

Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC)

Housing Colorado:
Getting On After Getting Out

CCJRC History

- Founded in 1999 when Senator Dorothy Rupert introduced legislation for a 3-year halt on prison expansion
- Legislation did not pass but served as a catalyst for uniting a diverse group of organizations, faith communities, and individuals
- CCJRC became a 501(c)(3) in 2003 and today is a coalition of over 100 organizations and over 6,000 members

Mission and Goals

- The mission of CCJRC is to reverse the trend of mass incarceration in Colorado
- Our goals are to:
 - 1) advocate for alternatives to prison expansion;
 - 2) research and design specific reforms of policies driving growth in the prison populations, with an emphasis on drug policy and parole/re-entry;
 - 3) build and facilitate a statewide coalition
 - 4) serve as a resource for prisoners, parolees, their families, and community organizations

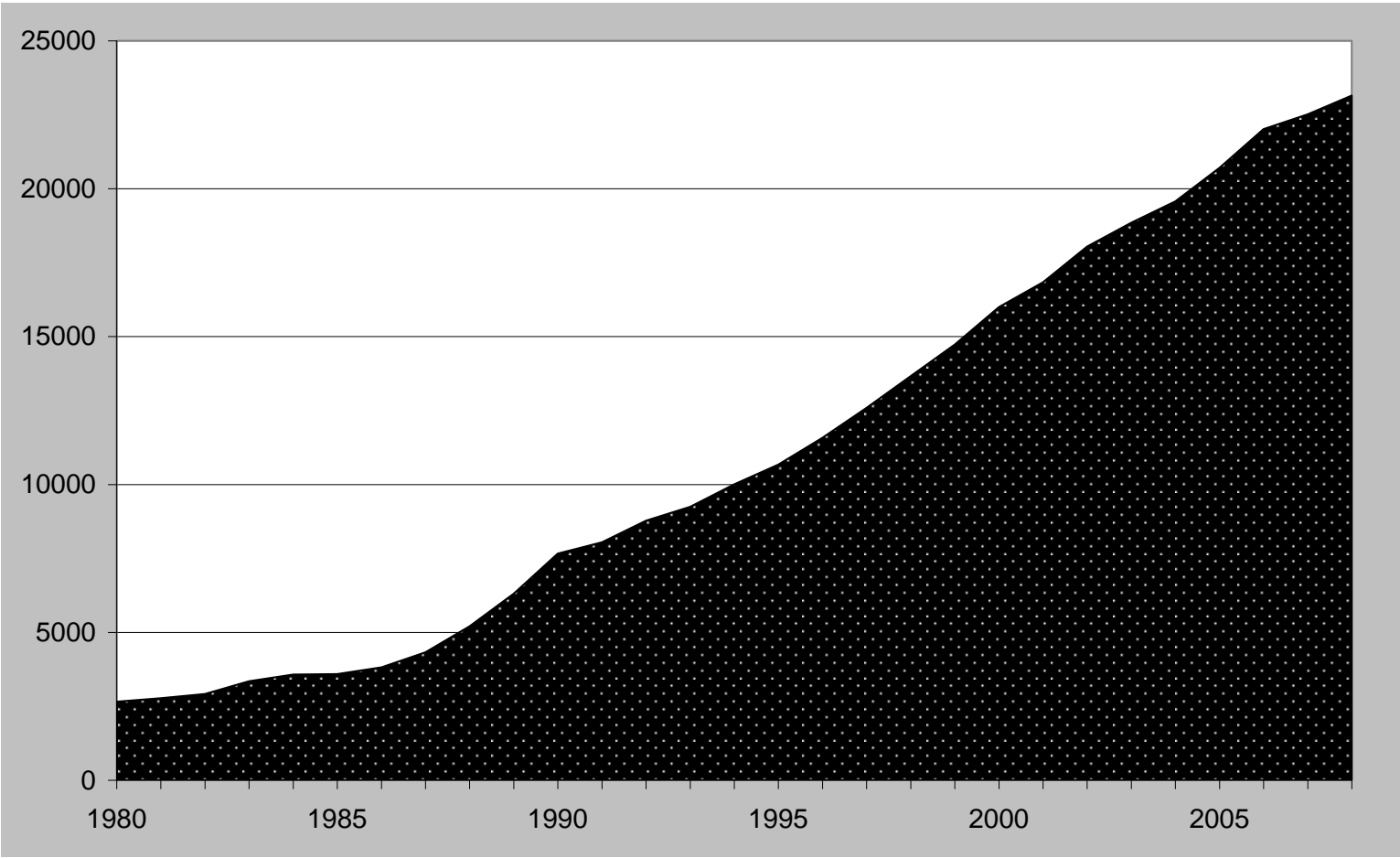
Incarceration Rate

- FY 2010 Department of Corrections (DOC) reports that Colorado's incarceration rate is 445 adults per 100,000 adult state residents
- Countries around the world are far lower:
 - Japan – 60
 - Sweden – 81
 - France – 88
 - Germany – 97
 - Canada – 116
 - China – 118
 - England & Wales – 145
 - Mexico - 191

Prison Population

- As of January 31, 2011, the Colorado DOC population was 22,674, with another 8,406 people on parole
- However, there has been a significant slowing in the growth of the prison population in Colorado
- In 2007, the prison population grew by an average of over 100 people per month
- In 2008, this slowed to 39 people a month and is currently averaging minus 36 people per month
- 3 prisons in the state have closed (Walsenburg, Brush, CWCF) and another prison is scheduled to close in March 2012 (Ft. Lyon)

Colorado Prison Population Growth



Cost of Corrections

- In Colorado, it costs an average of \$32,334 a year to house someone in prison or \$88.59/day
- In 1985, the Colorado DOC received \$57 million from the state's general fund
- The 2011/2012 Colorado DOC budget is \$727 million
- In 1985 the Colorado DOC budget was 2.8% of the state general fund budget
- In 2010 it was 9.3% of the state budget

Recidivism

- Every year more than 10,000 people are released from state prison in Colorado
- The majority reintegrate back to the Denver metro area and will NOT be successful in making this difficult transition
- DOC statistics indicate that 65% of people released on mandatory parole return to prison within 3 years
- For too many, the bridge from prison to community is inadequate to nonexistent
- In 2010 39% of total prison admissions were for a technical violation of parole
- In 2010 there were 4,631 people returned to prison for parole violations – 80% for technical violations (failure to maintain housing, employment, treatment), only 20% for new crimes

Getting on after getting out: A Re-entry Guide for Colorado

- A resource guide was NOT available in Colorado to assist people to better prepare prior to release and navigate barriers after release
- 2007 CCJRC published the 1st edition; provided 25,000 free copies to people in prison, community corrections, and on parole
- 2011 updated 2nd edition released; 20,000 free copies have been provided to people in prison, community corrections, and on parole
- Topics: How do I plan for my release; What should I know about parole and Comcor; How do I find a job and place to live; how do I reconnect to community; What assistance is available; Can I vote?
- Books available for purchase at www.ccjrc.org; nonprofit and bulk rates available

Primary Barriers for new parolees

- Money – released with a one-time \$100 debit card (gate money) and any monies from inmate account
- No parole sponsor – no family and/or family is disqualified due to their criminal record = parolee released homeless
- Criminal record - affects ability to get a job and housing

Homelessness

- In 2007 CCJRC collaborated with The Piton Foundation, and our findings indicated that a quarter of people on parole in the Denver metro area, and more than one-third in Denver, end up in homeless shelters or other temporary housing
- **Even our safety net systems intentionally exclude people with criminal records:**
Public housing and shelters often exclude people with criminal records, not being aware of the impact

Criminal Record

- Sixty-five million adults in the US, over one in four adults, have a criminal record
- Consistent theme across the country: “people with criminal records need not apply”
- Exclusion of people with criminal records severely impacts communities of color who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system
- Applying the 1:4 ratio to the Colorado adult work force, potentially 900,000 persons have some form of criminal record

Employment Laws

- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in employment, based on race, gender, national origin, and other protected categories
- Solely using a conviction record to deny employment is unlawful under Title VII
- When making an employment decision, employer must assess: 1) the nature and gravity of the offense(s); 2) the time that has passed since the conviction and/or completion of the sentence; and 3) the nature of the job held or sought
- There are also approximately 50 state laws in Colorado that hinder employment opportunities for ex-offenders

Key policies implemented and proposed to reduce recidivism and support re-entry

- In 2009 CCJRC researched and released “Homelessness and Parole: A Survey of Denver’s Shelters
- CCJRC conducted a survey of 48 people on parole residing in homeless shelters to better understand why people are released homeless from prison
- CCJRC made eleven recommendations to prevent parolees from being released homeless or shorten the length of homelessness

CCJRC Recommendations

- 1) DOC to identify people at risk of being released homeless prior to their release and five suggested actions DOC might take
- 2) DOC to ensure that community corrections boards are aware when applicant is homeless to give special consideration
- 3) DOC to officially track and report the number of people released homeless, parole revocation rate, and filing of escape charges
- 4) DOC to discontinue concentrating homeless parolees in one shelter
- 5) Denver City Council to explore the consequences of ordinance 565, series of 2001, and consider revision
- 6) DOC to articulate criteria considered by parole for denial or acceptance of a parole plan and reconsideration if denial results in homeless release of a parolee

CCJRC Recommendations

- 7) Area county jails to explore alternative step-down transitional program for homeless parolees
- 8) Metro area counties to identify and address the gaps in community-based services and housing for homeless people leaving prison or jail
- 9) Denver's Road Home to conduct a survey of the admission policies of housing providers that receive state, federal, or local government funding in Denver
- 10) City and County of Denver to conduct a review of municipal ordinances and department hiring policies and practices regarding the employment of people with a criminal conviction
- 11) Colorado to earmark additional funds to provide vouchers or other forms of financial assistance to indigent parolees for re-entry related expenses, including classes and treatment ordered as a condition of parole

2010 Legislative Session

- HB 1023 – this new law clarifies the limits of liability for employers and encourages them to hire people with criminal records who are otherwise suitable for the job
- SB 6 – provides free state ID for people leaving incarceration who are referred by a jail, DOC, or NYC
- HB 1112 – requires vocational programming in DOC to be more market-relevant
- HB 1360 – allows the parole board to modify the conditions of parole to require the parolee to participate in a residential or outpatient treatment program in lieu of revocation for a technical violation; provided \$1.2 million in wraparound services, such as money vouchers for temporary housing at motels

2011 Legislative Session

- HB 1167 – the timeline is staggered for sealing certain drug offense records – 3 years on a petty offense or class 2 or 3 misdemeanor; 5 years on a class 1 misdemeanor; 7 years on a class 5 or 6 felony; 10 years on any other drug crime

Opportunities for advocates to support CCJRC's work

- Develop more specific strategies to address barriers to housing for people with criminal records, particularly those currently involved in the criminal justice system
- Give more attention to reducing homelessness for those with criminal records
- Colorado's public housing laws for those with criminal records are inconsistent and more restrictive than federal law requires
- Historically, Public Housing is concerned with perception: "no drugs or cons" approach
- Historically, private landlords are concerned with being sued
- Convene stakeholders to develop a new framework for addressing housing issues for new parolees

