

Justice Reinvestment: Utah

Strengthening Public Safety While Curbing Corrections Growth

Utah's Challenge

From 2004 to 2013, Utah's prison population grew 18%—six times faster than the national average—despite the fact that crime rates declined over that period. Absent reform, the state's prison population was projected to grow by another 37%, or 2,700 inmates, over the following 20 years at a cost of more than \$500 million.

Facing a growing prison population and increased corrections costs, state leaders sought a new approach. In 2014, the Utah Legislature, with support from the Governor and the Attorney General, directed Utah's Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (Commission) to identify data-driven, evidence-based policies that would improve public safety while controlling corrections costs.

The Crime and Justice Institute (CJI), in partnership with the Pew Charitable Trusts, provided technical assistance, bringing expertise in data and systems analysis and evidence-based correctional practices to support the Commission in reaching its goals.

Data-Driven Analysis

In the summer of 2014, the Commission embarked on an intensive process of investigation and analysis to identify the key factors leading to prison growth and increased spending:

- Offenders were serving 18% longer in prison than they were a decade before, for similar offenses.
- Sixty-two percent of Utah's new prison admissions were for nonviolent offenses, with significant increases for certain drug and property crimes.
- As a result of declining success rates on community supervision and high numbers of revocations for technical violations (missing appointments, failing drug tests) rather than for new convictions, parole and probation revocations made up nearly half of Utah's prison population.

Legislative Reform Package

In November 2014, the Commission unanimously recommended a comprehensive set of policy changes and submitted a final report to state leadership for legislative consideration. These policy recommendations were articulated in House Bill 348, which passed with overwhelming majorities in both the House and Senate, with the following goals:

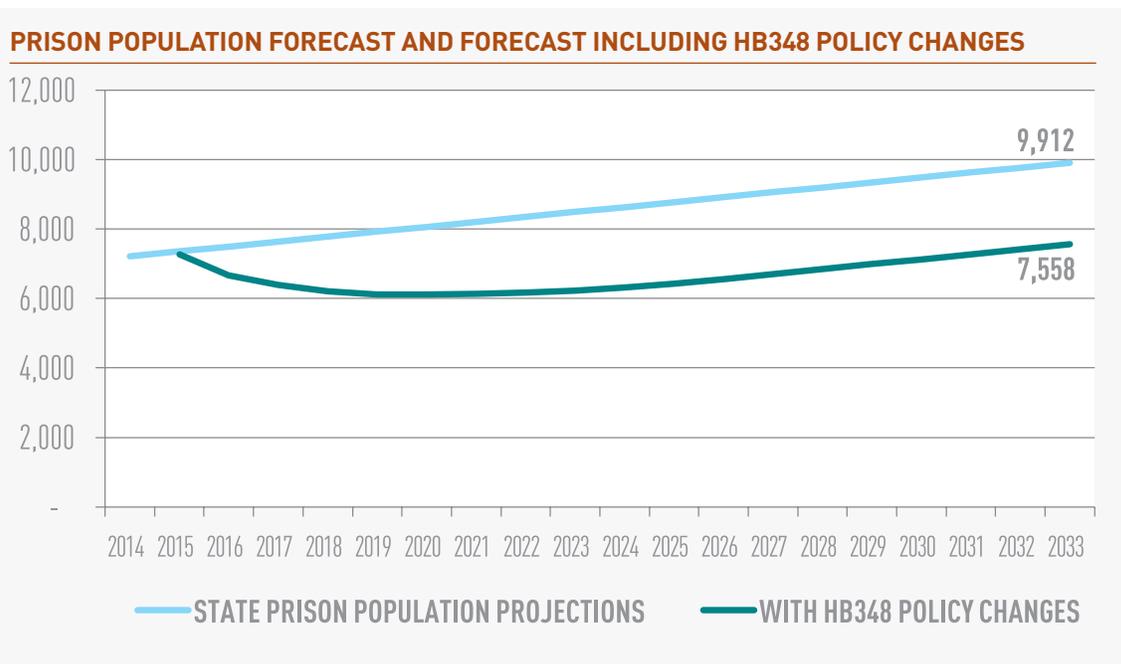
Reserve prison beds for serious offenders by enacting changes to drug laws, including reclassifying drug possession as a Class A misdemeanor and narrowing the size and application of drug-free zones; reducing sentencing guidelines for lower-level offenses; and reclassifying more than 300 moving vehicle misdemeanors to preserve jail resources.

Strengthening community supervision by developing a system of swift, certain, and proportionate sanctions for technical violations of probation and parole to reduce revocations; expanding and improving the quality of reentry planning and treatment services; and creating incentives for offenders to comply with court orders and participate in treatment.

Measure and improve system performance by requiring Utah to collect additional performance data on state and local agencies' programming and report on outcomes.

Projected Results

Utah's criminal justice reform legislation is expected to save taxpayers more than \$500 million over the next two decades by averting nearly all anticipated prison growth. The reforms were supported by an initial investment of nearly \$14 million toward reducing recidivism by strengthening community supervision, upgrading data collection systems and expanding evidence-based treatment programs.



FOR MORE INFORMATION,
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