

Lifer's Group Fast Facts: INCREASED INCARCERATION COSTS  
IN MASSACHUSETTS DEPT OF CORRECTION (MA-DOC)

ENDNOTES

MA-DOC data is from public records requests, 2016-2026, published "Fact Cards" and "Population Trends" reports by the MA-DOC. Calculations by author.

1. McKillop M & Boucher A. "Aging Prisoner Populations Drive Up Costs (Pew Charitable Trusts, Washington, DC, Feb 2018).
2. Under MA laws all persons committing first-degree murder receive mandatory LWOP sentences; plus under Felony Murder and Joint Venture laws, "a person who knowingly participates in one crime as part of a joint venture is...also guilty of murder committed by an accomplice". Com v Brown, 477 Mass. 805, 823 (2017).
3. Nellis A. "No End in Sight: America's Enduring Reliance on Life Imprisonment" (2021); Nellis A. "A Matter of Life: The Scope and Impact of Life and Long-Term Imprisonment in the United States"(2025)(both:The Sentencing Project, Wash. DC).
4. Anno BJ. "Correctional Health Care: Addressing the Needs of Elderly, Chronically Ill and Terminally Ill Inmates" (Dept of Justice, Washington, DC, Nat'l Institute of Correction, 2004).
5. McKillop & Boucher. (note 1); ACLU. "At America's Expense: The Mass Incarceration of the Elderly" (ACLU, New York, 2012); Tina Chiu. "It's About the Time: Aging Prisoners, Increasing Costs, and Geriatric Release" (Vera Institute of Justice, New York, 2010).
6. Greineder D. "Lifer's Group Fast Facts: Medical Costs Skyrocket Without Bringing Quality Healthcare To Massachusetts Department of Correction" (Lifer's Group, Norfolk, March 2026).
7. Nellis A. "No End In Sight"(note 3); Nellis A & Bishop B. "New Lease on Life" (Sentencing Project, Wash. DC, 2021); Bersani BE, Laub JH, Western B. "Thinking About Emerging Adults and Violent Crime" (Emerging Adult Justice Project, 2019); Ghandnoosh N. "Incarceration & Crime: A Weak Relationship" (Sentencing Project, Wash. DC 2024); Greineder D. "The Cruel Aging of Massachusetts Life-Sentenced Prisoners" (Lifer's Group, Norfolk, 2022); Nellis A. "Nothing But Time: Elderly Americans Serving Life Without Parole" (Sentencing Project, Wash. DC 2022); Wright V. "Deterrence in Criminal Justice: Evaluating Certainty vs. Severity of Punishment" (Sentencing Project, Wash. DC, 2010); Greineder D. "Aging and Risks of Criminal Behavior" (Lifer's Group, 2024).
8. Ibid.
9. Bersani BE, Laub JH, Western B. "Thinking About Emerging Adults... (note 7); Greineder D. "Aging and Risks... (note 7).
10. See all references in note 7.
11. Ibid. See also Durose MR, Cooper AD, Snyder HN. "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014); Langan PA & Levin DJ. "Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994" (Bur Justice Stat, 2002).
12. Greineder D. "Paroled Juveniles Convicted of First-Degree Murder Have Not Committed New Crimes, 2015-2025" (Lifer's Group, Norfolk, February 2026).
13. Wildeman C. "Parental Imprisonment, the Prison Boom, and the Concentration of Childhood Disadvantage" Demography (2009) 46:265-280; McLaughlin M, Pettus-Davis C, Brown D, et al. "The Economic Burden of Incarceration in the US" (Wash. Univ Inst Adv Just"#AJI072016(2016); Greineder "Cruel Aging..."at 13-15(note 7).

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# Lifer's Group Fast Facts: INCREASED INCARCERATION COSTS IN MASSACHUSETTS DEPT OF CORRECTION

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The average annual cost of incarcerating each MA-DOC prisoner has increased again to \$146,435 in FY2026. The FY2026 budget plus supplemental funding (House bill 4761) now totals \$881,246,840 dollars, an increase of 15% from FY2022, although the custody population increased less than 1%. A major driver of expenditure is the aging of prisoners with long or endless sentences. MA has had the oldest prisoners in the nation since 2016 (1). Mandatory Life Without Parole (LWOP) sentences for first-degree murder, as well as for felony murder or joint venture if a death occurs during the offense whether the offender killed or even intended to kill (2), have caused MA also to have the highest percentage of LWOP prisoners in the U.S. (3).

In 2025, almost half (46.4%) of MA LWOP prisoners were aged 55 or older. Criminologists consider prisoners aged 55+ as elderly because of premature aging due to deficient prison healthcare and high stress (4). 61% of MA LWOP prisoners have served 15 or more years and 35% already served 25+ years, as they aged in prison. Incarceration costs of elderly prisoners run 2 to 5 times higher than average, due to special needs and high healthcare costs (5) and MA prison healthcare costs rose a shocking 22% in FY2025 (6).

It has been shown that long sentences or incarcerating the elderly does little to improve public safety and neither deters nor prevents crime because older persons naturally cease offending (7). Most violent and other crimes are committed by the young, with peak offenses occurring in late adolescence and early 20s (8). Offending declines rapidly thereafter and the desistance remains pervasive, affecting all persons and crimes (9). Prisoners only rarely re-offend if released after age 50 (10), with those convicted of murder having the lowest recidivism rates (11). 51 LWOP-sentenced prisoners who committed murder as juveniles before the age of 18 and who became eligible for parole in 2014 by the Diatchenko decision personify and have validated these arguments because not one of them has committed another crime (12). Studies show that the destabilizing social effects of absent imprisoned older family and community members actually increase crime rates in affected communities (13).

These facts and other well documented evidence argue strongly that time is overdue for MA to consider ending LWOP sentences, and to provide timely parole eligibility for this major fraction of the elderly prison population. Ample evidence confirms that such measures will not decrease public safety and such legislation should be given urgent consideration.

AVERAGE ANNUAL COSTS OF INCARCERATION PER MA-DOC PRISONER FY2016-FY2026

	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026
MA-DOC Budget (In Millions)	\$571.5	\$599.7	\$658.9	\$678.6	\$730.9	\$730.6	\$763.2	\$779.8	\$822.0	\$843.0	\$881.2
Custody Pop <sup>a</sup> (January 1)	9,475	9,014	8,835	8,425	7,900	6,553	5,962	5,863	6,011	5,976	6,018
Avg Annual Cost/Prisoner	\$60,317	\$66,530	\$74,480	\$80,541	\$92,516	\$111,492	\$128,007	\$133,000	\$136,752	\$141,062	\$146,435
% Increase from											
Prior year	---	+10%	+12%	+ 8%	+15%	+21%	+15%	+ 4%	+ 3%	+ 3%	+ 4%
FY2016	---	+10%	+23%	+34%	+53%	+85%	+112%	+121%	+127%	+134%	+143%

<sup>a</sup> Custody population on January 1 of each Fiscal Year (Halfway through FY)



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