



# BJA Fact Sheet

FS 000336 • NOVEMBER 2010

BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE • OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

JAMES H. BURCH, II, ACTING DIRECTOR

## Improving Criminal Justice and Reducing Recidivism Through Justice Reinvestment

By Jacquelyn L. Rivers, BJA

### A Fiscal Imperative

In the past 20 years, state and local spending on corrections has grown at a rate faster than nearly any other budget item. Despite increasing corrections expenditures, recidivism rates remain high, with half of all persons released from prison returning within 3 years.<sup>1</sup> Further, every state has a handful of high-risk communities to which most ex-offenders return, which places significant financial burdens on already strapped local jurisdictions.

In recent decades, justice responses to crime relied substantially on incarceration strategies alone, resulting in exponential growth in:

- **Incarceration Rates.** Approximately 2.4 million American adults are currently incarcerated in federal, state, and local prisons and jails.<sup>2</sup>
- **Corrections Spending for State, Local, and Tribal Governments.** State corrections spending has increased over the past 20 years from \$10 billion to more than \$50 billion a year, while local corrections spending has increased from \$20 billion to more than \$100 billion during the same time period.<sup>3</sup>
- **Probation and Parole Rates.** Approximately 5.1 million Americans are currently on probation or parole, an increase of nearly 300 percent since 1980.<sup>4</sup>

These expensive and unsustainable approaches also lead to jail and prison overcrowding, budget constraints within the justice system and local government,

### MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) strives to assist cities, counties, states, and American Indian tribes in developing and operating the most effective justice strategies and systems possible. Although efficacy has been measured by crime reduction and the equity and fairness of our systems, the economic challenges that many state and local jurisdictions face today, and the consistent challenges faced by American Indian tribes, require us to reemphasize the critical importance of cost effectiveness within the overall determination of what works and how well it is working. BJA's Justice Reinvestment Initiative is designed to do just that—assist state, local, and tribal jurisdictions in making their justice systems more effective by protecting public safety, holding offenders accountable, and controlling corrections costs.

### KEY POINTS

- State and local expenditures in corrections grew to nearly \$68 billion in 2006 and have outpaced our ability to afford a "one size fits all" justice approach. Evidence-based and cost-effective solutions are imperative in today's economic environment.
- BJA's Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) is a strategic and data-driven process that helps state, local, and tribal communities better assess their systems and implement policy options that generate and reinvest substantial cost savings.

*continued on p. 2*

<sup>1</sup> Urban Institute, 2010, "Prisoner Reentry," Press Room, [www.urban.org/Pressroom/prisonerreentry.cfm](http://www.urban.org/Pressroom/prisonerreentry.cfm).

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d., "Total correctional population," Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=11>.

<sup>3</sup> National Association of State Budget Officers, 1989, *Fiscal Year 1988 State Expenditure Report*, p. 71, Washington, DC: National Association of State Budget Officers, [www.nasbo.org/Publications/StateExpenditureReport/StateExpenditureReportArchives/tabid/107/Default.aspx](http://www.nasbo.org/Publications/StateExpenditureReport/StateExpenditureReportArchives/tabid/107/Default.aspx); National Association of State Budget Officers, 2009, *Fiscal Year 2008 State Expenditure Report*, p. 54, Washington, DC: National Association of State Budget Officers, [www.nasbo.org/Publications/StateExpenditureReport/tabid/79/Default.aspx](http://www.nasbo.org/Publications/StateExpenditureReport/tabid/79/Default.aspx).

<sup>4</sup> Crary, David, 2009, "States Urged to Improve Probation, Parole Programs," Associated Press, Pew Center on the States News Room, [www.pewcenteronthestates.org/news\\_room\\_detail.aspx?id=49740](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/news_room_detail.aspx?id=49740); Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009, *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2008*, Bulletin, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 228230, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=1764>.

## KEY POINTS (cont.)

- The justice reinvestment strategy does not eliminate incarceration as an option for certain offenders, based on measured risk; however, the strategy does call for greater use of graduated, community-based sanctions and evidence-based crime prevention strategies and services that are aimed at addressing the underlying causes of crime.
- Several demonstration sites have shown that jurisdictions can save hundreds of millions in corrections costs by implementing strategic and evidence-based policy alternatives, without jeopardizing community safety or offender accountability.
- States, American Indian tribes, cities, and counties committing to a bipartisan, interagency approach are eligible to request participation in BJA's Justice Reinvestment Initiative.
- With funding from BJA and a variety of private foundations, several states and counties have either completed or initiated the justice reinvestment process—with impressive results.
- For past state demonstration projects, visit [www.justicereinvestment.org](http://www.justicereinvestment.org), and for local examples, see <http://justicereinvestment.urban.org>.

## CONTACT US

Bureau of Justice Assistance  
Office of Justice Programs  
810 Seventh Street NW.  
Washington, DC 20531  
Phone: 202-616-6500  
Toll free: 1-866-859-2687  
E-mail: [AskBJA@usdoj.gov](mailto:AskBJA@usdoj.gov)  
Web site: [www.ojp.gov/BJA](http://www.ojp.gov/BJA)



and overwhelmed community supervision agencies, programs, and service systems left to supervise high numbers of clients.

As a result, state, local, and tribal policymakers have been challenged to design policies that:

- Manage corrections system growth.
- Respond strategically to offender risks and needs based on sustainable, evidence-based approaches that do not jeopardize public safety and that ensure offender accountability.
- Coordinate existing resources and develop new approaches to promote successful offender reintegration.
- Reinvest savings generated from reduced corrections spending into communities.

## A Strategic and Data-Driven Process

Justice reinvestment (JR) is a data-driven approach that enhances public safety, reduces corrections spending, and redirects savings to alternative criminal justice strategies that decrease crime and strengthen neighborhoods. Based on the collection and analysis of corrections, court, crime, and resource data, the drivers of criminal justice system costs are identified. Policy responses and evidence-based practices are then developed to support a strategic plan to control those drivers and ensure that the savings that are generated are invested in benefits and services in the neighborhoods where such services can effectively prevent crime and increase public safety.

JR helps policymakers reach their goals through a four-step approach:

1. Analyze criminal justice trends to understand factors driving jail and prison population growth.
2. Develop and implement policy options to generate savings and increase public safety.
3. Quantify savings and reinvest in select, high-risk communities and other prevention-oriented strategies.
4. Measure the impact of policy changes and reinvestment resources and enhance the accountability of criminal justice system actors and policies.

Based on this approach, BJA launched the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) in 2006. Through a consortium of technical and policy experts, JRI provides policymakers with resources and tools to increase public safety, hold offenders accountable, and control corrections costs, resulting in a more effective justice system.

In recent years, the Pew Center on the States (Pew), an independent nonprofit organization, and BJA have separately supported JR and similar approaches to corrections and sentencing issues. Going forward, Pew and BJA have developed a process for more closely aligning their efforts. States participating with Pew and/or BJA will be eligible for continuing and further support through both organizations. For more information about Pew's efforts, visit [www.pewpublicsafety.org](http://www.pewpublicsafety.org).

## How To Participate in JRI

State, local, and tribal governments interested in participating in JRI must:

- Commit to bipartisan, interagency interest and partnerships in justice reinvestment.
- Provide access to criminal justice data.
- Provide in-kind contributions to support the data analysis, policy recommendations, implementation, and measurement phases of the project.

Chief executives of jurisdictions committed to this approach should contact Gary L. Dennis, BJA Senior Policy Advisor, at 202-305-9059 or [gary.dennis@usdoj.gov](mailto:gary.dennis@usdoj.gov).

More information on JR can be found at [www.ojp.gov/BJA/JRI](http://www.ojp.gov/BJA/JRI).