

Lifers' Group Inc. Fast Facts: THE ESCALATING AND STAGGERING COSTS OF INCARCERATING MASSACHUSETTS STATE PRISONERS

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The cost of incarcerating Massachusetts state prisoners has always been among the highest in the nation, but now has ballooned to over \$120,000 per year per prisoner (See table). With a progressive decrease in crime over the last decade, the number of prisoners also has steadily decreased. This trend continued and accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic over the last year. Much of the decrease in prison population during 2020 and early 2021 can be attributed to the closure of courts which prevented new criminal commitments to state prison. The greatest increase in costs, however, preceded the pandemic, with the increase of more than 50 million dollars FY2019 to FY2020. Surprisingly, in spite of the 20% decrease of prisoners between January 1, 2020 and July 1, 2021, the projected FY2022 budget increased by more than \$32 million. The projected average annual cost per state prisoner for FY2022 is a staggering \$121,139. Although it is likely that the upcoming year will see the gradual resumption of criminal trials and new commitments to state prison, it is important to remember that the currently incarcerated population will continue to shrink as sentences wrap up. Historically, this will largely balance the influx of new commitments, suggesting that the net prison population will increase only marginally during FY2022.

Such increases in costs of incarceration might be understood if they were accompanied by a concomitant increase in rehabilitative services for prisoners, resulting in better outcomes and lowered recidivism. In fact, the DOC continues to decrease the percentage and dollar amounts expended for prisoner programming and rehabilitation. The latest available data (G. Haas, Lifers' Group, "MA DOC Expenditures and Staffing Levels for FY2019") show that only 1.15% of the DOC annual budget is allocated for this purpose. Sadly, even with a lavish budget, it appears that the DOC has decided to ignore the rehabilitative mandate of M.G.L.c. 124, §1(e) and to forego its own Mission and Vision Statements which require the provision of "programming in preparation for successful reentry" and "to effect positive behavioral change in order to eliminate violence, victimization and recidivism". It appears that 'correction' is not a priority for the Department of Correction.

AVERAGE ANNUAL COST PER DOC PRISONER

	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2022
Number of Prisoners ^a	8835	8425	7900	6300 ^b
Annual DOC Budget	\$ 658,899,943	\$ 678,557,394	\$ 730,879,636	\$ 763,178,786
Cost per Prisoner	\$ 74,480	\$ 80,541	\$ 92,516	\$ 121,139 ^b

^a Custody population on January 1 of fiscal years 2018-2020. Missing FY2021 budget is due to an embargo of published data. Custody population on January 1, 2021 = 6553.

^b Cost based on projected FY2022 budget and custody population July 1, 2021.

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