

Arizona's Imprisonment Crisis:

PART 1

THE HIGH PRICE OF PRISON GROWTH *Summary Brief*

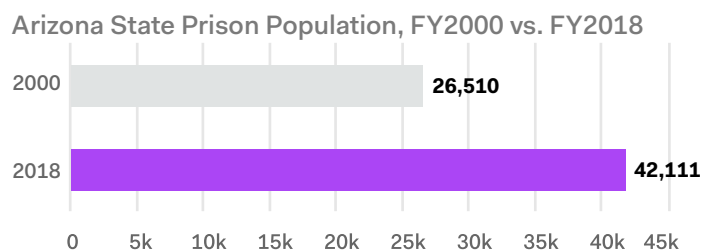
Arizona has the fourth highest imprisonment rate in the country and taxpayers spend more than \$1 billion on the prison system every year. The prison population has grown by 60 percent since 2000 alone — nearly doubling the rate of general population growth — and taxpayers now spend more on prisons than on higher education and other critical state budget priorities.

At a time when a majority of states have adopted reforms to curb prison population growth and invest in more effective public safety solutions, Arizona stands out for its high imprisonment rate and rising prison costs. Taxpayers could save hundreds of millions of dollars every year if the state reduced its imprisonment rate to the level of neighboring states with similar crime rates.

A new and comprehensive research study by FWD.us of trends in Arizona sentencing since 2000, finds that the state's rapid prison growth cannot be explained by more crime or a growing resident population. Instead, it was driven by decisions to send more people to prison for lower-level offenses, and to keep them in prison far longer than the national average, despite evidence that the additional months and years do not provide any added public safety benefit.

Arizona's prison population has grown by more than 15,000 people since 2000 alone. In that same period, Arizona's resident population grew at nearly half that rate and the national prison population grew only 6 percent.

Since 2000, Arizona's prison population has grown by more than 15,000 people — a 60 percent increase.



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoners Statistics series; Arizona Department of Corrections FY2018 Inmate Population Fact Sheet

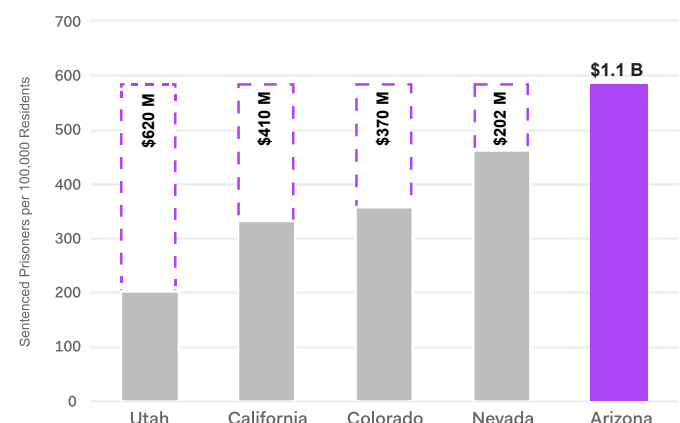
Prison population growth has come at an extraordinary cost to Arizona taxpayers. Prison spending has grown by more than \$250 million since 2000, and today the budget for the Department of Corrections is \$1.1 billion. This massive state spending far exceeds that of other critical priorities such as higher education and child safety.

Since the national prison population reached its peak in 2008, 32 states have reduced both crime and

imprisonment. Arizona is not among these states and stands out for having the fourth highest imprisonment rate in the country and by far the highest in the region. If Arizona's imprisonment rate matched Nevada's, it would save \$200 million every year. If it matched Utah's, state taxpayers would save more than \$600 million every year.

Arizona could save hundreds of millions of dollars every year by reducing its imprisonment rate to the level of neighboring states with similar crime rates.

Arizona vs. Neighboring State Imprisonment Rates (Sentenced Prisoners per 100,000 Residents) and Potential Cost Savings, 2016



Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 2016 and Arizona Department of Corrections FY2017 Operating Per Capita Cost Report

What is driving prison growth?

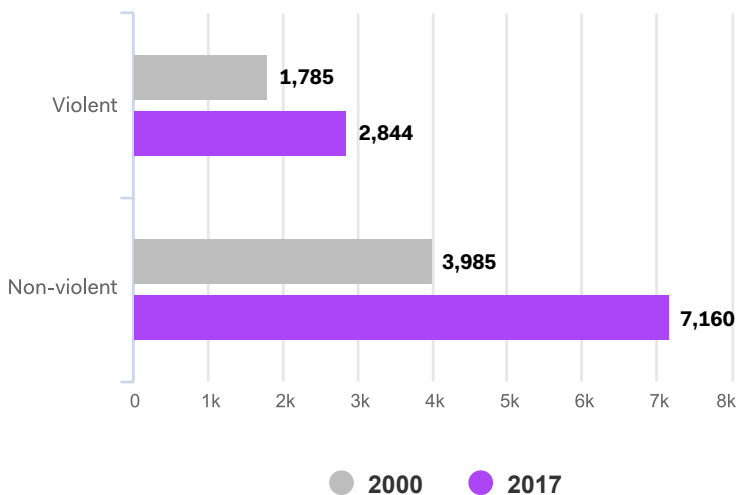
Arizona's imprisonment crisis was not driven by crime. Since 2000, the property crime rate in Arizona has fallen 44 percent, and the violent crime rate is down 12 percent.

Instead, Arizona's large and growing prison population is the product of poor policy choices. Since 2000, Arizona has sent more and more people convicted of non-violent and first-time offenses to prison instead of probation, drug treatment, or other alternatives. Additionally, Arizona's prison terms are far longer than in other states.

The number of people sent to prison for non-violent crimes has increased 80 percent since 2000, driving overall admissions growth. In fact, seven out of every 10 prison admissions in 2017 was for a non-violent offense.

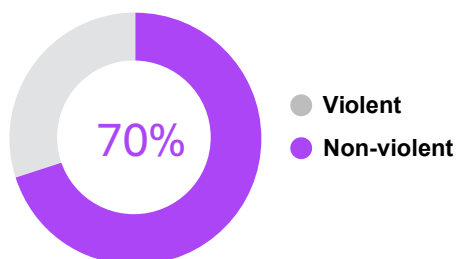
The number of people sentenced to prison for non-violent crimes in Arizona has grown by 80 percent since 2000.

Arizona New Prison Sentence Admissions, FY2000 vs. FY2017



Seven in 10 prison admissions in Arizona are for a non-violent crime.

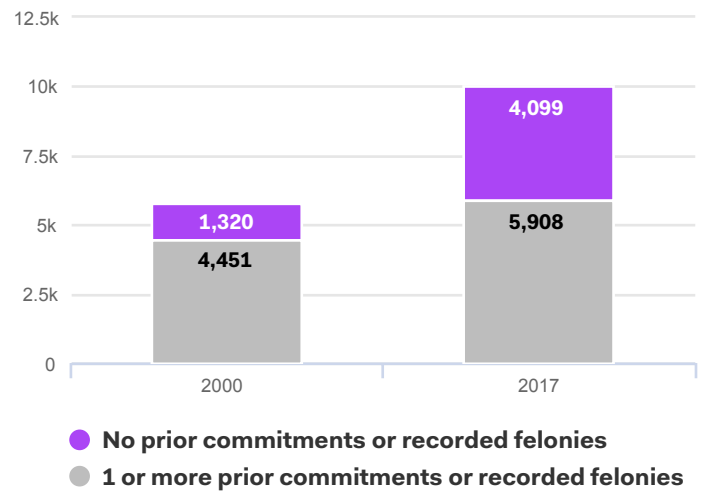
Arizona Prison Admissions, FY2017



Alongside growth in the number of people entering prison for non-violent crimes, Arizona has also drastically increased the number of people sentenced to prison on their first felony conviction. In 2000 only 1,320 people went to prison in Arizona for their first felony conviction. By 2017 this number had grown to over 4,000 or 41 percent of all new prison sentences.

The number of people sent to prison on their first felony conviction in Arizona has tripled since 2000.

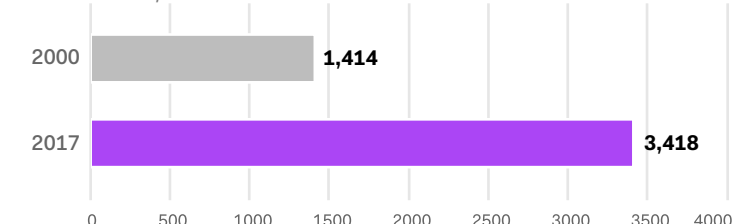
Arizona New Prison Sentence Admissions by Felony Conviction History, FY2000 vs. FY2017



Much of the growth in non-violent and first-time sentences to prison is driven by drug crimes and in particular, possession of a controlled substance. Simple possession is the most common crime for which people are admitted to prison in Arizona, topping assault, burglary, or other more serious drug crimes. The number of people sentenced to prison each year for simple possession has grown 142 percent since 2000, from 1,414 to 3,418 in 2017.

The number of people sentenced to prison for drug possession in Arizona has grown 142 percent.

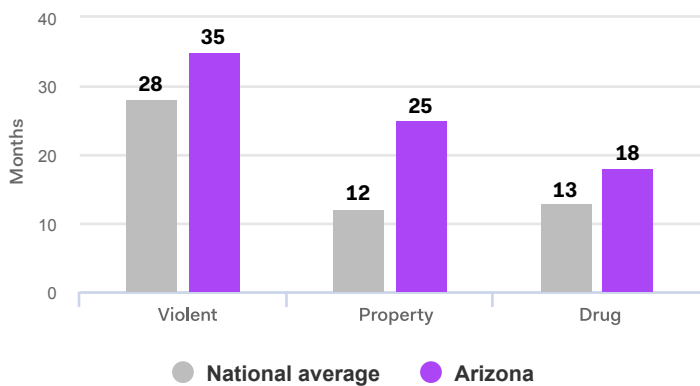
Arizona New Prison Sentence Admissions for Drug Possession, FY2000 vs. FY2017



Despite research showing that long prison sentences are ineffective at reducing crime, Arizona sends people to prison for much longer than other states and is one of only three states that does not allow people to earn more than 15 percent off their sentences for maintaining good behavior or participating in rehabilitation programs.

People stay in prison in Arizona significantly longer than in other states, particularly for property crimes.

Median Length of Stay by Offense Type, Arizona New Court Commitments, FY2017 vs. National Average, 2012



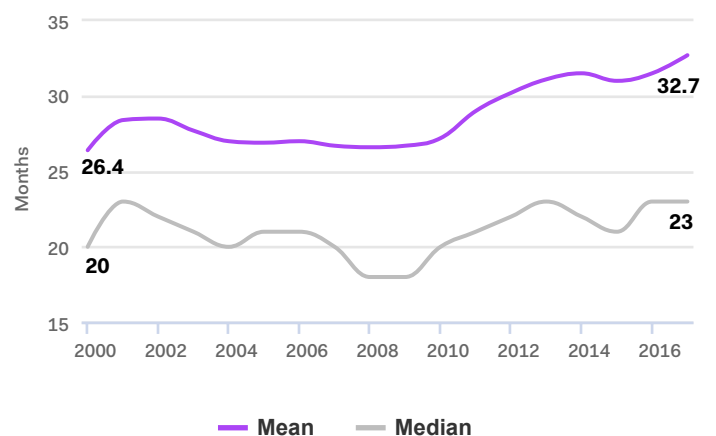
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 2013

Since 2000, the average length of stay in prison has increased from 26 months to 33 months, over half a year.

During this period, admissions to prison increased by more than 40 percent. Multiplied by the more than 14,000 people sentenced to prison each year, the increase in time served costs over 7,500 prison beds or \$175 million per year. These added months and years of imprisonment cost taxpayers millions of dollars without providing a public safety return.

Even as people enter Arizona’s prisons for less and less serious offenses, the length of time spent in prison continues to rise.

Mean and Median Length of Stay, Arizona New Court Commitments, FY2000 - FY2017



Arizona’s Imprisonment Crisis: The High Price of Prison Growth is the first in a three-part research series to be released throughout the fall of 2018. This part focuses on the causes of Arizona’s prison population growth and the consequences for Arizona’s economy. The second part reveals how Arizona’s imprisonment crisis has affected some communities more than others, and the third part examines the dire consequences for Arizona’s women and families. This analysis was created using more than half a million individual-level files from over 30 years of prison admissions. Experts on corrections data cleaned and analyzed Arizona’s prison data in accordance with national standards. To see the full report, please visit <https://www.fwd.us/AtWhatCost/>

Unless otherwise noted, all prison figures cited in this report use data from the Arizona Department of Corrections analyzed by FWD.us. See the full report for a description of the methodology and data definitions.

About FWD.us: Founded by leaders in the business and tech communities, FWD.us is a bipartisan political organization committed to reforming America’s broken immigration and criminal justice systems. Together, we can move America forward.

