



GROWTH IN MICHIGAN’S CORRECTIONS SYSTEM: HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Today, the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) is the largest program that state government operates directly, accounting for nearly 20 percent (\$2 billion) of the current discretionary General Fund – General Purpose budget and employing nearly one-third of the classified workforce. Corrections programs growth is a direct result of the dramatic increase in the number of inmates from 1973 to 2007, during which time the population grew 538 percent, or roughly 42,000 prisoners, to 50,000 inmates. Official MDOC projections reflect a continuation of the historical trends over the next five years as the prison population is estimated to be slightly more than 56,000 by the end of 2012.

Michigan’s prison population grew despite a 42 percent reduction in the crime rate from 1976 to 2006. While the total crime (violent and non-violent) rate fell, the number of felony dispositions rose over the same period.

Michigan’s prison population growth is the product of a combination of several different factors including: increases in felony dispositions¹, swelling prison com-

¹ A felony disposition is a court decision resulting in a felony conviction.

2005 Prison Populations, Incarceration Rates, Average Salary, Annual Per Prisoner Costs Compared to Great Lakes States and U.S. Average

	<u>Prison Population</u>	<u>Incarceration Rate</u> (per 100,000 residents)	<u>Incarceration Rate as a Percentage of Michigan’s Rate</u>	<u>Crime Rate Index</u> (per 100,000 residents)	<u>Average Corrections Salary</u>	<u>Annual Costs Per Prisoner</u>
Illinois	44,919	351	71.80%	3,631.80	\$51,507	\$21,622
Indiana	24,416	388	79.30%	3,780.00	33,521	21,531
Minnesota	8,874	180	36.80%	3,488.40	44,252	29,260
New York	62,743	326	66.70%	2,554.30	60,713	42,202
Ohio	45,854	400	81.80%	4,014.00	34,091	23,011
Pennsylvania	42,345	340	69.50%	2,841.70	45,845	31,029
Wisconsin	21,110	380	77.70%	2,901.70	41,845	28,932
Great Lakes Average	35,752	338	69.09%	3,316.00	44,487	28,227
U.S. Average	25,856	435	82.00%	3,900.50	41,354	23,876
Michigan	49,337	489		3,643.20	\$53,268	\$28,743

Sources: Pew Charitable Trusts “Public Safety, Public Spending, Forecasting Americas Prison Population 2007-2011”. FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2005.



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mitments, higher recidivism rates², and an increased average prisoner length of stay. Of these, the principal contributing factor is an increased average prisoner length of stay, which grew over 50 percent, from 28.4 months in 1981 to 43.5 months in 2005. Lower parole approval rates and specific policy changes aimed at being “tough on crime” are the primary causes of longer prison stays.

Substantial and sustained prison population growth since 1973 has caused the Corrections program in Michigan to look very different than those of the surrounding Great Lakes states³. Michigan’s

² Recidivism rate is the percentage of first paroled prisoners who returned to prison during their parole term, or within four years if the parole term is longer than four years.

³ The seven other states that border a Great Lake are Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Corrections program is out of line, substantially in some cases, in regional and national comparisons.

Michigan had an average length of stay that was at least one year longer than the national and Great Lakes states averages each year from 1990 to 2005. If Michigan’s average prisoner length of stay were one year shorter from 1990 to 2005, CRC estimates that Michigan would have:

- Incarcerated roughly 14,000 fewer prisoners in 2005;
- Spent about \$403 million less in 2005; and
- Employed approximately 4,700 fewer Corrections employees in 2005.

Michigan’s incarceration rate⁴ (511 prisoners per 100,000 residents) was the ninth highest in the U.S. in 2006 and 47 percent larger than

⁴ Incarceration rate is the number of prisoners per 100,000 state residents.

the average of the Great Lakes states. This factor, along with Michigan’s annual cost per prisoner figure (15th highest in the nation) and above-average Corrections employee salary (\$9,000 more than the average of the other states bordering the Great Lakes), has caused Michigan to spend a larger percentage of its total state expenditures on Corrections (5.2 percent) than the national average (3.4 percent).

Projections of future inmate growth portend continued growth in Corrections spending. The average annual increase in Corrections spending pressures related directly to prison population growth is projected to be about \$46 million, which will drive annual spending pressures to a level of approximately \$2.6 billion by 2012. The combination of prison population increases and economic factors will cause Corrections spending pressures to grow at a faster annual rate than they have over the last 34 years.