Safe Inside

Workforce Trends in State Departments of Corrections

A 50-State Analysis

In partnership with
Correctional Leaders Association

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

For most of my adulthood, corrections was my life.

At age 20, I was working at a county jail in Pennsylvania while taking college classes, until I quit school to focus full time on being a corrections officer. Thirty-two years later, in 2021, I retired as the secretary of corrections for the Commonwealth. I served in that position for nearly 11 years, first appointed by a Republican Governor and then reappointed by his successor, a Democrat.

If you haven't worked in a prison or jail, it may be hard to understand what makes a career in corrections so rewarding. For those of us who have done it, the answer is obvious: the people.

My colleagues and I protected the public, looked out for each other, and cared for people, young and old, whose safe and successful reentry to the community had huge stakes for their neighbors and loved ones. Sharing this bond day in and day out — standing, walking, or running, sometimes laughing or crying, but always talking — makes you cherish humanity. You experience the monotony and highs and lows of life in a way that's hard to relate to unless you've really done time in a prison or jail.

Although I no longer work for a department of corrections, I still spend much of my time both in corrections facilities and with people impacted by the corrections system. What I see and hear saddens me.

Frontline staff, their supervisors, and incarcerated people, no matter the state or the county, are suffering in a way I never experienced or witnessed when I was in the job. New recruits and old timers alike are quitting at rates that would have been shocking 10 years ago. Sometimes they are lured by better compensation or retirement packages; just as often, they take jobs that pay less or have worse benefits. The staff who are left behind and the people in their custody are angry. I don't think the public understands how urgent the situation is.

This report is an unprecedented examination of workforce trends in state departments of corrections — and what those mean for the health

"I don't think the public understands just how urgent this situation is."

FOREWORD

and safety of people working and living in state prisons. I am very grateful to the Correctional Leaders Association for guiding and informing the process as this report was developed. We appreciate their partnership. We are also grateful to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, which funded this report. Without them and the crucial support they provided, this initiative would not have been possible. Thanks also to Arnold Ventures for the valuable assistance they provided.

The level of detail in this report might seem overwhelming. Don't let it numb you to just how many millions of lives are at stake.

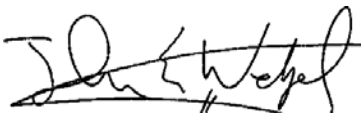
For corrections administrators whose reflex when reviewing new information that reflects negatively on them is to defend the profession, I remind them of the many times in the past when elected officials, advocates, and lawyers have found fault in how we run state prisons. In those situations, our field made its greatest strides when we engaged our critics, analyzed our data, and brought sunlight into our system. Doing this requires transparency and candor — values, especially in corrections, that unfortunately are often punished instead of rewarded.

This is why vulnerable leadership is essential.

I watched my mentors in corrections demonstrate what that looks like, and I did my best to emulate them when it was my turn. I'm not in that seat anymore, though. I acknowledge that the complexity of what our field faces today is nothing like what we've navigated in the past.

Here's why I am hopeful. I know corrections administrators who work out of the department's central office today, but whose careers, like mine, started in a corrections facility. They feel the pain and fear that people working and living behind the walls are experiencing. Our connection to these people on the front lines is deep. Our commitment to them is unshakeable. We are willing to be straight with elected officials and the public when we cannot ensure the health and safety of people in our care. We understand we can't fix this situation by ourselves, and we are determined to do everything we can to get the help we need from elected officials and the broader public.

We will not rest until everyone is safe inside.



John Wetzel

Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (Retired)
Past President, Correctional Leaders Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Safe Inside is a national initiative focused on making prisons safer and healthier places to work and live, which depends in large part on improving staff recruitment and retention.

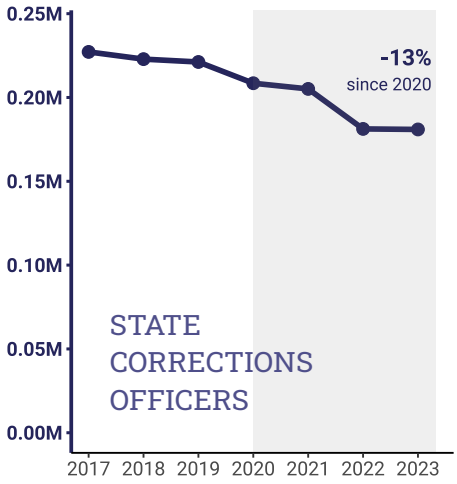
This report provides an unprecedented examination of workforce trends in state corrections departments.

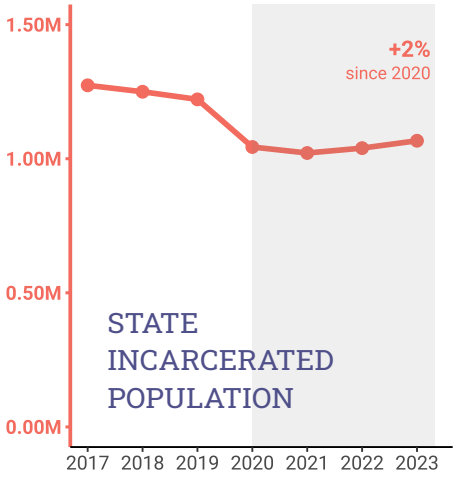
What distinguishes this report from other analyses of the corrections workforce is its exhaustive review of publicly available data from all 50 states. It also integrates this 50-state analysis with federal data and insights from hundreds of interviews with corrections administrators, frontline staff, and incarcerated people. The findings show that while each state department of corrections (and even each prison) faces unique challenges, many share common trends — regardless of geographic region, prison population size, incarceration rate, or the role of unions.

The corrections workforce in the U.S. is under considerable stress.

State corrections leaders routinely cite workforce challenges — including understaffing, excessive overtime, and low morale — as their number one challenge.

Nationally, the number of state corrections officers has declined significantly, while the number of incarcerated people has recently begun increasing.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Meanwhile, the demands on officers have multiplied. Unlike 30 years ago, when there were far more officers per incarcerated person, corrections officers today are expected to support reentry programs, comply with growing reporting requirements, serve an incarcerated population that is aging and has complex health and behavioral health needs, and reduce reliance on restrictive housing such as administrative segregation and solitary confinement. These combined pressures are creating unsustainable workloads.

Filling vacant positions and providing relief to overburdened staff are difficulties familiar to state leaders everywhere, who are competing with the private sector for a shrinking labor pool. But the combination of pressures on the corrections workforce is uniquely challenging:

Prisons are often located where few people (especially young people) are looking for jobs.

> The majority of prisons in the U.S. are in rural areas.

The job can be dangerous.

> Corrections officers experience the highest rate of nonfatal workplace violence — more than 18 times the national average and nearly double that of police officers.

Hours are long and unpredictable.

> The overtime required of corrections officers can include double shifts and extended stretches without days off — leading to fatigue, safety risks, and burnout.

Corrections department salaries lag salaries of other public safety agencies.

> In all but two states, corrections officers earn considerably less than police — on average, $21,000 less per year nationwide.

Turnover is high.

> In most states, the rates at which corrections officers leave their jobs exceed turnover rates of sister agencies.

One in five state employees work for the department of corrections.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The workforce challenges state departments of corrections are navigating have high stakes.

When hospitals, schools, or air traffic control centers are significantly understaffed, the public is likely to feel the impact. Prison staffing shortages, however, often go unnoticed. This report highlights new findings that underscore why workforce challenges in corrections have such far-reaching consequences:

Among all state government job categories, corrections officers are the largest group of employees.

> New analyses conducted for this report found that, on average, approximately one in five state employees work for the department of corrections.

Corrections agencies drive overtime spending.

> State corrections departments spend billions annually on overtime; these agencies are responsible for 40 percent of state governments' total overtime costs. Across a diverse group of states, department of corrections overtime spending doubled on average over the past five years, with some states spending more than four times what they did five years ago.

The health and safety of staff and incarcerated people are at risk.

> Departments of corrections employ more than 200,000 officers, and there are more than one million incarcerated people in state prisons on a given day. An analysis of data across a diverse cross-section of states with publicly available data found that the rate of deaths in custody was 47 percent higher in 2024 than it was in 2019. Violence in prisons has also risen sharply: assaults on staff surged 77 percent, and assaults on incarcerated people increased 54 percent over the same time period.

The ripple effects of prison understaffing reach families and communities.

> Millions of people have a loved one working or incarcerated in a state prison. How they return home, whether from a shift or a sentence, affects everyone's well-being.

Department of corrections overtime spending doubled on average over the past five years, with some states spending more than four times what they did five years ago.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the U.S., states are taking steps to improve recruitment and retention.

To improve recruitment and retention, corrections leaders are pursuing various approaches, including the following:

Raising compensation.

> Most states have increased officer pay, resulting in a 33 percent rise in average salaries from 2017 to 2024.

Launching strategic recruitment efforts.

> Departments are moving beyond traditional job ads, using social media, targeted media campaigns, and dedicated recruitment teams to increase interest.

Adjusting hiring standards.

> Some states are lowering minimum age and education requirements or modifying pre-employment tests to broaden the applicant pool.

Offering new perks and wellness support.

> Incentives like tuition reimbursement, mental health services, and enhanced employee assistance programs aim to boost retention and staff morale.

Some states have made significant improvements to their vacancy rates, but progress is fragile.

Several states have cut their vacancy rates in half in recent years. However, other cases serve as cautionary examples: initial gains were followed by setbacks, with vacancy rates rising again within a year or two.

Violence in prisons has risen sharply:

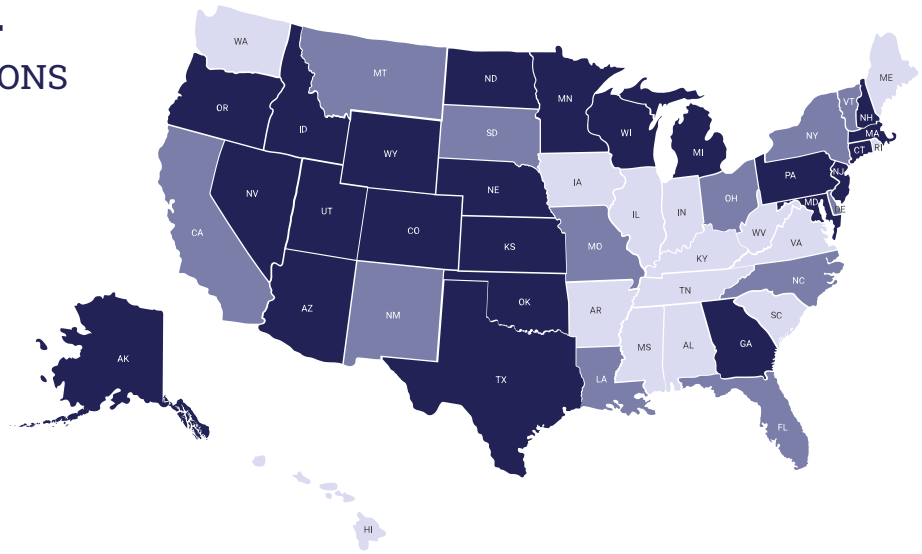
> Assaults on staff surged 77 percent.

> Assaults on incarcerated people increased 54 percent.

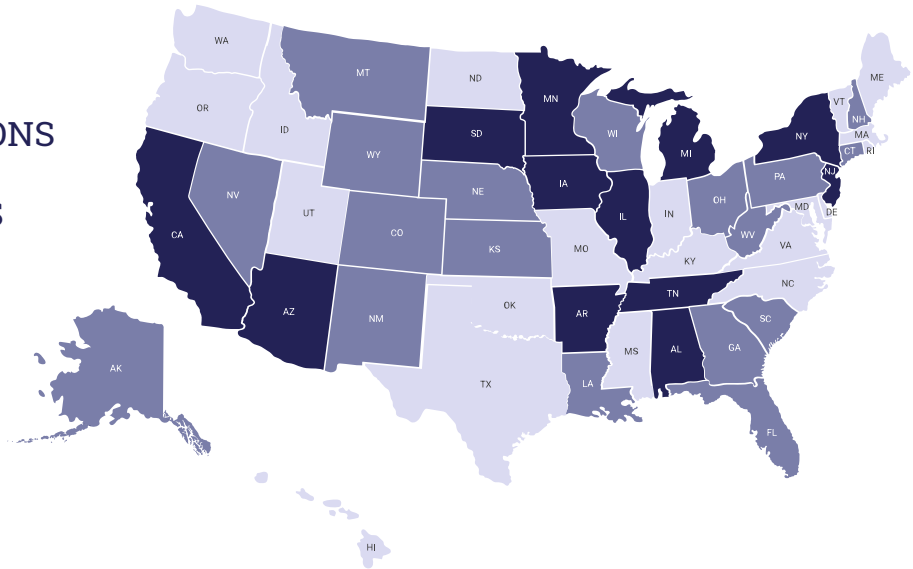
Gaps in publicly available data make it difficult to measure important trends in many state corrections departments.

Federal data on the state corrections workforce are often outdated, incomplete, and inconsistent across states. The maps below show which states make data publicly available across the six workforce metrics and 14 health and safety metrics analyzed for this report.

AVAILABILITY OF STATE CORRECTIONS WORKFORCE METRICS



AVAILABILITY OF STATE CORRECTIONS HEALTH AND SAFETY METRICS



Metric Availability

- Comprehensive (5–6 metrics)
- Moderate (3–4 metrics)
- Limited (0–2 metrics)

When departments of corrections invested significantly in collecting and analyzing data to guide recruitment and retention, the path forward came into sharper focus.

Several states have shown through extensive analyses that, while they have succeeded in hiring large numbers of staff, most new hires left shortly after starting. This insight has helped focus leadership attention on improving retention rates. For example, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice found that extending average officer tenure by just four months would have the same impact as hiring hundreds of new officers.

Durable improvements in retention will depend on whether people feel healthy and safe on the job — and whether frontline staff find purpose in their work, sense empathetic leadership, and have work-life balance. Increased retention also requires recruitment strategies that attract people aligned with these values, rather than reinforcing outdated norms that drive many away.

Even with better recruitment and retention, most corrections systems are unlikely to return to staffing levels seen 20 years ago. State leaders, alongside advocates for incarcerated people and frontline staff, must find ways to manage facilities with current staffing levels while still creating safe, supportive environments for both staff and incarcerated people. Doing so may require revisiting who is incarcerated, rethinking how facilities have traditionally operated, and piloting innovative uses of technology.

Conclusion

Workforce challenges have taken a toll on corrections officers, who take immense pride in protecting the public, supporting their colleagues, and helping incarcerated people prepare to return to their communities. Incarcerated people are acutely aware of how understaffed facilities create unsafe, unhealthy living conditions and undermine access to programs and contact with loved ones. Advocates for frontline staff and incarcerated people, as well as corrections leaders, are working hard to draw attention to these issues and advance efforts that improve the health and safety of people working and living behind the walls. This report equips these constituencies with new data points demonstrating the urgency of their cause and with insights that help illuminate their path forward.

This project was supported by Grant No. 15PBJA-23-GK-05377-MUMU awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Additional support for this effort has been provided by Arnold Ventures and is conducted in partnership with the Correctional Leaders Association.

INTRODUCTION

Background

This report presents findings from an unprecedented 50-state analysis of workforce trends in state departments of corrections.

Across the country, corrections agencies — including county jails, the federal Bureau of Prisons, and community supervision departments — are struggling with staffing shortages that reach every corner of their operations, from security, health care, and education to maintenance and support services.

This report focuses specifically on corrections officers working in state prisons. Drawing on extensive quantitative and qualitative data, it examines how trends in this workforce carry far-reaching consequences. The health and safety of officers and the health and safety of incarcerated people are inextricably linked. How states respond to workforce challenges in their prisons will shape not only conditions inside but also broader impacts for public safety and state budgets.

Public safety is a core responsibility of state government, and the public — especially survivors of crime — expect safe, well-run prisons as part of that duty. Fulfilling this responsibility depends on corrections officers. Their top priority is keeping the community, incarcerated people, and each other safe. These officers walk some of the toughest beats unarmed, vastly outnumbered, and often alone. Maintaining order in a prison hinges on an officer's attention to detail, art of persuasion, compassion, and quick wits. Solving problems day to day must be accomplished with the resources available inside the walls of the prison — a mindset that contrasts with other law enforcement agencies, which are accustomed to calling in sister agencies for backup.

> How states respond to workforce challenges in their prisons will shape not only conditions inside corrections facilities but also broader outcomes for public safety and state budgets.

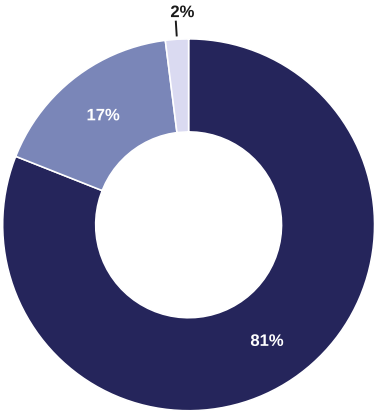
INTRODUCTION

Corrections officers make it possible for substance use counselors, mental health providers, teachers, mentors, clergy, families, and other members of the community to connect with incarcerated people. The delivery of effective services that prepare people for reentry depends on their work. And officers report that seeing incarcerated people return safely and successfully to the community is the most rewarding aspect of their public service.

For most people, however, state prisons remain out of sight. What happens behind prison walls rarely enters public view — until a high-profile incident such as an escape, serious injury, or death draws attention. As a result, few realize how many lives are touched daily by what happens inside. Nearly 200,000 corrections officers work in state prisons nationwide, alongside more than one million incarcerated individuals.[1,2] Beyond those inside, millions of family members of both corrections staff and incarcerated people hope each day for their loved ones' safety. Together, they know what many do not: **state departments of corrections are facing serious workforce challenges that demand urgent attention.**

In a 2023 survey, almost all state department of corrections (DOC) directors identified workforce issues as their top concern (see Figure 1). In fact, one in five felt that their department's situation had become so dire that they either had engaged or were seriously considering engaging the National Guard to supplement staffing.[3]

Figure 1



98% OF STATE DOC DIRECTORS AGREE

"WORKFORCE ISSUES ARE MY TOP PRIORITY"

Strongly Agree
Mostly Agree
Mostly Disagree

Source: Correctional Leaders Association survey, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Corrections leaders know that adequate staffing is essential to fulfilling the core elements of their mission: protecting the community through secure prison operations and preparing incarcerated people for their successful return home. In 2023, more than 408,000 people across the U.S. were released from state custody and back to communities.[4] Sufficient staffing ensures that incarcerated people can access education, job training, and treatment for mental health needs and addiction — supports that make successful reentry and safer communities possible.

States also have a duty to safeguard the health and well-being of their employees. Corrections officers make up the largest single occupational group in the state government workforce.[5] Information gathered for this report indicates that, on average, nearly one in five state employees work for the department of corrections (see Figure 2).[6] In many states, the department of corrections is among the largest agencies, often second only to health and human services.

Figure 2

NEARLY 1/5 STATE EMPLOYEES WORK FOR THE DOC

Source: Safe Inside analysis of 33 states with available data

Understaffing also drives up costs. To maintain operations, departments rely heavily on overtime — an expensive strategy. In the 23 states with available data collected for this report, overtime costs exceeded $2 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2024 alone.[7]

Purpose

In states where staffing shortages are most acute, elected officials are generally aware of this problem. But policymakers, as well as advocates for staff and incarcerated people, often lack national context to understand if other states are facing similar challenges. This situation contrasts starkly with workforce issues in other sectors. The public regularly interacts with health care, public education, and law enforcement — and quickly notices when they are understaffed. National task forces bringing together frontline staff, administrators, elected officials, and advocates have been convened to address workforce challenges in professions

INTRODUCTION

such as nursing, teaching, and law enforcement. These groups have produced comprehensive reports on staffing shortages, supported by consistent data collection that allows progress to be tracked over time.[8,9,10]

This report is a first step toward closing the gap regarding what is known about the corrections workforce versus other essential workers in the public sector. It is designed for a broad audience: elected officials and staff who oversee and fund state departments of corrections, corrections administrators, researchers, advocates, and journalists. Other organizations, noted in the sidebar, have also highlighted the challenges with corrections staffing and contributed important resources and voices to this topic. What is different about this report is its exhaustive analysis of publicly available data from 50 states.

Reading this report provides unprecedented insight into the following:

- The key factors driving staffing shortages in state prisons
- Trends in overtime use and institutional violence
- How staff turnover and use of overtime in a state department of corrections compare to other agencies in that same state
- States' progress in maintaining adequate staffing levels
- State efforts to collect, analyze, and publicly share data on workforce and health and safety trends
- The extent to which these workforce challenges vary across states
- Resources available and under development that can make prisons healthier and safer places to work and live

Other Resources Available on Corrections Workforce Trends

The Marshall Project's "How to Investigate Prison Staffing Trends in Your State" provides useful information on using federal data to generate state insights.

Safer Prisons, Safer Communities joins voices for incarcerated people and corrections staff regarding prison conditions.

Chicago Beyond's "Holistic Safety in Action" offers solutions-focused workshops to support improved health and safety in carceral systems.

INTRODUCTION

Methodology

This report draws on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were obtained from federal and state government agencies.

However, the federal data — including those produced by the U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Bureau of Justice Statistics — have significant limitations when it comes to the state corrections workforce. Existing datasets rarely distinguish among local, state, and federal facilities and often cannot be disaggregated by state, occupation, tenure, or demographic characteristics. They are also typically delayed by one to two years and rely heavily on voluntary surveys, which have experienced declining response rates over the past decade. To fill these gaps, analysts often use imputation (replacing missing values with estimates) to model national trends, but this approach reduces accuracy at the state level. While such sources help illustrate broad patterns, they lack the granularity needed to guide state-specific policy solutions.

Although the Bureau of Justice Statistics provides a wealth of information on corrections populations nationwide, it offers little insight into the workforce itself or into health and safety conditions within state prisons.

These data gaps reinforce a core goal of Safe Inside — building tools and standards that help state DOCs measure and share information on staffing, health, and safety with greater accuracy, consistency, and transparency.

To address these shortcomings, the authors of this report compiled and analyzed available data from multiple sources on a state-by-state basis, drawing on information published on state websites as well as records obtained through public information requests for selected metrics.

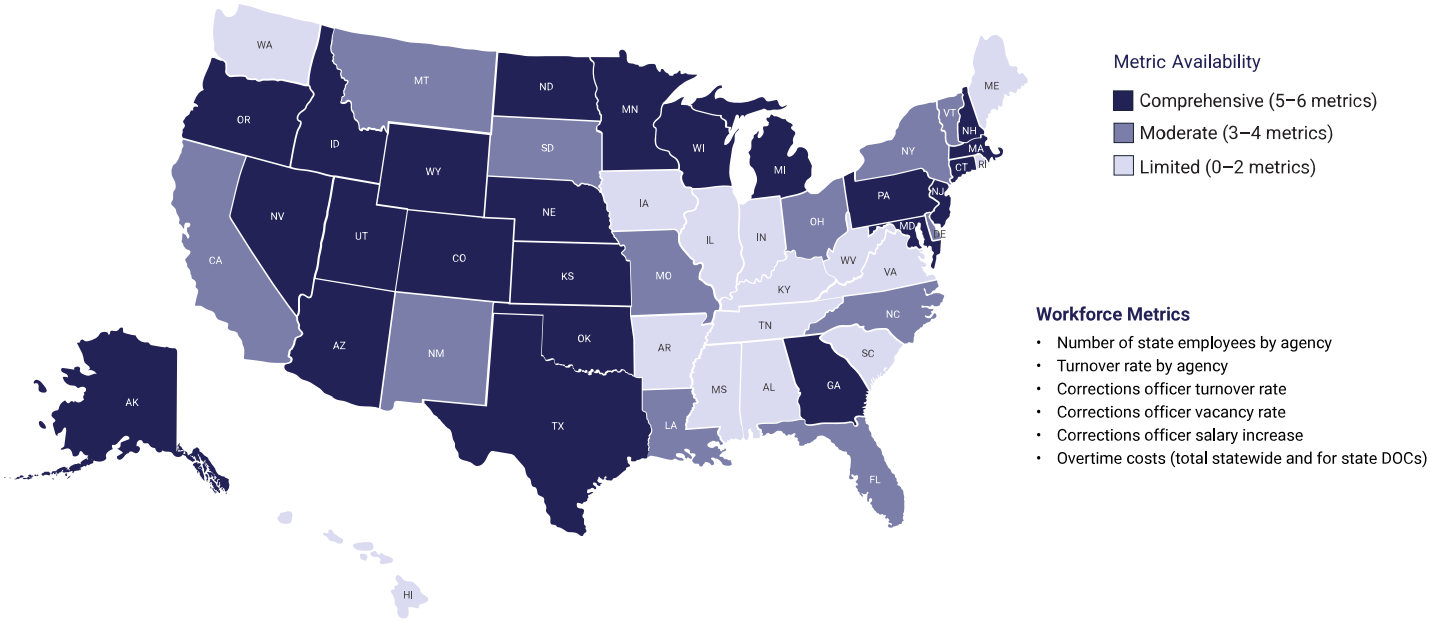
> What is different about this report is its exhaustive analysis of publicly available data from 50 states.

Workforce metrics

To measure trends in state corrections workforces — and to assess how these trends compare to other agencies in the same state — this report examines six key metrics, including turnover rates, vacancy rates, and compensation. Where these data are maintained within state government, and the extent to which they are made publicly available, varies significantly from one state to another. As shown in Figure 3 below, sufficient data were collected for all six metrics in just over half of all states. Profiles of these 28 states are provided in Appendix A.

Figure 3

AVAILABILITY OF STATE CORRECTIONS WORKFORCE METRICS



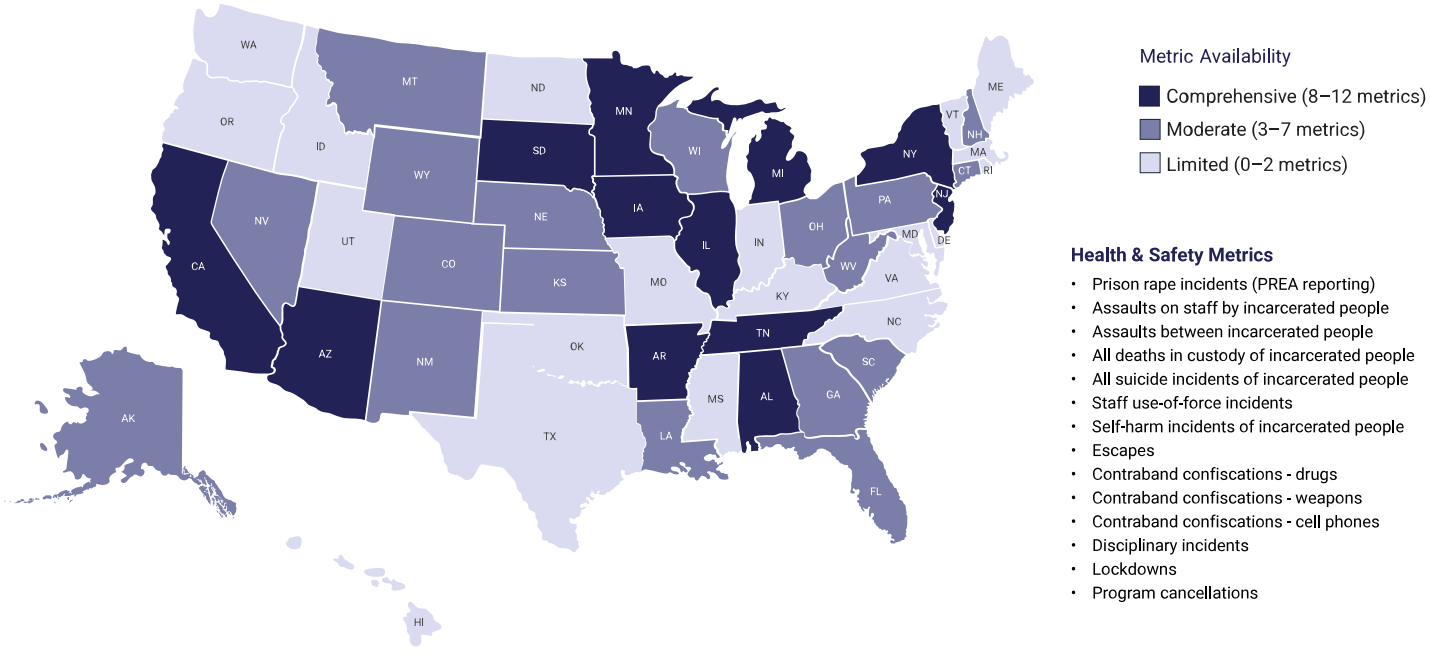
Source: Safe Inside

Health and safety metrics

To measure trends related to the health and safety of people who work and live in state prisons, this report focused on 14 metrics, including incidents of violence and contraband, program cancellations, and lockdowns (see Figure 4). Only one of these 14 metrics — prison rape — is reported consistently across all states and years.[11] About half of state departments of corrections make information publicly available on assaults, deaths, and escapes, while far fewer report data on suicides, program cancellations, or lockdowns. Because many states did not report the same data consistently across the 2019–2024 period, it was not possible to develop meaningful trend analyses for most metrics. As a result, this report highlights only selected indicators of violence. Appendix B provides additional information on the survey results and the data that could be gathered for each metric.

Figure 4

AVAILABILITY OF STATE CORRECTIONS HEALTH AND SAFETY METRICS



Source: Safe Inside

Site visits and interviews

In addition to publicly available quantitative data, the authors and advisors conducted hundreds of meetings and interviews across the U.S. with state corrections directors, their leadership teams, administrators of individual institutions, shift commanders, frontline staff, advocates for survivors of crime, union leaders, formerly incarcerated people, and community-based advocates. Some of these meetings and interviews took place inside state prisons.

Data gaps and limitations

The data assembled for this report make it possible to assess and understand state-level and national trends in the corrections workforce in ways that were previously impossible. However, weaknesses in the available data limit the types of findings that can be drawn.

In particular, readers of this report should note that the available data do **not** allow for the following:

Determining how each of the 50 states is performing

> Data are not publicly available for every state, so findings are often based on a subset of states with available data for the specific metric and time period being evaluated.

Measuring differences between states

> States vary widely in how they calculate key indicators such as vacancy and turnover rates, or how they report compensation for corrections officers — making "apples-to-apples" comparisons across states impossible. For this reason, the report emphasizes comparisons of corrections workforce data (such as turnover rates and overtime usage) to other state agencies within the same state. In some cases, the authors made careful decisions to aggregate data across states — such as averaging overtime expenditures for a given fiscal year or calculating median trends — when underlying data appeared reasonably comparable across a subset of states. These aggregations were used selectively and with caution to illuminate broad national patterns while avoiding misleading direct comparisons.

The data in this report should be used only to understand trends and illustrate shared challenges across states.

The available information is not granular enough to diagnose conditions at individual facilities, nor consistent enough to support comprehensive comparisons between states.

INTRODUCTION

Assessing the degree to which systems are adequately staffed

> As this report documents, many state corrections departments operate with fewer staff than needed to run prisons safely and effectively, with serious implications for health, safety, and overall stability. Understaffing is undeniably widespread.
>
> Assessing the degree of understaffing, however, is more difficult. As described in more detail later in this report, vacancy rates — one of the few consistent measures available — offer useful trend data but are imperfect indicators of whether a department of corrections has a sufficient number of corrections officers. Even less useful is a commonly used metric that is intentionally not presented in this report: the ratio of staff to incarcerated people. This figure overlooks essential variables such as institutional design, mission, and population needs, all of which significantly influence how much staffing a specific prison facility or system requires.

Analyzing thoroughly the impact that understaffed facilities have on the incarcerated population

> Data used for this project provided some insight into levels of violence to which staff and incarcerated people are exposed. The data available were not sufficient, however, to measure how people's access to programs, time out of their cell, or health services changed as vacancy rates among corrections officers increased or decreased in individual states.

For these reasons, the data in this report should be used only to understand trends and illustrate shared challenges across states. The available information is not granular enough to diagnose conditions at individual facilities, nor consistent enough to support comprehensive comparisons between states. In addition, insufficient data existed to derive quantitative findings about the relationship between vacancy rates and the access incarcerated people have to programs and services that prepare them for reentry.

Various converging trends are putting the corrections workforce under significant strain.

The U.S. has a persistent, widespread worker shortage.

The overall U.S. labor force participation rate has been declining for more than 20 years, falling 5 percent since 2005 (see Figure 5). As of July 2025, there were more open jobs in the U.S. than available workers.[12] Industries like manufacturing, construction, and trucking are all struggling to attract and retain workers, forcing employers to rethink pay, scheduling, and workplace conditions to stay competitive.[13,14,15] These pressures make it even harder for state departments of corrections to recruit, as the same pool of potential employees has increasingly attractive alternatives outside public service.

Figure 5

FEWER AVAILABLE WORKERS ACROSS THE U.S.

MONTHLY LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE (%)

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Why Staffing Is Harder in Rural Prisons

ECONOMIC TRANSITION

With a **17%** decline in agricultural employment and **80%+** of high-skill job growth occurring in metro areas (2000–2021), the labor pool has shifted away from rural communities.

OLDER POPULATION

20% of rural residents are age 65+ (vs. 14% in urban areas), further reducing the available workforce.

LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Limited childcare and transportation options make it harder for potential workers to take and keep jobs.

Sources: Federal Reserve and U.S. Department of Agriculture (2024)

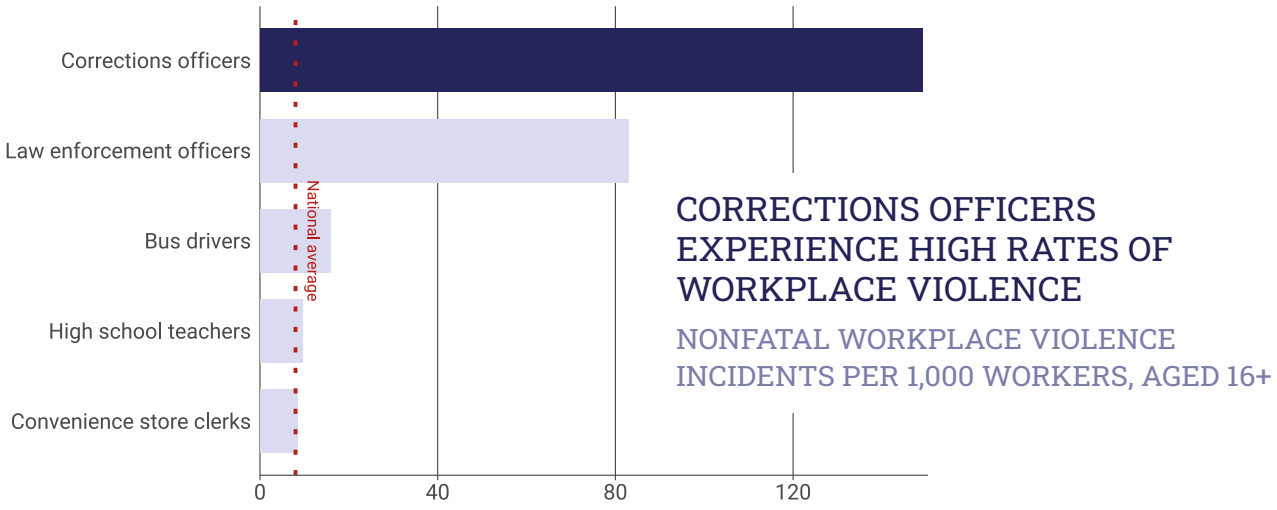
Corrections departments have historically struggled to compete with other public safety employers, including state, local, and federal law enforcement (see Figure 15 later in this report). They also face competition from other corrections systems, such as city, county, or federal jails and prisons operating in the same regions — many of which offer higher pay than the states.[16,17]

Compounding matters, many state prisons are located in rural areas where changes in the economy, the aging of the resident population, and gaps in infrastructure mean even fewer people locally are looking for jobs.[18,19,20]

Working conditions in corrections facilities are challenging.

Corrections officers experience the highest rate of nonfatal workplace violence of any occupational group, as shown in Figure 6. Between 2015 and 2019, they suffered 149 violent incidents per 1,000 workers annually — more than 18 times the national average rate for all workers (8 per 1,000 workers) and almost double the rate of violence that police officers experience.[21] A study of more than 1,800 corrections officers across 45 prisons in Kentucky and Ohio found that officers who had experienced or been threatened with violence reported more workplace stress, and officers' perceptions of safety strongly impacted their level of stress.[22]

Figure 6



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022

Beyond the risk of violence, corrections officers face other intense occupational stressors. Facilities are often loud, hot, and physically taxing places to work, especially when wearing protective gear such as stab-resistant vests. Opportunities to step outside the secure area for breaks are limited, and officers cannot carry cellphones to connect with loved ones for support during their shifts. Corrections officers also routinely witness critical incidents: self-harm attempts or deaths by suicide, assaults between incarcerated people, medical emergencies, and other security events that can have significant and lasting psychological effects. A recent study of corrections officers in the Minnesota prison system found a relationship between accumulated critical incident exposure and mental health symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety becoming more pronounced.[23]

Research regarding the impact these and other factors have on corrections officers' life expectancy is limited. What has been published on this question usually dates to a 1984 study.[24] Because that research is outdated and relies on methodology that does not effectively compare data across different categories of people, it should not be used to highlight lifespans of corrections officers. More research is needed to examine how working conditions affect the health and longevity of corrections officers.

> Corrections officers routinely witness critical incidents that can have significant and lasting psychological effects.

Who is a typical corrections officer?

Many assume corrections officers are overwhelmingly White men, but nationally the workforce is more diverse. This employee makeup has important implications for recruiting and retention strategies.[25]

32.5%
Women

66.8%
White

27.1%
Black/African American

15.8%
Hispanic/Latino (can be any race)

1.8%
Asian

Responsibilities and expectations of corrections officers have multiplied.

Over the past 25 years, pressure from elected officials across the political spectrum, advocates, and state and federal judges has helped propel major changes to corrections systems. Examples of policy areas where state corrections leaders have made major changes include:

- Preparing incarcerated people for reentry to the community;
- Reducing reliance on the use of restrictive housing such as administrative segregation;
- Protecting incarcerated people from sexual assault;
- Meeting the complex health needs of an incarcerated population that is aging and has a large and growing number of people diagnosed with mental health and/or substance use disorders;
- Facilitating, when appropriate, incarcerated parents' contact with their children; and
- Providing increased access to corrections facilities by members of the community, such as clergy, mentors, educators, and other volunteers.

Corrections officers and administrators interviewed for this report acknowledged that this change in focus can make their work more meaningful. Yet they also noted that these changes have added new layers of responsibility, documentation, and compliance work on top of long-standing operational duties such as counts, searches, and perimeter supervision. Rather than replacing old tasks, the new expectations have accumulated, leaving officers with more to do and less time for direct engagement with colleagues and incarcerated people.

These overlapping demands often create mixed signals about what to prioritize — the rehabilitative work many find

Rather than replacing old tasks, the new expectations have accumulated, leaving officers with more to do and less time for direct engagement with colleagues and incarcerated people.

rewarding, the operational routines that sustain security, or the administrative requirements of policy compliance. This combination contributes to **frustration, fatigue, and a sense of role ambiguity** — all well-documented factors in job dissatisfaction and turnover among corrections officers.[26,27]

Increased rates of retirement and high rates of turnover among new hires contribute to an unstable working environment.

Between 1970 and 2010, most state departments of corrections built new prisons because their prison population was growing significantly, which also required hiring large numbers of new corrections officers. Of those four decades, the 1990s saw the highest number of new prisons being built: 462 in total.[28] Now, the officers hired during that period are approaching retirement age. Across the U.S., the average age for a corrections officer is about 40 years old.[29] Meanwhile, newer hires are leaving their jobs much faster than was the case just 10 years ago.

Examples

How These Trends Are Unfolding in States

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

63%

of corrections officers have **3 years or less** experience with the department.[30]

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

53%

of all DOC staff have a length of service of **4 years or less.**[31]

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

42%

of all DOC staff have worked **less than 5 years** at the department.[32]

This churn hollows out the "middle" of the workforce: **with fewer mid-career staff to draw from, agencies are promoting officers into key frontline supervisor and middle-management roles much faster than they did in the past.** This development compromises the quality of mentoring that new staff receive and undermines the general oversight and consistency of day-to-day operations. It also makes it harder to retain both new officers and the seasoned staff they need to learn from.

This dynamic is hardly unique to corrections. Whether it can be attributed to changes in pension and health benefits offered to new employees — or is part of the larger trend among younger generations to stay in jobs for less time than their parents — is unclear. Whatever the reasons, turnover rates among new hires in state departments of corrections are extremely high, especially in comparison to other jobs in the public sector. For example, only about 7 percent of new public-school teachers (with three years or less of experience) leave the profession each year.[33]

Examples

High Turnover Rates

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

In 2025, the secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections testified to a state budget committee that 58 percent of their corrections officers have two years or less experience on the job. He said, "That keeps me up at night ... the [incarcerated population has] much more experience."[34]

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Between fiscal years 2015 and 2024, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice hired 78,000 corrections officers but lost almost 82,000, averaging over 7,800 new hires per year just to keep pace with exits.[35]

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

In 2024, corrections cadet positions at the Louisiana Department of Corrections had a turnover rate exceeding 200 percent — meaning, on average, new hires stayed less than six months on the job.[36]

NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The average tenure for a corrections officer at the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation dropped from 11.5 years in 2017 to just 4.3 years in 2024.[37]

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Nearly 25 percent of entry-level officers at the Minnesota Department of Corrections left their positions in 2023.[38]

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The New Hampshire Department of Corrections hired 46 new officers in 2024, but 35 others left the same year.[39]

Between 2019 and 2023, the number of corrections officers continued to decline, while the number of incarcerated people in state prisons began increasing.

After decades of steady growth, incarceration rates across the United States began to decline. Starting around 2007, most states saw significant reductions in their prison populations, though the timing and pace varied. In many states — including North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas — populations fell enough that departments of corrections were able to close facilities.[40]

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this downward trend, reducing both the number of incarcerated people and the number of corrections officers. From 2019 to 2021, the number of state corrections officers nationwide fell by 7.3 percent, while the number of incarcerated people declined by 16.4 percent. The pace of these declines was accelerated by pandemic-related disruptions, but they still reflected broader trends already underway.

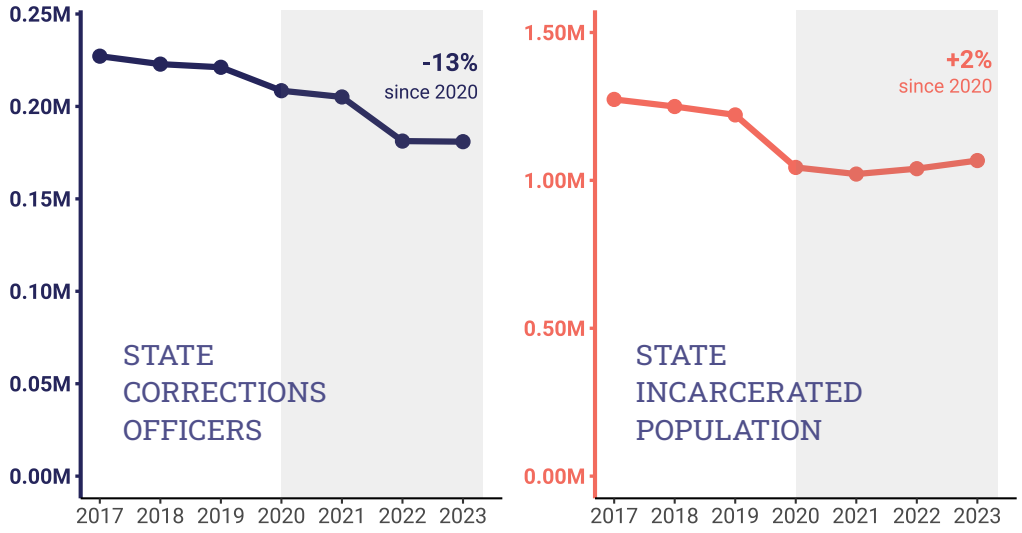
Since 2021, these trajectories have diverged. The incarcerated population in state prisons has begun to rise again, while the corrections workforce has continued to shrink. Between 2021 and 2023, the number of state corrections officers declined another 11.8 percent, even as the number of incarcerated people grew by 4.5 percent. As shown in Figure 7, the result is a widening gap between the size of the incarcerated population and the workforce charged with managing it.[41] Longtime corrections administrators interviewed for this report noted that the rapid turnover and upheaval of recent years have left many agencies without frontline staff who have firsthand experience of what a better-staffed, better-functioning pre-pandemic prison environment looked like.[42]

The rapid turnover and upheaval of recent years have left many agencies without frontline staff who have firsthand experience of what a better-staffed, better-functioning pre-pandemic prison environment looked like.

The most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest a possible shift: in 2024, the number of state corrections officers increased by 1.1 percent compared to 2023. However, that modest growth is still not keeping pace with projected increases in the incarcerated population. (At the time of publication, national 2024 data on state prison populations were not yet available.)

Figure 7

INCARCERATED POPULATION INCREASES WHILE NUMBER OF CORRECTIONS OFFICERS CONTINUES TO DECLINE



Sources: Left graphic: Bureau of Labor Statistics; right graphic: Bureau of Justice Statistics

As state departments of corrections wrestle with workforce challenges, overtime spending and violence in prisons are increasing.

Many state departments of corrections report significant vacancy rates among their corrections officer positions.

Vacancy rates among corrections officers — usually defined as the share of budgeted positions that are unfilled — reflect that many state departments of corrections are understaffed, often significantly so. The authors of this report collected a snapshot of corrections officer vacancy rates in 2025 from 19 state departments of corrections and found wide variation. The highest reported vacancy rate was 43 percent, and the lowest was 5 percent, with an average rate across the sample of 17 percent (see Figure 8).[43]

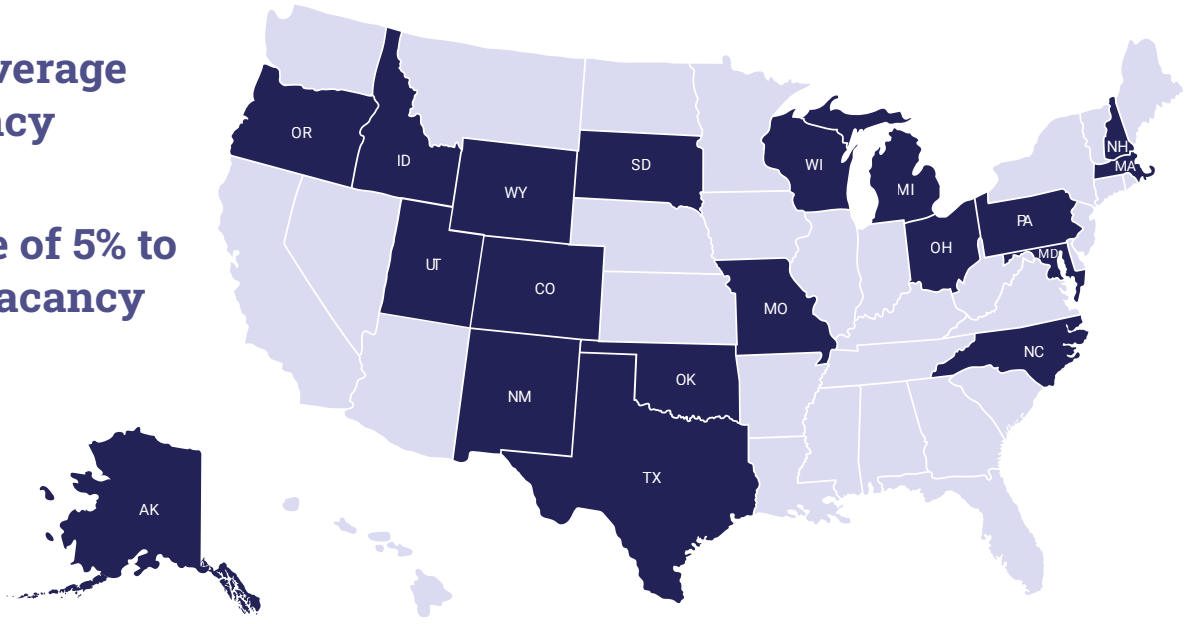
Figure 8

VACANCY RATES ACROSS A SAMPLE OF 19 DOCS

UNFILLED CORRECTIONS OFFICER POSITIONS

17% average vacancy

Range of 5% to 43% vacancy



Vacancy rates are reported inconsistently across departments of corrections. Many states release this information only sporadically, limit it to certain positions or facilities, or do not report it at all. A few states report vacancies in more than one way, for example, as a percentage of budgeted full-time equivalents (FTEs), as a percentage of designed staffing levels, and/or as a percentage of operational staffing levels. Therefore, it is important to interpret this information with caution, as described below.

Interpreting Vacancy Rates with Caution

Measuring the extent to which a state department of corrections, or an individual state prison, is short- (or adequately) staffed is tricky. Vacancy rates are the measure most used for this purpose, but as explained below, a host of issues make this metric problematic.

WHAT'S COUNTED?

Most states compute vacancy rates using budgeted positions as the denominator — an approach that can be misleading. Budgets may rest on outdated staffing analyses or reflect negotiations with budget officials rather than true operational need. The numerator is also tricky: many departments of corrections lack an accurate count of officers actually reporting for duty, obscuring the "true" vacancy rate. Finally, the relief factor — meant to account for time off (vacation, sick leave, training, disciplinary suspension, military duty) — is often inaccurate and may miss spikes in absenteeism.

WHAT'S THE SCOPE?

Rates are often agency-wide, masking critical shortages at specific facilities or within certain job categories.

WHAT TIME FRAME?

Reported rates may reflect vacancy as of a single day or as a broader average across a specific time period — and timing matters for understanding impacts.

HOW OFTEN?

Many state departments of corrections publicly report vacancy data once per year or only when requested (during a budget process, for example). As a result, it is difficult to discern when vacancies are spiking at certain times over the course of the year.

Examples

The Impact of Corrections Officer Vacancy

Vacancy rates can mean hundreds of unfilled positions — especially in larger systems.

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

17%

vacancy rate among corrections officers, which translated to **more than 950 empty positions** in early 2025[44]

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION AND CORRECTIONS

8%

vacancy rate as of May 2025, which meant **513 unfilled corrections officer jobs**[45]

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

9%

vacancy rate as of July 2024 (department-wide), which meant the agency had **more than 2,100 unfilled positions** that year[46]

Vacancy rates are often much higher in certain institutions or among certain job classes.

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

An analysis of individual prisons run by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice found that, while the overall vacancy rate among corrections staff was 28 percent agency-wide, some facilities had much higher rates. **Six facilities, for example, reported more than half their positions vacant.**[47]

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The overall vacancy rate for corrections officers at the Michigan Department of Corrections was 17 percent, but **several facilities in rural areas were operating at more than 30 percent vacancy** in early 2025.[48]

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Certain classes of employees also have higher vacancy rates. For example, the New Hampshire Department of Corrections had **48 percent vacancy among its entry-level corrections officer positions.**[49]

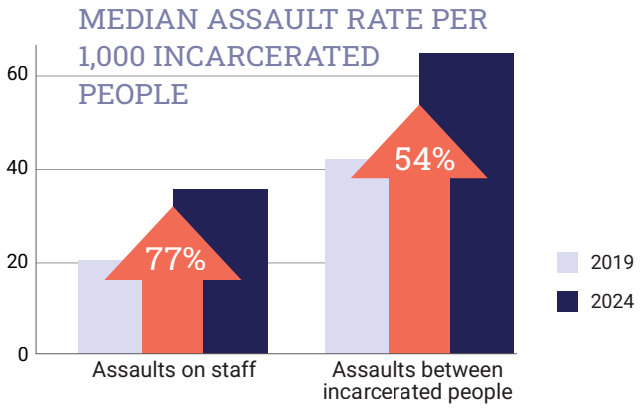
Violence in state prisons has been increasing.

As part of this project, websites for all 50 state departments of corrections were reviewed to identify publicly available indicators of health and safety. Data in this area are spotty at best (see sidebar), but the authors of this report were able to draw conclusions on two key indicators.

Eleven state departments of corrections, which given their size and location amount to a cross-section of state DOCs across the U.S., made similar types of data available publicly for 2019 to 2024. That information reflects a substantial increase in rates of assaults on staff and person-on-person assaults over this five-year timeframe.

Figure 9

SIGNIFICANT UPTICK IN RATE OF ASSAULTS ON STAFF AND BETWEEN INCARCERATED PEOPLE, 2019 AND 2024



Source: Data on assaults on staff from Safe Inside analysis of AL, AR, CA, IL, MI, MN, NJ, NY, TN, and WI; data on assaults between incarcerated people from Safe Inside analysis of AL, AR, CA, IL, MI, MN, NY, SD, and TN

What Could Not Be Analyzed and Why

Interviews with corrections administrators, officers, and incarcerated people revealed that understaffing can quickly escalate tensions and lead to worsening conditions. However, few state departments of corrections make data publicly available that would allow these dynamics to be systematically examined through consistent measurement of key factors.

STAFF USES OF FORCE

Data were publicly available for 13 departments of corrections, but the years of available data were incomplete, or definitions varied, so multi-year trends across these agencies or some subset of them could not be established.

LOCKDOWNS

Regular public reporting was found in only three departments of corrections (California, Illinois, and Tennessee), an insufficient number of states from which national trends could be extrapolated.

PROGRAM DISRUPTIONS

States often list program offerings, but do not consistently make information about interruptions publicly available, including when and why they happened and the duration of these interruptions.

CONTRABAND

Fourteen states report at least one contraband metric, but what contraband was featured in these reports (e.g., drugs, weapons, cellphones) differed among these states, as did how contraband seizures were reported (incidents vs. weight/quantity). Time periods covered in these reports also varied. Some states, for example, started or stopped reporting between 2019 and 2024.

COMPARABILITY OVER TIME

For several indicators, states changed definitions or reporting frequency, making it impossible to measure trends over time within a single state.

See Appendix B for more information on health and safety trends analyzed for this report.

Mortality trends for incarcerated people point the same way. Among 12 departments of corrections with sufficiently consistent reporting, the rate of deaths in custody was 47 percent higher in 2024 than in 2019 (a two-year comparison chosen to avoid the pandemic-era spike in deaths).

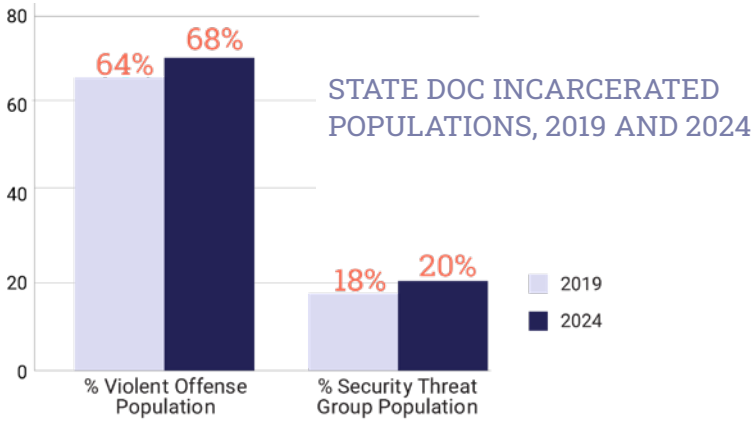
Some states report manners of death (e.g., natural, accidental, homicide, suicide), but these categories were not comparable system-wide, and homicide/suicide counts were generally too small for trend analysis.

These spikes in violence do not appear driven by a significant change in the composition of the incarcerated population. A comparison of 2019 and 2024 percentages indicates that the share of people with violent-offense histories or security-threat-group affiliations remained relatively stable (see Figure 10). Other operational factors likely contribute (e.g., staffing levels, turnover/experience mix), though interviews and stakeholder meetings did not point to a single cause.

> Among a cross-section of 12 departments of corrections with sufficiently consistent reporting, the rate of deaths in custody was 47 percent higher in 2024 than in 2019.

Figure 10

POPULATION WITH VIOLENT HISTORIES RELATIVELY STABLE



Average percentage

Source: Safe Inside analysis of 10 states with available data

State departments of corrections have significantly increased spending on overtime.

Overtime expenditures across state departments of corrections have risen sharply in recent years. Among the states with complete data from 2019 and 2024, departments of corrections spent $2.2 billion on overtime in 2024 alone, 80 percent more than the amount in 2019 (see Figure 11).[50]

Figure 12 below highlights the pace of that increase, with average overtime spending across the states with available data rising by more than 100 percent since 2019 — and several states seeing jumps of nearly 200 percent or more.[51]

Figure 11

26 STATES SPENT A COMBINED $2.2B ON OVERTIME IN 2024

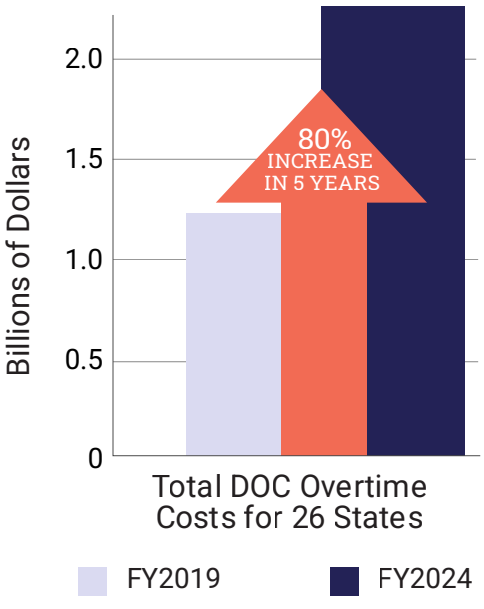
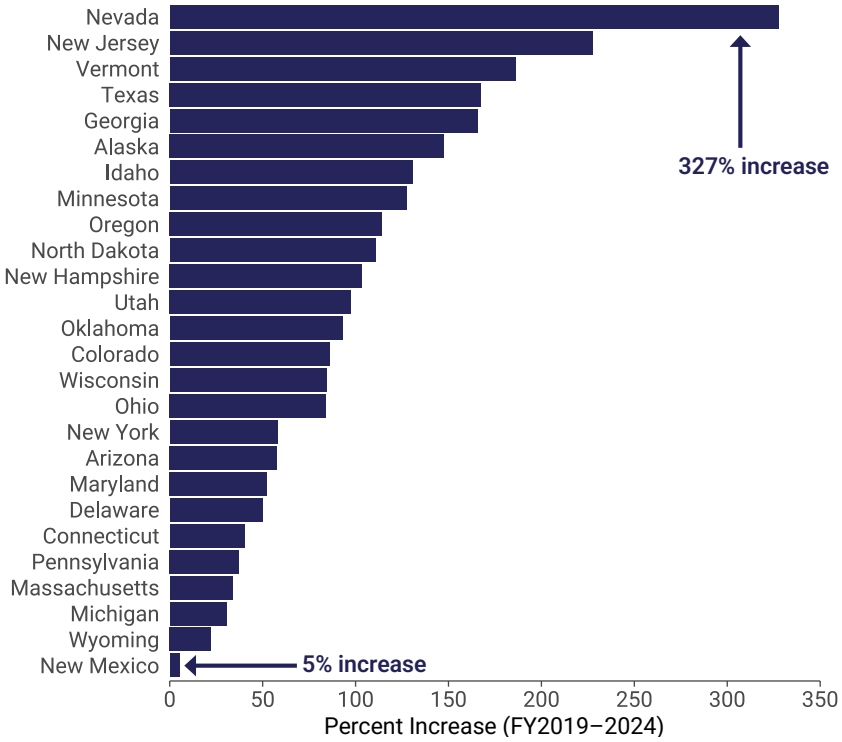


Figure 12

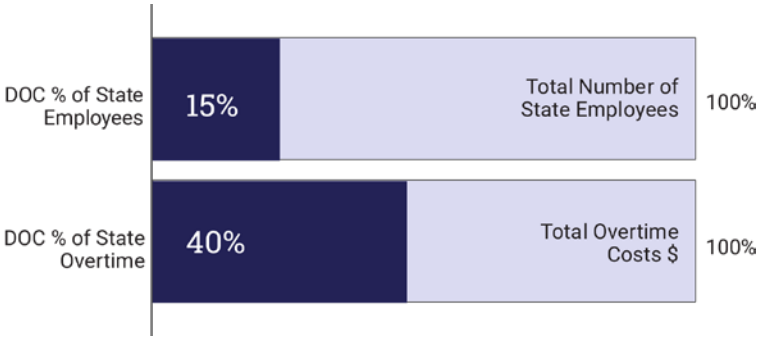
DOC OVERTIME HAS MORE THAN DOUBLED IN MANY STATES



Source: Safe Inside analysis of 26 states with available data

For state policymakers scrutinizing overtime costs, corrections is a major driver. Although corrections employees typically make up about 15 percent of a state's workforce, they account for roughly 40 percent of state government overtime spending, as shown in Figure 13.[52]

Figure 13



DOCS HAVE OUTSIZED IMPACT ON STATE OVERTIME COSTS

15% OF WORKERS; 40% OF OVERTIME

Source: Safe Inside analysis of 24 states with available data

Frequent use of overtime contributes to staff burnout **AND** turnover.

When facilities operate without enough staff, the impacts on the workforce are wide-ranging. Officers face heavier workloads, more frequent exposure to stressful situations, and less time to manage their core responsibilities. The multistate study of 1,800 officers cited earlier also found that stress levels were significantly higher among those who believed staffing was inadequate or who lacked sufficient time to meet job demands.[53]

As state departments of corrections have struggled to fill vacant positions, the use of overtime has increased. Overtime has been common in state departments of corrections for decades. In many systems, it was a perk prioritized for more tenured officers, who saw it as a helpful supplement to their salaries. In recent years, however, state departments of corrections are increasingly relying on *mandatory* overtime, requiring officers to work double shifts, forego days off, and sometimes travel long distances to cover understaffed facilities.

Interviews and meetings for this project frequently highlighted the toll mandatory overtime places on corrections officers. Extreme work demands can include the equivalent of working

two full-time jobs, multiple 18-hour shifts in a row, and, in some exceptional cases, stretches of 30 consecutive days without relief. Line staff and shift commanders reported how common it was for officers to spend hours at a post unable to ask for relief so they could so much as take a bathroom break.

These work conditions increase the risk of accidents, both on the job and on commutes to and from work. Besides the grueling schedules, officers, especially new hires who had the least standing to request certain shifts, explained how frustrating it was to work a job where it was impossible to know if or when you would go home or have a day off. Some officers interviewed said their only recourse was to call in sick or simply not show up for work, which triggered a sense of guilt because it meant forcing another colleague to work more. In addition, failing to report for unscheduled or extended duty can result in disciplinary action. Corrections administrators also reported that because institutions are so understaffed, they have had to compress or eliminate in-service training programs, which makes it harder to equip staff with the tools needed to succeed on the job.

These situations are taxing — for an employee's physical and mental health and for the well-being of their families. Research from 2019 on psychosocial and behavioral outcome variables among corrections officers found that work-related exhaustion is one of the primary drivers of occupational stress and impaired workability.[54]

States have implemented a variety of strategies to improve recruitment and increase retention of corrections officers; vacancy rates have improved in some states.

Most states have increased pay.

Raising salaries has been the most common and significant response by states to address high vacancy and turnover rates. Nationwide, governors and corrections leaders have secured legislative approval for major corrections officer pay increases, driving substantial new spending in state corrections budgets. In many states, these raises came in the form of significant one-time bumps in across-the-board pay or targeted for entry-level positions, described in Table 1.[55] Not included in the table are additional signing and retention bonuses that many states have adopted in recent years.

Table 1

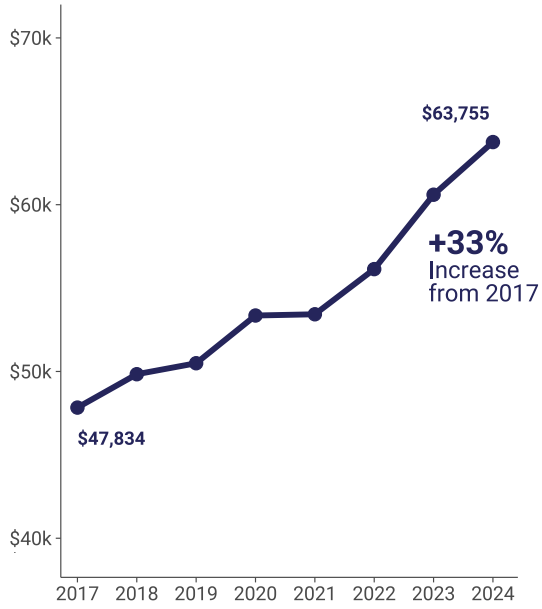
SIGNIFICANT RAISES FOR CORRECTIONS OFFICERS

State	Pay Increases	Time Range
INCREASES FOR ENTRY-LEVEL OFFICERS		
Idaho	**45%**	2020–2025
Nebraska	**40%**	2021
Oregon	**54%**	2020–2025
INCREASES FOR ALL OFFICERS		
Georgia	**58%**	2021–2025
Kansas	**36%**	2021–2024
Montana	**50%**	2020–2025
Nevada	**32%**	2021–2026
New Mexico	**40%**	2020–2025
Ohio	**45%**	2020–2025
Oklahoma	**30%**	2022
Texas	**39%**	2020–2025
Utah	**52%**	2020–2025
Wisconsin	**46%**	2020–2024

Source: Safe Inside

Nationally, these efforts have resulted in an overall 33 percent increase in average salary for state corrections officers between 2017 and 2024 (see Figure 14).[56]

Figure 14



SALARIES ON THE RISE

AVERAGE PAY FOR STATE CORRECTIONS OFFICERS

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Other workforce initiatives are also common.

States are not relying only on bonuses and pay raises to accelerate hiring or to encourage existing employees to stay on the job. States are also designing and implementing a wide array of other initiatives, as illustrated in Table 2. At least some of these reflect important, and overdue, improvements to how state departments of corrections reach a younger generation of employees. In some cases, changes to hiring policies (such as lowering the minimum age of employment or eliminating certain educational requirements) could attract new talent to the corrections workforce that previously had been ineligible for the job. Shortening training academies could reduce attrition during the onboarding process. On the other hand, it is possible such changes are introducing employees to the corrections workforce who are not sufficiently prepared to succeed in the job. As a result, it remains unclear which approaches sustainably improve recruitment and retention and which may carry costs for safety, culture, or workforce health.

Table 2

EXAMPLES OF NEW APPROACHES BEING EMPLOYED TO IMPROVE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Recruiting	Hiring	Other Perks
Post jobs via print, online, radio, TV	**Lower** minimum age requirements	**Expand** benefits
Use online job hubs, virtual fairs	**Reduce** education requirements (HS/GED)	**Offer** flexible scheduling (part-time, multi-site)
Attend job fairs and recruiting events	**Ease** state residency rules	**Provide** tuition repayment
Offer staff referral incentives	**Hire** legal permanent residents	**Expand** employee assistance programs (EAP)
Partner with labor agencies, schools (e.g., technical high schools)	**Implement** one-day, one-stop hiring (in person or online)	**Improve** quality of life (relax dress code, allow cellphone use)
Leverage social media, texting, digital tools	**Streamline** or eliminate pre-employment testing	**Enhance** employee support (psychologist, wellness apps, mentoring)
Sponsor ads on Indeed, LinkedIn	**Shorten** career ladders for faster promotion	**Involve** staff in decision-making
Develop or hire recruiters	**Credit** prior tenure in other jobs toward seniority	**Highlight** employee achievements on social media
Recruit through community networks (e.g., churches, barbershops)	**Use** internships as hiring pathways	**Invest** in ongoing professional development
Empower individual facilities to hire directly		

Examples

Workforce Initiatives: Brief Case Studies

THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

implemented specialized training programs around mental health and wellness, resiliency, and suicide prevention in 2023. In 2021, the department implemented a peer-to-peer mentoring and support program (4BLUENJ) in partnership with a university healthcare provider.[57]

THE IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

hired a clinician to work as an employee wellness coordinator and connect staff to local providers. The department also developed a wellness app that allows employees to complete individualized burnout assessments and wellness logs.[58]

THE SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

offers up to $10,000 for successful recruitment referrals in critical need positions, advertises in atypical venues like gas station pumps, and created a retention team in each facility across the state.[59]

THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

created a 15-member dedicated Recruitment and Retention team who travel the state to engage potential employees and respond to the needs of new hires.[60]

THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

has surveyed employees every other year since 2020 and publishes the results of the survey in interactive dashboards on its website.[61]

THE KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

implemented Peer Support Teams to respond to staff needs after critical events and designated a statewide wellness manager.[62]

THE WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

conducts an employee satisfaction survey each year, with a participation rate of nearly 100 percent.[63]

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

operates an internship program with colleges in the state and offers a nine-week course for high school students.[64]

State elected officials are paying attention.

The following examples illustrate ways in which governors, state legislators, and other state agencies have become engaged in the workforce challenges state corrections departments are experiencing.

Examples

Oversight Attention in 2024 and 2025

GEORGIA

Special House and Senate committees in Georgia investigated conditions in Georgia prisons. The Senate panel recommended investing in corrections officer recruitment and retention, conducting pay studies, and increasing availability of mental health care for staff.[65]

NEW YORK

Following a high-profile unsanctioned work stoppage by corrections officers in New York State, a special joint committee of the New York Senate and Assembly held a hearing to investigate conditions and staffing levels.[66]

VIRGINIA

Virginia created a new corrections ombudsman and legislative oversight committee and required the corrections department to conduct an independent assessment of its staffing. The assessment found that the state's prison system is "critically and, in many cases, dangerously short-staffed."[67]

TEXAS

A legislative review panel in Texas highlighted the state's difficulty in recruiting and retaining corrections officers. It recommended a phased plan to close facilities with persistent staffing challenges, along with other measures to improve corrections workforce retention and support programs.[68]

INDIANA

The Indiana governor signed an executive order requiring the corrections department to establish employee turnover benchmarks, evaluate onboarding practices, and develop a comprehensive retention plan.[69]

Recent reductions in vacancy rates are encouraging.

Several state departments of corrections have made progress in reducing vacancy rates. These improvements suggest that salary increases and/or additional efforts such as those summarized above may be helping move the needle in the right direction. However, because these measures are rarely evaluated in a systematic way, it is often unclear which specific changes are driving the gains or whether they can be sustained over time.

Examples

Progress in Increasing Staff Retention and Reducing Vacancies

TEXAS
DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

reduced corrections officer turnover from 31 percent in 2023 to 19 percent in 2024.[70]

MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

lowered staff turnover from 17 percent in 2022 to 12 percent in 2024.[71]

COLORADO
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

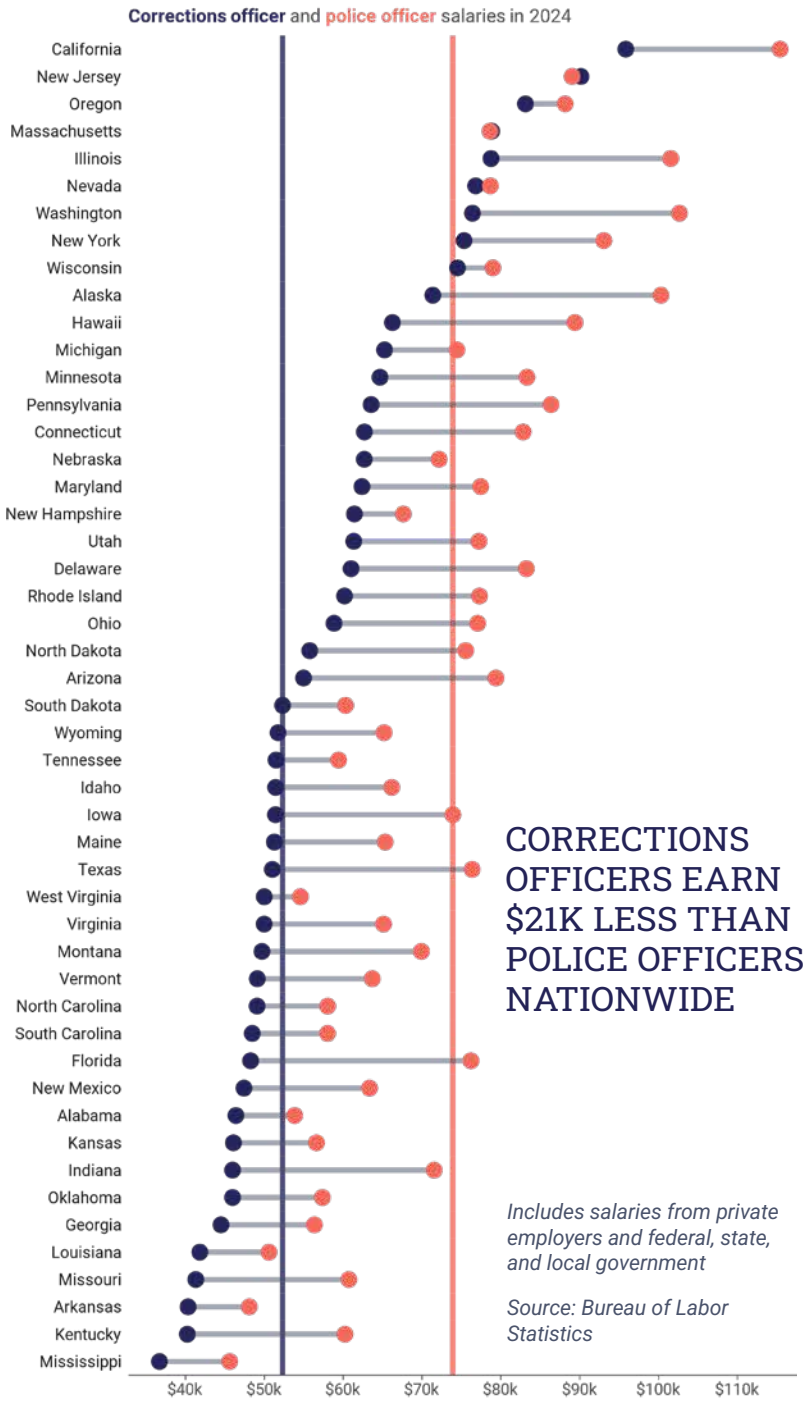
cut its staff vacancy rate from 25 percent in July 2022 to 14.5 percent by March 2025.[72]

Improvements in recruitment and retention are fragile; sustaining progress is challenging.

Corrections officer pay lags behind other law enforcement roles.

Despite concerted pay increases across states, in 2024, corrections officers earned $21,000 less per year, on average, than police officers nationwide (see Figure 15).

Figure 15



Improvements in recruitment and retention can be followed by some backsliding.

In some cases, initial improvements have begun to reverse — illustrating the ongoing volatility of the state corrections workforce environment. These reversals highlight the need for sustained efforts and long-term strategies to ensure staffing gains are not only achieved but maintained.

Examples

Reductions in Vacancy Rates Can Be Difficult to Sustain

VERMONT

After consistent improvement at the Vermont Department of Corrections, where vacancy rates fell from a pandemic peak of 21.5 percent to 12.9 percent in mid-2024, vacancies crept back up to nearly 15 percent by the end of that year.[73]

NEBRASKA

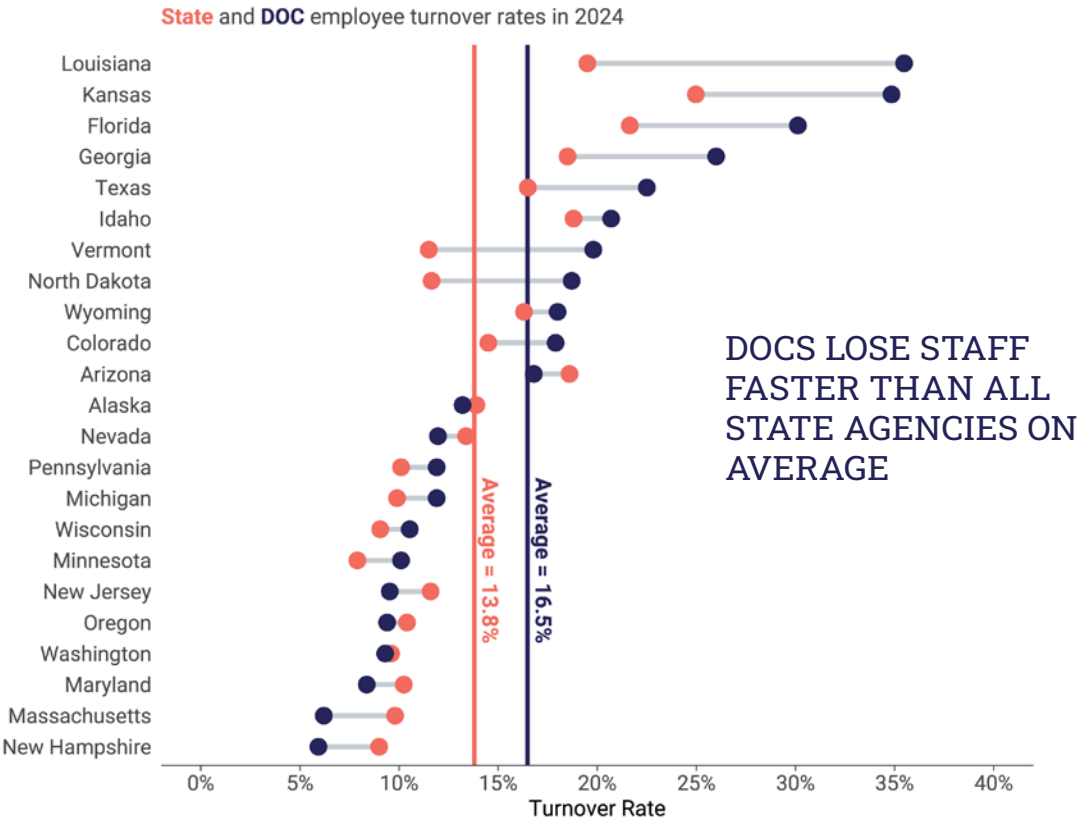
At the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, the number of department vacancies dropped from a high of 527 in June 2021 to 359 in June 2023, but then rose again to 452 by June 2024.[74]

Corrections staff leave their jobs at higher rates than other state employees.

Turnover — defined as the number of employees who leave divided by the average number employed over a period — is a widely reported metric of workforce health. High turnover increases human resources costs and reduces institutional experience.

Analysis for this report included data from 23 state corrections departments with complete turnover information for 2024.[75] Across these states, average turnover was 16.5 percent — meaning that in 2024, it was common for one out of every six state corrections staff to leave their jobs. In about two-thirds of the states (14 of 23), the corrections department was losing staff faster than state government overall, as shown in Figure 16. This level of staff departures contributes to continued recruitment pressure and gaps in staffing coverage.

Figure 16



Source: Safe Inside analysis of 23 states with available data

State prison understaffing continues to make headlines across the country.

The headlines shown in Figure 17 below — all from 2023 to 2025 — reflect the kinds of stories that have been appearing in national and local media. These articles highlight a range of challenges tied to chronic staffing shortages, including corrections officer strikes and protests, the deployment of National Guard troops to support prison operations, and the increased use of lockdowns in response to understaffing — all of which signal growing concern about strained and potentially unsafe conditions inside state prison facilities.[76]

Figure 17

STATE DOCS IN THE NEWS

Source: National Criminal Justice Reference Service analysis of articles from March 2023 to March 2025

PATH FORWARD

State corrections departments face a dual challenge: rebuilding a stable workforce while maintaining safe, well-run facilities. The first step in addressing this challenge requires ensuring state leaders have at their fingertips important data about their workforce — and the conditions of the facilities where they are working. This information is essential to the design of effective recruitment and retention strategies.

Better data can inform recruitment and retention strategies, but the path forward for state departments of corrections seeking to address their workforce challenges cannot focus exclusively on increasing the supply of corrections officers. State leaders must also ask how state corrections departments can reduce the demands on existing staff.

Using data to design strategies, measure progress, and troubleshoot problems

Interviews conducted for this report revealed that most state corrections leaders have difficulty gaining access to timely, user-friendly data that makes the following analyses possible:

- How recruitment and retention rates are trending month to month, by institution;
- What impact specific initiatives have had on staff recruitment and retention; and
- How working and living conditions within institutions correspond with staff retention.

> The first step in addressing this challenge requires ensuring state leaders have at their fingertips important data about their workforce — and the conditions of the facilities where they are working.

Reliable information on these topics, including answers to the questions listed in the sidebar, would give corrections directors valuable insights into workforce dynamics and operational challenges. Yet when leaders convene staff from security, human resources, research, and budget divisions to ask for information, they often find that available data are incomplete or unreliable. Even when solid data exist, they are often kept internal. Greater public sharing of this information is vital for progress.

This imbalance is telling: most departments of corrections produce far more data and analysis about the people they incarcerate than about the people they employ. Several factors limit departments' ability to analyze their own workforce:

Data ownership and access

> In many states, another agency maintains the human resources data needed to analyze employee tenure, exit survey results, absenteeism, sick leave, and other indicators of workplace satisfaction. While these data can be shared with departments of corrections, doing so often requires a data use agreement and other administrative steps.

Reporting mandates

> Legislators have focused primarily on understanding trends in incarcerated populations, and many departments of corrections are required by law to produce dozens of reports each year. These statutory reporting obligations can limit the resources available for workforce analysis.

Workforce trends

> Broader labor market shifts have changed the employment calculus for younger staff, who are less motivated by retirement benefits and other traditional perks of state employment. When staff tenure was longer, there was less perceived urgency to analyze workforce composition and the drivers of attrition.

5 Questions Every DOC Director Should Be Able to Answer

1. How many corrections officer positions are **currently vacant** — and how has that number changed over time?
2. What is the **average length of service** for new hires? How does it compare to past cohorts?
3. What are the top **reasons employees give for leaving** — and how do those reasons vary by facility or role?
4. How much is the agency spending on **overtime** — and how is that overtime distributed across facilities?
5. How long does it take to **fill a vacancy,** and how often do recruits complete training and **stay at least one year** on the job?

Examples

What States Are Learning When They Invest in Data

TEXAS
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice analyzed recruiting targets and new hires, calculated attrition rates by recruiting targets and other initiatives, and streamlined processes by granting recruiters more autonomy to advance candidates.[77]

MISSOURI
TRAINING ACADEMY OUTCOMES

The Missouri Department of Corrections renovated its training academy to better prepare recruits and established a tracking system to monitor cohorts and evaluate retention outcomes.[78]

IDAHO
WELLNESS PROGRAM IMPACTS

The Idaho Department of Correction hired a wellness coordinator, implemented resiliency training, and analyzed participation data from pilot programs and a wellness app to gauge engagement.[79]

Creating a culture that attracts and retains talented staff

State departments of corrections that have advanced their data analysis report that it clarifies the roots of staffing challenges. Many find the primary issue is not recruitment but early attrition — new hires leaving soon after they start. This churn drives up costs for recruitment, training, and overtime, and leaves fewer experienced staff, greater instability, and rising expenses.

Salary increases or a softer job market can offer short-term relief, but they do not constitute a sustainable retention strategy. The focus should shift from persuading recruits to make corrections a lifelong career to encouraging them to stay longer before deciding to leave.

For example, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice found that extending the average tenure of corrections officers by just four months would have the same impact on workforce size as hiring hundreds of additional officers.[80]

Changing culture requires living the values that resonate with today's workforce — creating environments where employees find purpose, empathetic supervision, and work-life balance. It also calls for recruitment strategies that attract people who strengthen this culture rather than reinforce outdated norms that drive others away.

Making more efficient use of existing staff

Even with better recruitment and retention, corrections administrators interviewed for this report acknowledge they are unlikely to rebuild staffing to operate prisons as they once did. Leaders must therefore explore how to manage facilities with fewer staff while improving the environment so incarcerated people and staff feel safe — and so new recruits find enough satisfaction to stay. At first glance, these goals may seem at odds.

PATH FORWARD

One option would be to reduce the number of incarcerated people, enough to close facilities, and significantly cut the number of positions needed to be filled. Making that happen depends on leadership from elected officials. Although legislators and governors across the political spectrum and in every region of the U.S. took major steps to reduce incarceration rates over the past 15 to 20 years, appetite for such reforms seems to have waned, at least temporarily. As this report shows, prison populations are rising, not falling.

Another approach is to revisit long-standing operational norms. Many supervisors and frontline staff described mounting workloads as new mandates are added without retiring old ones. To ease this burden, departments should identify tasks that can be streamlined or reassigned, such as the following:

- Conducting fewer counts, searches, or tours — but performing each more purposefully;
- Relaxing daytime movement restrictions for incarcerated people; and
- Assigning appropriate duties to civilian employees or incarcerated people trained to fulfill certain tasks.

Pursuing these strategies requires reexamining entrenched policies that have become accepted orthodoxy, even when they add little to safety or effectiveness.

A third approach is to expand the strategic use of technology to automate routine administrative and security tasks. While this will require investment and creative adaptation in older facilities, it offers a critical path to greater efficiency and long-term sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This report holds up a mirror to the current state of corrections — showing why change is both urgent and achievable. The findings reveal the scope of staffing challenges and their effects on safety, health, and stability for those who live and work behind prison walls. **The field of corrections has faced difficult periods before and has repeatedly found ways to adapt, innovate, and improve.** It can do so again.

Lasting progress will depend on transparency and partnership. No single department or leader can do this alone, and every stakeholder — policymakers, labor leaders, staff, researchers, and community advocates — has a role to play. Building trust in this environment is not easy, which is why this initiative emphasizes listening to all voices, promoting transparency, and tailoring support and solutions to each state's specific circumstances.

The path forward is clear: strengthen data systems, improve recruitment and retention, and create safer, more stable environments for staff and incarcerated people. The good news is that some tools and resources to support this work already exist — and more are on the way.

This report marks just the first step of Safe Inside. Beyond documenting the problem, Safe Inside offers practical tools, technical assistance, and peer learning opportunities to support workforce planning and build resilient systems — meeting states where they are rather than prescribing a one-size-fits-all approach. At its core is a simple but transformative idea: better data — and better use of data — lead to better outcomes.

To learn more, explore resources, or engage in future phases of support, visit https://safeinsideproject.org.

REPORT AUTHORS

Michael Thompson has spent more than 30 years leading and advising nonprofit, government, and philanthropic organizations. He has been a senior executive with The Pew Charitable Trusts and with The Council of State Governments, where he founded and led the Justice Center. His work in the area of corrections has prompted hearings by the U.S. Congress and countless state legislatures, leading to major bipartisan state and federal initiatives focused on justice reinvestment, behavioral health, and reentry.

Katharine Teleki has more than 18 years of experience in translating research into actionable policy recommendations and helping leaders make informed decisions, with a focus on objective, nonpartisan analysis. Most notably, she served on the staff of the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission from 2006 to 2018, where she reviewed state agency performance in every area of government. She now leads Teleki Consulting LLC and teaches in the Executive Master of Public Leadership program at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.

Angela Gunter has worked for over 15 years in the field of criminal justice policy analysis. She focuses primarily on providing research and data analysis support to county and state agencies on various initiatives to improve the public sector response to people involved in the justice system. She has managed projects both large and small, including statewide efforts under the Justice Reinvestment Initiative program and a 50-state revocations survey, as well as county efforts to improve pretrial processing of individuals experiencing mental health challenges.

Isabel Keddy-Hector is a data analyst helping leaders make better decisions with clear, objective analysis. A former Peace Corps and AmeriCorps member, she brings on-the-ground perspective to policy research for government and nonprofits. She holds a Master's in Global Policy from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.

PROJECT GUIDANCE AND OVERSIGHT

John E. Wetzel is a longtime corrections leader and reformer who served as Pennsylvania's Secretary of Corrections under both Republican and Democratic governors — the longest-serving in state history. Known for a pragmatic, data-driven approach, he advanced evidence-based practices, strengthened education and vocational programs, and modernized facilities to improve safety, transparency, and reentry outcomes while maintaining a strong focus on victims' rights. He now leads the Keystone Restituere Justice Center (KRJC), guiding strategy and partnerships to improve community safety and outcomes across the justice system. Wetzel works across party lines and with diverse stakeholders, pairing compassion with accountability to reduce recidivism and make communities safer.

Scott Semple is the former commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Correction, a career leader who began as a frontline corrections officer and later served as training coordinator, in external and legislative affairs, and as warden of the state's men's mental-health treatment facility. As commissioner, he advanced performance-based practices, repurposing facilities for specialized therapeutic populations, and expanding agency-wide staff wellness initiatives. After retiring in 2019, he founded Semple Consulting LLC and serves as a senior expert advising on criminal justice and corrections.

Andrew Barbee directs the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Office of Strategic Initiatives and Modernization and is the American Correctional Association's 2024 Peter P. Lejins Research Award recipient. A policy and research leader across corrections, courts, and the legislature, he joined TDCJ in October 2019 to build a new research and development function and has since helped tackle staff retention, program evaluation, and risk assessment while fostering a culture of continuous improvement. His work advances research-driven practices that protect the public, create opportunities, and support rehabilitation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the additional insight, time, and collaboration of the following individuals and organizations whose contributions helped shape this report.

The following provided critical analysis and information:

Suzanne Brown-McBride
The Impossible 6 LLC

Bryan Collier
Former Director, Texas Department of Criminal Justice

Nick Deml
Former Director, Vermont Department of Corrections

Ricky Dixon
Secretary, Florida Department of Corrections

Leslie Dismukes
Secretary, North Carolina Department of Adult Correction

Tony Fabelo, PhD
Senior Fellow for Justice Policy, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Lisa Jaegers, PhD
Director, Transformative Justice Initiative, Saint Louis University Doisy College of Health Sciences

Kevin Kempf
Executive Director, Correctional Leaders Association

Robert Shelor
Senior Policy Advisor, Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice

Heather Tubman-Carbone, PhD
Associate Deputy Director, Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice

Heidi Washington
Director, Michigan Department of Corrections

Jeremy Wilson, PhD
Director, Police Staffing Observatory, Michigan State University School of Criminal Justice

Chicago Beyond

JustLeadershipUSA

One Voice United

Public Welfare Foundation

The following supported the project team and report publication process:

Katy Albis

Russell Blessing
Lawn Chair Consulting LLC

Lili Elkins
Keystone Restituere Justice Center

Joey Kaspar
Lawn Chair Consulting LLC

Allie Maynard
Mission Possible LLC

Maddie McPherson
Keystone Restituere Justice Center

Kat Ravish
Mission Possible LLC

Mari Roberts

Greg Rowe
Keystone Restituere Justice Center

Juan Thompson

Cover image provided courtesy of Florida Department of Corrections.

ABOUT SAFE INSIDE

Safe Inside is a national initiative focused on making prisons safer and healthier places to work and live, which depends in large part on improving staff recruitment and retention.

This report was funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Safe Inside initiative receives funding support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance and Arnold Ventures, and is conducted in partnership with the Correctional Leaders Association.

Suggested citation:

Michael Thompson, Katharine Teleki, Angela Gunter, and Isabel Keddy-Hector, *Workforce Trends in State Departments of Corrections: A 50-State Analysis* (Washington, DC: Safe Inside, 2026).

This project was supported by Grant No. 15PBJA-23-GK-05377-MUMU awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Additional support for this effort has been provided by Arnold Ventures and is conducted in partnership with the Correctional Leaders Association.

ENDNOTES

1 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "OEWS Research Estimates by State and Industry," Sector 99: Federal, State, and Local Government, May 2024 data (last modified July 23, 2025).

2 Derek Mueller and Rich Kluckow, *Prisoners in 2023 – Statistical Tables* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2025).

3 Correctional Leaders Association survey of state directors of departments of corrections (2023).

4 Derek Mueller and Rich Kluckow, *Prisoners in 2023 – Statistical Tables.*

5 Audrey Watson, *Occupational Employment and Wages in State and Local Government* (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

6 Statistic is an average of information collected from the following 33 states with available data: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. See Appendix C for detail on sources and methods.

7 Statistic is a total of information collected from the following 23 states with available data for fiscal years 2019–2024: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. See Appendix C for detail on sources and methods.

8 National Council of State Boards of Nursing Inc., "Results of the 2024 National Workforce Study" (April 2025); American Association of Colleges of Nursing, "Nursing Shortage Fact Sheet" (last modified May 2024).

9 American Federation of Teachers, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow? What America Must Do to Attract and Retain the Educators and School Staff Our Students Need* (Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, 2022).

10 Police Executive Research Forum, "New PERF Survey Shows Police Agencies Have Turned a Corner with Staffing Challenges" (April 27, 2024).

11 The consistency of prison sexual assault reporting across all states is the result of federal requirements in the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which requires states to publish data on harassment, assaults, and audit outcomes.

12 Stephanie Ferguson Melhorn and Isabella Lucy, "America Works Data Center: The U.S. Workforce by the Numbers" (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, last modified November 11, 2025).

13 The Manufacturing Institute, "Manufacturers Need as Many as 3.8 Million New Employees by 2033" (accessed October 10, 2025).

14 Associated Builders and Contractors, "ABC: Construction Industry Must Attract 439,000 Workers in 2025" (January 24, 2025).

15 David Taube, "Industry Leaders Continue Clash over Driver Shortage Views," news release (Trucking Dive, July 28, 2025).

ENDNOTES

16 California Department of Human Resources, *2022 Correctional Officer Total Compensation Survey* (Sacramento: California Department of Human Resources, April 2023, revised August 2023).

17 Kim Chandler, "Alabama Prison Chief Says Lack of Staffing Remains Top Issue" (Associated Press, February 23, 2023).

18 Sonya R. Porter, John L. Voorhels, and William Sabol, *Correctional Facility and Inmate Locations: Urban and Rural Status Patterns*, CARRA Working Paper Series, No. 2017-08 (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

19 Andrew Dumont, "Changes in the U.S. Economy and Rural-Urban Employment Disparities," FEDS Notes (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, January 19, 2024).

20 Tracey Farrigan et al., *Rural America at a Glance* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2024).

21 Erika Harrell et al., *Indicators of Workplace Violence, 2019* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022).

22 Benjamin Steiner and John Wooldredge, "Individual and Environmental Sources of Work Stress among Prison Officers," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 42, no. 8 (February 5, 2015).

23 Joseph A. Schwartz et al., "The Accumulated Impact of Critical Incident Exposure on Correctional Officers' Mental Health," *Criminology* 62, no. 3 (September 7, 2024).

24 F. Cheek and R. Howard, *Stress Management for Correctional Officers and Their Families* (College Park, MD: American Correctional Association, 1984).

25 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," Table 11: Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2024 data (last modified January 29, 2025).

26 E. Lambert et al., "The Impact of Role Stressors on Job Stress, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment among Private Prison Staff," *Security Journal* 18, no. 4 (2005).

27 L. A. Leip and J. B. Stinchcomb, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intent of Jail Staff throughout the United States," *Criminal Justice Review* 38, no. 2 (2013).

28 John M. Eason, "Prisons as Panacea or Pariah? The Countervailing Consequences of the Prison Boom on the Political Economy of Rural Towns," *Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (January 12, 2017).

29 Data USA, "Correctional Officers and Jailers: Gender and Age" (accessed October 10, 2025). Data are from the Census Bureau ACS PUMS 5-Year Estimate.

30 Analysis provided by Andrew Barbee, director, Office of Strategic Initiatives and Modernization, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2025.

31 Montana Department of Corrections, "Department of Corrections Workforce," Length of Service tab, data for FY2025 generated on October 14, 2024.

32 Vermont Department of Corrections, "Current Staffing: Estimated Years of Service for Active Employees (Agency-Wide)" (VT DOC Staff Interactive Dashboard, December 30, 2024).

33 National Center for Education Statistics, "Teacher Turnover: Stayers, Movers, and Leavers" (Condition of Education, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, May 2024).

ENDNOTES

34 Florida House of Representatives, "Justice Budget Subcommittee" (February 4, 2025).

35 Analysis provided by Andrew Barbee, director, Office of Strategic Initiatives and Modernization, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2025.

36 Louisiana State Civil Service, *State of Louisiana Annual Report on Turnover: Fiscal Year 2024* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Civil Service, 2024).

37 North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, *2025–2027 Budget Overview* (Bismarck, ND: North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2025).

38 Minnesota Management and Budget, *State of Minnesota Workforce Planning Report FY 2023* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Management and Budget, 2023).

39 New Hampshire Department of Corrections, *FY 2026-2027 Budget Hearing* (Concord, NH: New Hampshire Department of Corrections, 2024).

40 The Council of State Governments Justice Center documents prison closures in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

41 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "OEWS Research Estimates by State and Industry," Sector 99: Federal, State, and Local Government, 2017–2023 tables (last modified July 23, 2025); U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "National Prisoner Statistics," 2017–2023 (accessed October 10, 2025).

42 Tammy Felix et al., *Effects of COVID-19 on Prison Operations* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2023).

43 Vacancy rates reported for the following 19 states with available information from January to July 2025: Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. See Appendix C for detail on sources and methods.

44 Michigan Department of Corrections, "Staffing Reports" (accessed October 10, 2025).

45 Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, response to Safe Inside information request, data as of May 2025.

46 Florida Department of Management Services, response to Safe Inside information request, data as of July 2024.

47 Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, *Staff Report with Final Results: Department of Criminal Justice, Correctional Managed Health Care Committee, Windham School District, and Board of Pardons and Paroles* (Austin, TX: Sunset Advisory Commission, 2025).

48 Michigan Department of Corrections, "Staffing Reports" (accessed October 10, 2025).

49 New Hampshire Department of Corrections, "$10,000 Recruitment Initiative Renewal Passes Fiscal Committee," news release (May 17, 2024).

50 Graphic shows information collected from the following 26 states with available data comparing 2019 to 2024: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. See Appendix C for detail on sources and methods.

51 Ibid.

ENDNOTES

52 Graphic shows information collected from the following 24 states with data on both the DOC's share of the state workforce and the DOC's share of state overtime expenditures in 2024: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. See Appendix C for detail on sources and methods.

53 Benjamin Steiner and John Wooldredge, "Individual and Environmental Sources of Work Stress among Prison Officers."

54 Jin Lee, Robert Henning, and Martin Cherniak, "Correction Workers' Burnout and Outcomes: A Bayesian Network Approach," *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 16, no. 2 (January 20, 2019); Andrew James Clements and Gail Kinman, "Job Demands, Organizational Justice, and Emotional Exhaustion in Prison Officers," *Criminal Justice Studies* 34, no. 4 (November 9, 2021).

55 Table includes examples of significant corrections officer salary raises collected for this project from the following states: Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin. See Appendix C for detail on sources and methods.

56 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics," 2017 to 2024 tables (last modified July 23, 2025).

57 New Jersey Department of Corrections, *2023 Annual Report* (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Department of Corrections, 2023); and "Inside Corrections: Newsletter of the New Jersey Department of Corrections" (September 2021).

58 Interview with Bree Derrick, deputy director (now director), Idaho Department of Correction, March 2025.

59 South Carolina Department of Corrections, *2023 Annual Accountability Report* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Department of Corrections, 2023).

60 Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, *FY 2024-25 Budget Testimony* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 2024).

61 Wisconsin Department of Corrections, "Interactive Dashboards" (accessed October 10, 2025).

62 Kansas Department of Corrections, *Annual Report Fiscal Year 2023* (Topeka, KS: Kansas Department of Corrections, 2023); and Kansas Department of Corrections, communication with Safe Inside, December 2025.

63 Communications/interview with Wyoming Department of Corrections staff (S. Stark), March 28, 2025.

64 New Hampshire Department of Corrections, *2023 Annual Report* (Concord, NH: New Hampshire Department of Corrections, 2023).

65 Georgia Senate Office of Policy and Legislative Analysis, *Final Report of the Senate Supporting Safety and Welfare of All Individuals in Department of Corrections Study Committee (SR 570)* (Atlanta, GA: Senate Office of Policy and Legislative Analysis, 2024); House Committee on Appropriations, "Subcommittees: Special Subcommittee of Appropriations on State Prisons," 2023–2024 Regular Session (accessed October 10, 2025).

66 Senate Standing Committee on Crime Victims, Crime & Correction and Assembly Standing Committee on Correction, "Notice of Joint Public Hearing" (April 30, 2025).

ENDNOTES

67 CGL Companies, *Virginia Department of Corrections: Security Staff Assessment and Relief Factor Recalculation – Final Report* (Baltimore, MD: CGL, 2024). The law requiring the assessment was part of Virginia's 2024 Special Session I budget, Chapter 2, approved May 13, 2024; see Item 390 on p. 470.

68 Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, *Staff Report with Final Results.*

69 Governor Mike Braun, "Governor Braun Takes Steps to Improve Retention of Correctional Officers and Reduce Recidivism," news release, April 9, 2025.

70 Texas State Auditor's Office, *An Annual Report on Classified Employee Turnover for Fiscal Year 2024* (Austin, TX: Texas State Auditor's Office, 2024).

71 Michigan Civil Service Commission, *Forty-Fifth Annual Workforce Report: Fiscal Year 2023-2024* (Lansing, MI: Michigan Civil Service Commission, 2024).

72 Colorado Governor Jared Polis, "Department of Corrections: Wildly Important Goals, Fiscal Year 2024-2025" (accessed October 10, 2025).

73 Vermont Department of Corrections, "VT DOC Staff Interactive Dashboard" (December 14, 2024).

74 Office of the Inspector General of the Nebraska Correctional System, *2024 Annual Report* (Lincoln, NE: Office of the Inspector General, 2024).

75 Graphic includes 23 states with available information on turnover rates comparing statewide and DOC turnover in 2024: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. See Appendix C for detail on sources and methods.

76 National Criminal Justice Reference Service review of news articles from March 2023 to March 2025 with 18 terms related to corrections, staffing, and stress/mental health, conducted on April 15, 2025, and provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

77 Interviews and conversations with Andrew Barbee, director, Office of Strategic Initiatives and Modernization, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Spring 2025.

78 Interview with David Edwards, director, Office of Research, Planning and Process Improvement, Missouri Department of Corrections, February 2025.

79 Interview with Bree Derrick, deputy director (now director), Idaho Department of Correction, March 2025.

80 Analysis provided by Andrew Barbee, director, Office of Strategic Initiatives and Modernization, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2025.

APPENDICES

ACCESS ONLINE

Appendix A: **State Corrections Workforce Profiles**

Presents findings from a 50-state analysis of six workforce metrics comparing state departments of corrections with overall state government. Includes 28 state profiles (of states where sufficient data were available) that place corrections staffing patterns in the context of broader state workforce trends, highlighting both cross-state variation and the common themes identified in this report.

Appendix B: **Health and Safety Trends**

Summarizes a 50-state review of publicly available data across 14 indicators of facility health and safety. Presents selected findings from states with comparable series, showing an overall upward trend in critical incidents where data are available, and notes significant gaps and inconsistencies in public reporting.

Appendix C: **Sources and Methods**

Documents the project's 50-state data collection and analysis on workforce trends and facility health and safety in state departments of corrections. Includes tables detailing the sources underlying figures in the main report and Appendices A and B.