

The policy framework can be accessed at: <http://justicereinvestment.org/states/ohio/pubmaps-oh>

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**STATE LEADERS ANNOUNCE COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK  
TO STRENGTHEN PROBATION, INCREASE PUBLIC SAFETY, AND REDUCE COSTS**

Columbus, OH—After months of deliberation and discussion, leaders from all three branches of Ohio’s state government unveiled today a policy framework which would avert growth in the prison population that would otherwise cost nearly half a billion dollars in construction and operation expenses to address. The framework’s thirteen policies, described in a report released today, are designed to hold offenders accountable in more meaningful ways; make smarter, more effective use of community correction programs; and strengthen probation supervision.

The framework is the product of research conducted over the last year by the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, in partnership with the Pew Center on the States and the Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, using a “justice reinvestment” approach.

Senator Bill Seitz (R-Green Township), who championed a corrections proposal (Senate Bill 22) introduced in the last General Assembly, praised the new framework. He said: “This data-driven approach helps us address the fundamental public safety issues facing our corrections system. It enables us to challenge the status quo that, over many years, created a corrections system that does not deliver the public safety benefit taxpayers expect given the costs they are asked to cover. Streamlining government operations, increasing the cost-effectiveness of existing programs, and creating incentives between the state and local probation departments are all sound approaches that can achieve better public safety outcomes.”

Projections show that Ohio’s prison population of 50,987 is 133 percent of the system’s capacity. Unless action is taken, the population will climb another 2,871 people by FY 2015, pushing the system to 140 percent of capacity. Accommodating this growth by constructing and operating new prisons would cost hundreds of millions of dollars on top of what the state is already spending annually on corrections.

Today’s report estimates that enacting the policy framework would avert the projected growth and gradually return the prison population to a level last seen in 2007. Doing so would generate more than \$62 million in corrections cost savings over the next four years. The report calls for reinvesting \$20 million of those savings in grant funding to improve local felony probation supervision and reduce recidivism rates among probationers by 10 percent.

House Speaker Pro Tempore Louis Blessing (R-Cincinnati) said: “We know that a lot of people are cycling through our prisons and that there are more cost-effective approaches, which are actually better at preventing these non-violent, low level offenders from committing more crimes.”

On the opposite end of the sentencing spectrum, one of the proposed policies would toughen penalties for the highest-level felony offenders (F1), including the most violent offenders, by increasing the number of years judges can sentence them to prison.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor, who chairs the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission, highlighted the policies in the framework relating to the state’s probation system: “About 75 percent of people under the control of Ohio’s criminal justice system are on probation, yet without data or coordination, the effectiveness of supervision at holding offenders accountable is largely unknown. This framework will modernize and strengthen probation and result in potential cost savings.”

Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton said she was pleased that input from judges was included in the process. “Ohio’s investment in a network of community correction programs leads the nation. These policies will ensure they target people for whom intensive programming is appropriate and who would otherwise have been sent to prison at substantially higher costs to the taxpayer.”

“Simply spending and building our way out of prison crowding is not an acceptable strategy for dealing with a growing problem,” said Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Director Gary Mohr. “Placing offenders in the right setting with evidence-based interventions should be the standard for our work, as it provides the greatest opportunity for positive change.”

Also on-hand to support the new policies were Senator Shirley Smith (D-Cleveland) and Representative Nancy Garland (D-New Albany), both of whom served on the 18-member Justice Reinvestment Working Group, which developed the policies. The group was co-chaired by Senator Seitz and included House Speaker Pro Tempore Blessing.

Senator Smith cited analysis showing that 10,000 fourth and fifth degree (the lowest felony levels) property and drug offenders are spending an average of just nine months in prison at a cost approaching \$200 million. Smith explained: “There’s no way for us to have a long-term impact on their behavior in such a short amount of time, especially when 72 percent are returning to the community with no supervision.” She added: “Our plan also ensures that people who need treatment can get it and that high risk offenders will be supervised when they are released from prison back to the community.”

“The data-driven justice reinvestment approach works to achieve both cost savings and public safety improvements at the same time. That is a critical element in any bipartisan effort of this scale.” said Gary Dennis, Ph.D., Senior Policy Advisor for Corrections from the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

“In such a difficult budget climate, this policy framework gives Ohio *proven, innovative* ways to achieve critical cost savings while attaining public safety goals,” said Richard Jerome, manager of the Pew Center on the States’ Public Safety Performance Project.

Senators Seitz and Smith will jointly cosponsor legislation incorporating the framework released in the report today and all of the provisions of Senate Bill 22 from last session. House Speaker Pro Tempore Blessing will introduce the same legislation in the House.

*The [CSG Justice Center’s Justice Reinvestment Initiative](#) to address corrections spending and public safety is a partnership with the [Public Safety Performance Project of the Pew Center on the States](#), with additional support to CSG from the [Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice](#). These efforts have provided similar data-driven analyses and policy options to state leaders in 14 states.*

*The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven strategies—informed by available evidence—to increase public safety and strengthen communities.*

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