Expanding Elderly Parole Eligibility in Alabama

5-year impact in Alabama

Granting elderly prisoners compassionate release could reduce the Alabama prison population by more than 3,200 people over the next five years. This kind of geriatric parole program is an opportunity to let elderly prisoners spend 13,500 life years safely in their communities instead of in prison, while reducing prison costs by almost $200 million in the first five years.

Cumulative cost avoidance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yearly savings</th>
<th>5 year total cost avoidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$39M</td>
<td>$195M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Projected population impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life years spent out of prison over five years</th>
<th>Fewer people in AL prisons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13,500+</td>
<td>3,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The opportunity

The number of elderly people incarcerated in Alabama is growing rapidly, outpacing overall prison growth and exacerbating systemic and financial strain on Alabama DOC. The average age of people in ADOC custody rose from 39 in 2016 to 42 in 2021. There are now more than 6,000 people over the age of 50 incarcerated in AL, making up a quarter of the total prison population. This trend is driven by the incarceration of more elderly people over time as well as the effect of long sentences that keep people in prison, often for life.

This growing elderly population requires higher levels of medical attention, overcrowding ADOC infirmaries that consistently operate at twice their designed capacity. Overflow admissions to offsite infirmaries have risen by 54% since 2014 and the growing need for medical care resulted in ADOC spending almost $200 million on medical expenditures in 2021, a 65% increase since 2016. Elderly populations typically cost 2-3x as much to incarcerate compared to younger populations due to costs for medical treatments, prescriptions, etc.

6,000+
People age 50 and older incarcerated in Alabama

3,640%
Increase in AL prisoners age 50 and older in the past fifty years

Creating an avenue to presumptive elderly parole in Alabama is a promising opportunity to provide relief for its aging prisoners, the population most expensive to house and also least likely to re-offend. Even among offenders who are parole eligible under current law, the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles (ABPP) has denied 90% of parole hearings for those 50 and older, despite ABPP Parole Guidelines recommending that parole be granted in 90% of elderly cases. Once parole is granted, the recidivism rate among the elderly parolees is significantly lower than the rate for younger populations. A 2012 New York study found that just 4% of prisoners released at age 65 and older and 7% of those released at ages 50-64 returned to prison for new convictions.

Other states with compassionate parole for elderly prisoners

Wisconsin

Compassionate release alone was expected to save Wisconsin an estimated $27 million over just two years. By releasing people 6 to 12 months prior to the end of their sentence, this bill is expected to decrease department expenditures by approximately 33%.