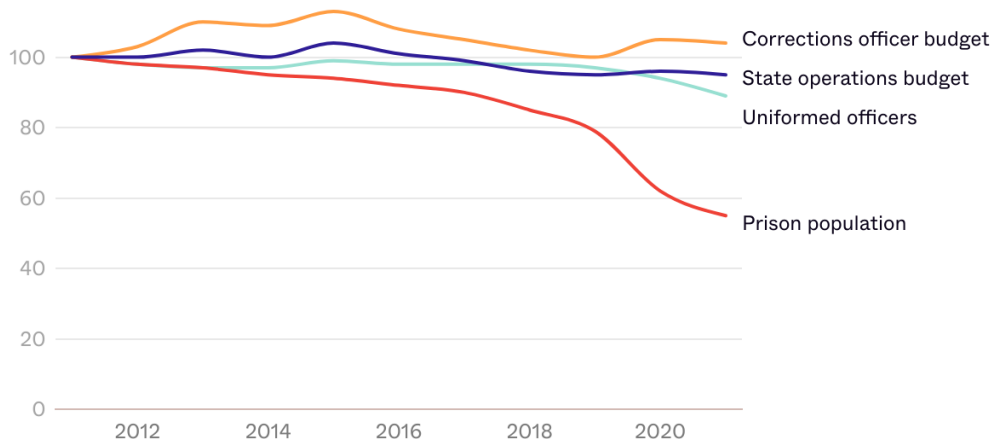


# An Analysis of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision's Budget

Even as New York State's prison population has plummeted, state correctional spending has stayed relatively constant, depleting critical funds that could be reinvested in our communities.

Over the last decade, New York State's prison population has plummeted. In 2011, there were nearly 56,000 people in New York State prisons. By 2021, that population had dropped to 30,746.<sup>1</sup> The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), however, has maintained a relatively steady budget. Despite a 45 percent decrease in the prison population from 2011 to 2021, the agency's operating budget decreased by a mere 5 percent, adjusting for inflation. And while uniformed headcount decreased by only 11 percent, the budget for uniformed officers *increased* during that time frame, suggesting increases to salaries and benefits. Spending on staffing remains a clear obstacle to reducing the DOCCS budget: 47 percent of DOCCS's \$3.5 billion budget in Fiscal Year 2022 was allocated to uniformed corrections officers.<sup>2</sup>

**Change in DOCCS budget and staffing, 2011–2021 (indexed at 2011 = 100%)**



Note: Budget totals adjusted for inflation using Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index figures.

Source: New York State Division of the Budget, New York State Department of Correction and Community Supervision

## Prison closures have not delivered meaningful savings

Since 2011, New York has closed 24 correctional facilities due to the state's steeply declining prison population.<sup>3</sup> When announcing these closures, state leaders repeatedly promised millions of dollars in savings. For example, in 2011, Governor Cuomo predicted \$184 million in savings from closing seven prisons.<sup>4</sup> More recently, in 2021, Governor Hochul predicted \$142 million in savings from closing six prisons.<sup>5</sup>

The DOCCS budget, however, tells a different story. Over the past decade, New York State's total correctional spending per incarcerated person has increased by more than 79 percent, from \$63,926 in 2011 to \$114,831 in

2021.<sup>6</sup> Although it is possible that New York's correctional spending would have been even higher had it not closed 24 prisons, it merits further investigation that the budget continues to increase even as facilities close.

Rather than simply forecast savings, state leaders should proactively reinvest expected savings from prison closures into programs and services that deliver safety by supporting communities, like housing, education, and jobs. These investments would also help generate future savings by helping to further reduce the prison population, allowing the state to close more facilities.

## Overinvesting in incarceration does not make us safer

Every taxpayer dollar spent on New York's prisons is a dollar that could be spent on evidence-based programs that keep communities safe more effectively than incarceration. Research shows, for example, that young adults with access to mental health services are 15 percent less likely to be incarcerated than those with no access to mental health treatment.<sup>7</sup> Another study found that a 10 percent increase in substance treatment was correlated with a 4 to 9 percent decrease in aggravated assaults.<sup>8</sup> These programs achieve impressive results at a fraction of the cost of incarceration. For example, supportive housing for one person in New York City costs roughly \$41,833 per year, or one-third the statewide average cost of incarceration, and has been shown to reduce jail admissions, shelter admissions, and days in psychiatric facilities by providing people with stability and support.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, prison is more than ineffective—it is actively harmful. Economic instability, mental illness, and substance use disorders all are associated with crime; but these problems are exacerbated, not alleviated, by contact with the criminal legal system.<sup>10</sup> Numerous studies show that the relationship between incarceration and crime rates is weak; in fact, some research concludes that the use of incarceration actually increases crime by destabilizing neighborhoods and traumatizing incarcerated people before releasing them back to their communities.<sup>11</sup> These harms fall disproportionately on the shoulders of Black communities and other communities of color.<sup>12</sup>

## New York State needs to rightsize its correctional spending with thought and care

Though more work remains, New York has already begun the important work of decarceration. Now, the state must adjust its budget priorities to invest in evidence-based solutions that deliver safety by supporting communities rather than tearing them apart.

Given that nearly half of the DOCCS budget goes toward corrections officer salaries and other associated costs, this means revisiting the number of uniformed officers on staff. Currently, there are fewer than two people in prison for every corrections officer, a ratio that points to severe overstaffing.<sup>13</sup> This is largely because when a facility closes, uniformed staff are generally relocated rather than downsized.<sup>14</sup>

Mass incarceration should not be a large-scale jobs program for New York State. Nevertheless, for many New Yorkers, working as a corrections officer is one of too few well-paid career opportunities available. To ensure that shrinking DOCCS's fiscal footprint does not cause economic harm, the state should invest some of the savings from a rightsized correctional budget into career transition services for current corrections officers.

All New Yorkers have a right to feel safe in their homes and communities. For the sake of safety and justice, New York must stop overfunding its prisons and start investing in community-based services that keep all New Yorkers safe.

## About

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The Vera Institute of Justice is powered by hundreds of advocates, researchers, and policy experts working to transform the criminal legal and immigration systems until they're fair for all. Founded in 1961 to advocate for alternatives to money bail in New York City, Vera is now a national organization that partners with impacted communities and government leaders for change. We develop just, antiracist solutions so that money doesn't determine freedom; fewer people are in jails, prisons, and immigration detention; and everyone is treated with dignity. Vera's headquarters is in Brooklyn, New York, with offices in Washington, DC, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. For more information, visit [vera.org](http://vera.org).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, *DOCCS Fact Sheet* (Albany: New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, 2022), [perma.cc/6LSB-P5CF](https://perma.cc/6LSB-P5CF).

<sup>2</sup> New York State Operations, Aid to Localities, and Capital Projects Budgets, 2011–2022, select “Budget” > “Year”, accessed via [public.leginfo.state.ny.us/budssrch.cgi?NVBUO](https://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/budssrch.cgi?NVBUO); nominal dollars adjusted for inflation using Bureau of Labor Statistics, “CPI Inflation Calculator,” [data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl](https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl).

<sup>3</sup> New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, *DOCCS Fact Sheet*, 2022, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Staff Writer, “Cuomo to Close Mid-Orange Prison,” *Times Herald-Record*, June 30, 2011, <https://perma.cc/JCZ3-CWHJ>.

<sup>5</sup> Luis Ferré-Sadurní, “Why New York is Closing 6 Prisons,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2021, [nytimes.com/2021/11/09/nyregion/prisons-closing-new-york-hochul.html](https://nytimes.com/2021/11/09/nyregion/prisons-closing-new-york-hochul.html).

<sup>6</sup> New York State Operations, Aid to Localities, and Capital Projects Budgets, 2011–2022. To estimate the cost of incarceration per person, we stripped out parole supervision costs.

<sup>7</sup> Elisa Jácome, “How Better Access to Mental Health Care Can Reduce Crime,” *Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research*, July 2021, [perma.cc/94EZ-W69M](https://perma.cc/94EZ-W69M).

<sup>8</sup> Hefei Wen, Jason M. Hockenberry, and Janet R. Cummings, “The Effect of Substance Use Disorder Treatment Use on Crime: Evidence from Public Insurance Expansions and Health Insurance Parity Mandates,” *National Bureau of Economic Research*, October 2014, 25, [perma.cc/6369-6ZXD](https://perma.cc/6369-6ZXD).

<sup>9</sup> Center for Supportive Housing, *Advancing Supportive Housing Solutions to Reduce Homelessness for People Impacted by the Criminal Legal System: A Report for New York City Leaders* (New York: Center for Supportive Housing, 2022), [perma.cc/PH5R-G6AR](https://perma.cc/PH5R-G6AR); New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, “Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Department of Health Announce Successful Rollout of ‘Justice-Involved Supportive Housing’ Program Stabilizing Individuals Who Frequently Cycle Through Jail And Shelter,” March 15, 2017, [perma.cc/PCY5-VLBE](https://perma.cc/PCY5-VLBE). Statewide average costs of incarceration are nearly \$115,000 per year, based on Vera's analysis.

<sup>10</sup> Alexi Jones and Wendy Sawyer, “Arrest, Release, Repeat: How Police and Jails are Misused to Respond to Social Problems,” *Prison Policy Initiative*, August 2019, [perma.cc/3SZR-AE2E](https://perma.cc/3SZR-AE2E).

<sup>11</sup> Damon M. Petrich, Travis C. Pratt, Cheryl Lero Johnson, et al., “Custodial Sanctions and Reoffending: A Meta-Analytic Review,” *Crime and Justice* 50 (September 2021), [perma.cc/4ATJ-KY7Y](https://perma.cc/4ATJ-KY7Y).

<sup>12</sup> New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, *Under Custody Report: Profile of Under Custody Population As of January 1, 2021*, April 2022, 5, [perma.cc/R2HG-2NXA](https://perma.cc/R2HG-2NXA).

<sup>13</sup> New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, *DOCCS Fact Sheet*, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Harding, “Gov. Andrew Cuomo Must Give Legislative Leaders at Least 90 Days' Notice of the Closures Instead of the Usual One-Year Notification Requirement,” *The Citizen*, April 7, 2021, [perma.cc/B4WC-X4XX](https://perma.cc/B4WC-X4XX); and Nick Reisman, “Prison Officials to Close 6 Facilities in New York State,” *Spectrum News 1*, November 8, 2021, [perma.cc/NB48-6Z98](https://perma.cc/NB48-6Z98).