provided a timely look at the structure of correctional budgets. Now that comprehensive criminal justice reform legislation is law and agencies have been tasked with implementing sweeping change, it is even more critical that we have a common understanding of how resources are allocated.

As the 2017 MassINC report noted, lack of standardized accounting for correctional expenditures makes it difficult to identify and interpret trends, yet as summarized below, the available data do reveal several important patterns:

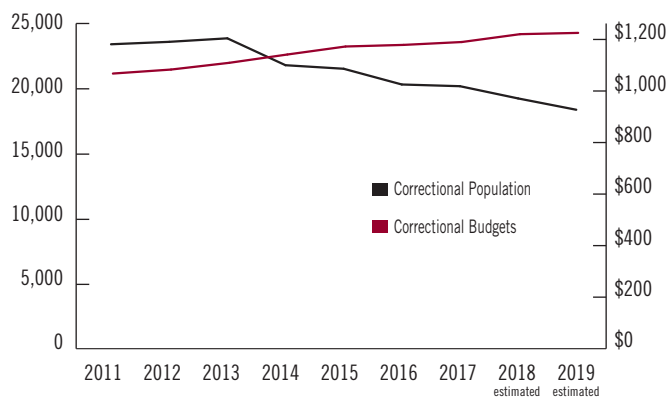
1. Despite steady decline in the total number of individuals held in correctional facilities, spending on prisons and jails continues to rise. This was the key finding of the 2017 MassINC report and the overall pattern has not changed, in fact, the divergence between spending and population is accelerating slightly.

Between FY 2011 and the present, the average daily population in all state and county correctional facilities in Massachusetts dropped 21 percent, yet correctional budgets consistently moved in the opposite direction (Figure 1). Between FY 2011 and the proposed FY 2019 budget, the combined allocation to the Department of Correction (DOC) and county sheriffs’ departments increased by nearly 25 percent, or \$254 million, to

almost \$1.4 billion. Although the state’s prisons and jails now hold 5,000 fewer individuals than they did at the beginning of FY 2011, under the proposed FY 2019 budget, correctional budget growth will have outpaced inflation by \$117 million between FY 2011 and FY 2019.

2. Correctional spending has exceeded correctional budgets in every fiscal year since 2011. The variation between the annual budget authorized by the Legislature and final agency spending has increased in recent years. In FY 2018, projected spending for sheriffs’ departments is 7 percent (\$41 million) above budget, despite a more than 5 percent decrease in population over the fiscal year through April; for the DOC, projected spending is 1.2 percent (\$8 million) above budget, with population down by approximately 4 percent.

Figure 1: Trend in correctional spending and average daily population in correctional facilities, FY 2011 to FY 2019

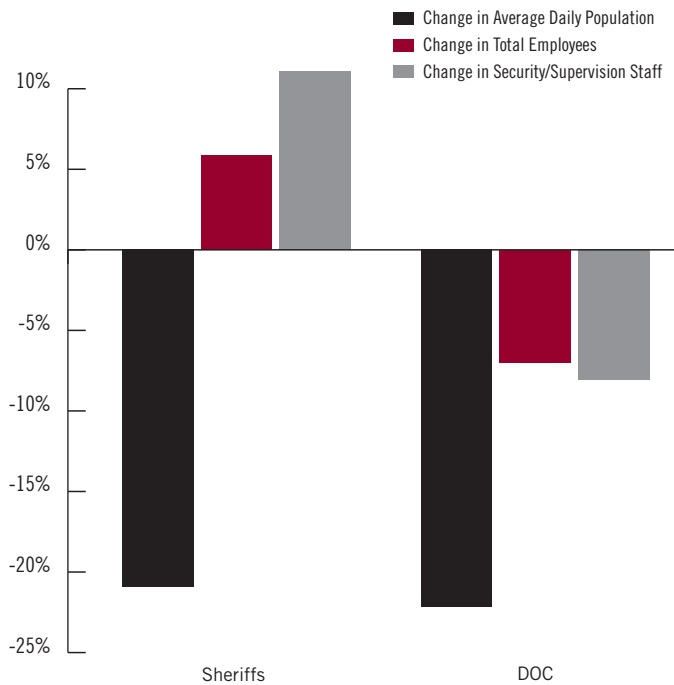


Source: MassINC’s analysis of data from MA Budget & Policy Center and Department of Correction Weekly Count Sheets (FY 2019 population estimated based on April 2018 count) and average House and SWM budget proposals (adjusted upward based on final expenditures, FY 2011 to FY 2018)

This pattern may simply reflect a strategy adopted by the Legislature to manage structural budget deficits (as opposed to insufficient budget discipline on the part of the agencies). Either way, the lack of transparency and accountability this practice creates is problematic. And the large mid-year supplemental budgets required to cover excess spending certainly provide a sharp contrast to the recent fate of reentry programs with a proven record of accomplishment (notably, *Overcoming the Odds*, the Boston Reentry Initiative, and the Worcester Initiative for Supportive Reentry). Evidence indicated that these efforts were providing a high return on investment, yet when their federal funding and other modest grants expired over the past few years, the state could not find resources to sustain them.

* Figures 2 and 3 and the associated text have been corrected from an earlier version of this report to reflect accurate headcount after removing duplicates from the data.

Figure 2: Change in average daily population relative to employee headcount, FY 2011 to Present



Source: MassINC's analysis of MA Office of the Comptroller data by request and Department of Correction Weekly Count Sheets (staffing levels through CY 2017; ADP as of April 2018)

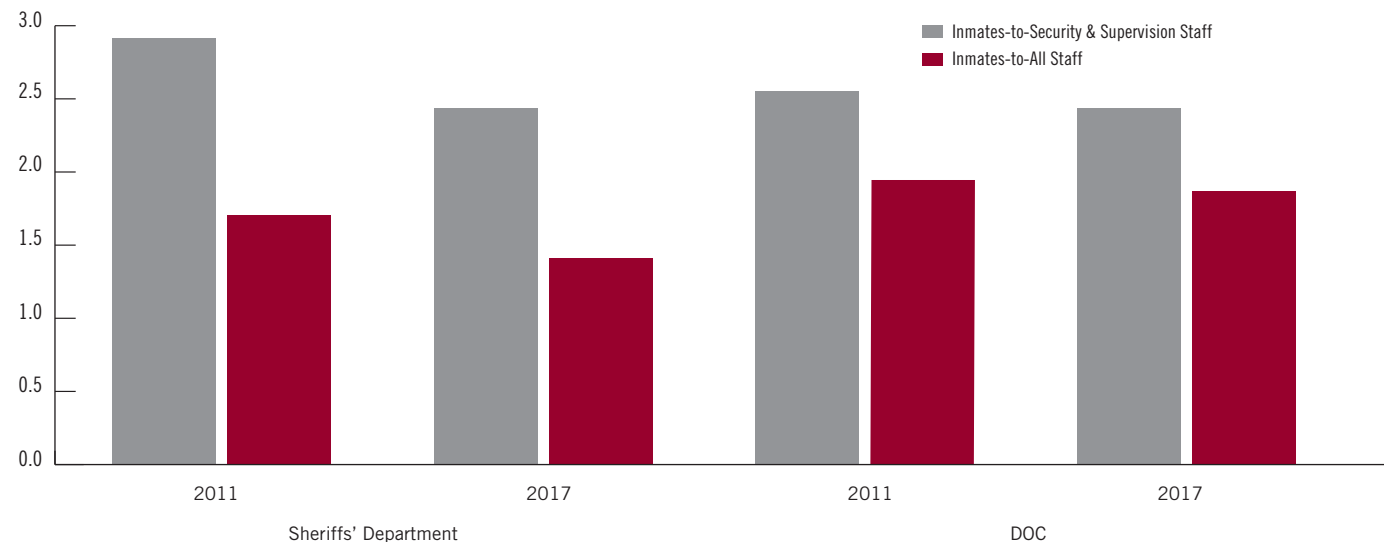
3. From a labor perspective, sheriff's departments and the DOC have responded very differently to falling correctional populations. Since FY 2011, the correctional population at both county sheriffs' departments and the DOC is down by more than 20 percent, yet total compensation at both the sheriffs' departments and the DOC is up by about 20 percent. Different factors account for the increase in expenditure on employee compensation.

The number of employees in sheriffs' departments rose by 6 percent between 2011 and the end of calendar year 2017. Conversely, the number of DOC employees fell by 7 percent over this period (Figure 2). It is also notable that the number of employees responsible for the security and supervision of fewer individuals has risen at sheriffs' departments at a faster rate (11 percent) than overall employee headcount, while at the DOC, security and supervision staff has declined further (-8 percent) than overall employee headcount.

Between FY 2011 and FY 2017, the average salary for employees at sheriff's departments increased by 22 percent, whereas the average salary for DOC employees rose by 29 percent.

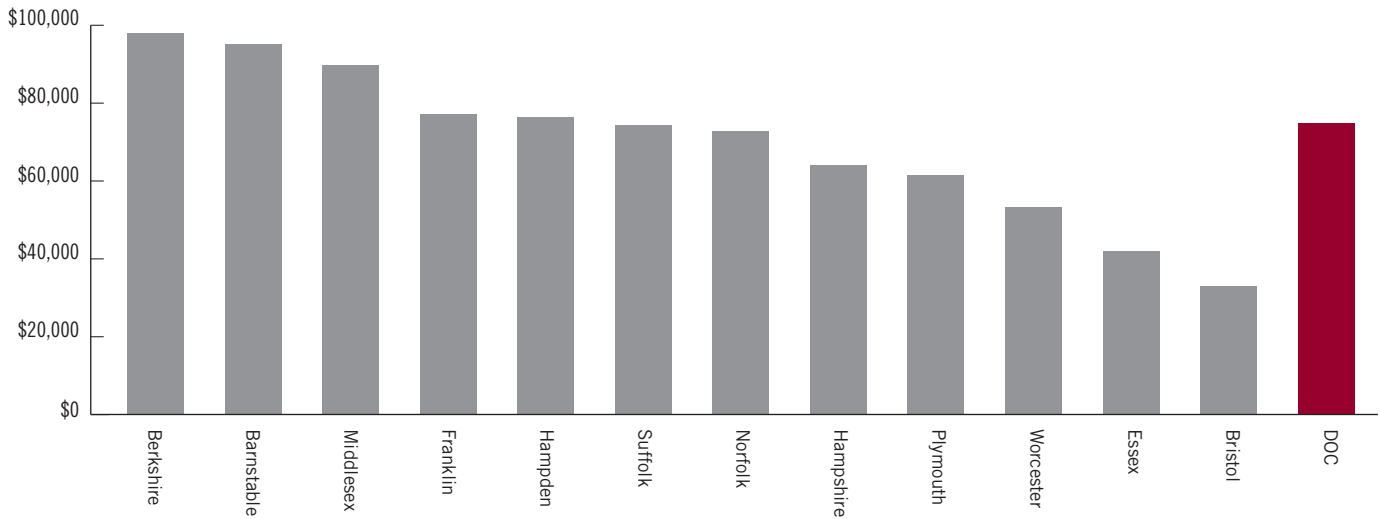
With 1.4 and 1.9 inmates per employee in sheriffs' departments and the DOC, respectively (2.4 and 2.5 inmates per security and supervision staff), inmate-to-staff ratios are well below both historic levels in Massachusetts and industry norms nationally.

Figure 3: Inmate-to-staff ratios, FY 2011 and FY 2017



Source: MassINC's analysis of MA Office of the Comptroller data by request and Department of Correction Weekly Count Sheets (staffing levels through CY 2017; ADP as of April 2018)

Figure 4: Estimated expenditure per inmate, FY 2019



Source: MassINC's analysis of Department of Correction Weekly Count Sheets, April 2018, and average House and SWM FY 2019 budget proposals (adjusted upward based on final expenditures, FY 2011 to FY 2018)

4. With inmate populations declining and correctional facilities seeing potential cost savings, spending categories associated with recidivism reduction have not increased significantly, and these services continue to represent a small fraction of total correctional expenditure. Education and program services made up just 3.1 percent of spending for sheriffs' departments and 4 percent of DOC expenditure in FY 2017, the most recent year for which detailed expenditure data are available.

Healthcare spending does appear to represent a noteworthy exception. While spending for inmate health services has held fairly constant at around 11 percent of spending for sheriffs' departments and 19 percent of DOC expenditure from FY 2011 through FY 2017, with falling populations and rising budgets, this consistent allocation to health services led to significantly greater spending on a per-inmate basis. For sheriff's departments, health services spending climbed from \$5,102 per inmate in FY 2011 to \$6,115 per inmate in FY 2017. At the DOC, per-inmate health services spending rose from \$9,289 per inmate to \$12,467 over the period. The degree to which these increases represented efforts to improve the services available to inmates (versus simply maintaining the provision of services with rising health care costs and an aging inmate population) is unclear. As some officials have recently cited cost as a barrier to providing medication-assisted

treatment to individuals with substance use disorder, it is important to know what services individuals are receiving in correctional facilities, and whether expenditures for health services are sufficient in all facilities to meet current standards of care.

5. There are large and growing disparities in correctional spending across agencies, particularly in areas associated with recidivism reduction. Based on current inmate counts and the proposed FY 2019 budget (averaging the final House budget and the Senate Ways and Means budget), the Barnstable, Berkshire, and Middlesex Sheriff's Department will each spend more than \$90,000 per inmate next year; at the other end of the spectrum, Plymouth (\$60,366), Worcester (\$53,741), Essex (\$41,278), and Bristol (\$30,887) will all receive considerably less funding on a per inmate basis.

These disparities correlate strongly with per-inmate spending on education and other services associated with recidivism reduction. For instance, the Bristol and Essex County Sheriff's Departments each spent just about \$500 per inmate on education and program services in FY 2017; per-inmate spending on education and program services was at least eight times higher in Barnstable (\$5,200), Berkshire (\$6,065), and Middlesex (\$4,251).



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