



Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars

^{UW}**Extension**

Corrections Policy: Can States Cut Costs and Still Curb Crime?

Briefing Report
October 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, expenditures for state and local corrections in the United States increased over 600%. This trend is reflected here in Wisconsin: in the past 13 years, the Badger State has seen its corrections budget grow from \$556 million in the 1992-93 biennium to nearly \$2 billion in the biennial budget adopted for 2004-05—an increase of 257%. Since 1990, Wisconsin's inmate population has more than tripled.

The good news is that crime rates in Wisconsin are falling. Between 1993 and 2002, total violent crime declined by 8.2% and property crime declined by 14.6%. Wisconsin's rates of violent crime and property crime are lower than in the Midwest and in the United States. Moreover, Wisconsin residents were less apt to be victims of crime in 2002 than ten years earlier.

Under the Truth in Sentencing law passed in Wisconsin in 1997 and implemented in 1999, prisoners are spending more time behind bars. Taken together, more prisoners and longer sentences have translated into significant costs for the state. In Wisconsin and across the country, state legislators are struggling to balance the rising cost of corrections with the need to protect public safety. This report addresses how state sentencing policies are changing during tough budget times, the costs and benefits of incarceration and other crime control policies, and effective programs to strengthen treatment and reduce recidivism for convicted offenders.

"Corrections Policy: Can States Cut Costs and Still Curb Crime?" is the 19th Family Impact Seminar and briefing report in a series designed to provide state policymakers with objective, solution-oriented research on current policy issues. Family Impact Seminars analyze the consequences an issue, policy, or program may have for families. Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars are a joint effort of University of Wisconsin-Extension and the Center for Excellence in Family Studies in the School of Human Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Wisconsin's rates of violent crime and property crime are lower than in the Midwest and in the United States.

Data on corrections and crime in Wisconsin are summarized in the first chapter of this report. In the second chapter, Daniel Wilhelm discusses how states' budget shortfalls are playing out against a backdrop of changed public attitudes about crime and incarceration. As an example, in recent polls, about two-thirds of Americans (65%) preferred addressing the root causes of crime, whereas only one-third (32%) preferred more stringent sentencing. Wilhelm explains that, while perhaps

immediately cost effective, prison closings, layoffs, and program eliminations often fail to address the broader issue of how to better manage a state's fiscal resources. The chapter also provides examples from states that have taken up this broader challenge by effecting systemic change to sentencing and corrections policy as a way to enhance efficiency, predictability, and fairness.

For example, Kansas, North Carolina, and Virginia created state entities to inform sentencing and corrections policy by providing data-based information that can both predict a system's needs and guide development of responsive laws and policies. In North Carolina, the state's sentencing commission created a system to use scarce prison space for the most violent and frequent offenders, and to invest in non-prison sanctions for others. Between 1993 and 1997, prison admissions decreased more than half (52%), and from 1994 to 2000, North Carolina's crime rate fell 12.5%. North Carolina and Kansas designed computer simulation models to alert legislators of growing prison populations, and to project the resources needed to implement proposed policy changes.

Virginia's fiscal notes or impact statements require that any bill that would increase the prison population requires a cost estimate before it can be reported out of committee and take up valuable time in floor debates. Since implementing fiscal impact statements, Virginia's crime rate has declined 26%, and its incarceration rate has grown just 6%. Lastly, risk assessment at the time of sentencing in Virginia helps conserve corrections dollars by using prison space for the offenders most likely to commit more crime, while identifying low-risk drug and property offenders who might be suitable for non-prison sanctions. An evaluation of the pilot program concluded that diverting 263 low-risk offenders from prison saved \$1.5 million over and beyond the costs of diversion: savings that would have been \$3.7 to \$4.5 million if the program had been implemented statewide. Perhaps most importantly, the innovations in these three states show that such reform-minded responses need not compromise public safety.

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Incarcerating violent and high-volume property offenders continues to generate more benefits than costs.

In the next chapter, economist Steve Aos provides a cost-benefit analysis of different policies to control crime. His work reveals that policymakers can affect the level of crime by making decisions that influence the rate of incarceration, as well as by making decisions on rehabilitation and prevention strategies. Aos's study finds that a 10% increase in the state

incarceration rate leads to a 2% to 4% reduction in the crime rate. Conversely, a 10% decrease in the state incarceration rate leads to a 2% to 4% increase in the crime rate. According to the economic law of diminishing marginal returns, however, the more incarceration rates are increased, the less each additional prison cell will be able to reduce crime. For Washington State, incarcerating more violent and high-volume property offenders continues to generate

more benefits than cost, although the net advantage has decreased significantly since 1980. For drug-related offenders, however, it now costs taxpayers more to incarcerate additional offenders than the average value of the crimes avoided.

This analysis also shows that for certain types of offenders some research-based and well-implemented rehabilitation and prevention programs can produce better returns for taxpayers' dollars than further prison expansion. For example, some but not all drug treatment programs for adult offenders, and some but not all family-focused approaches for juvenile offenders have both proven to be cost-effective crime-reduction strategies. The Washington State Legislature has recently adopted sentencing policies and treatment programs to implement some of these strategies. The general lesson from this research is this: business-like economic analysis can be used by legislatures to give taxpayers a better return on their crime fighting dollars.

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Treatment models proven to work target factors such as family dysfunction, social skills, criminal thinking, and problem-solving skills.

In the fourth chapter, Professor Edward Latessa discusses effective correctional interventions and examines what works to promote public safety and what doesn't. He explains how researchers in the science of crime and treatment have made major strides over the past two decades in identifying what factors increase the odds that an individual will re-offend. Based on a consistent body of research evidence, Latessa describes the proven link among certain characteristics and conditions, and repeat criminal behavior. Latessa

contends that interventions designed for incarcerated populations are most likely to succeed if they take target these proven crime-producing factors: 1) Antisocial values; 2) Antisocial peers; 3) Poor self control, self management, and problem solving skills; 4) Family dysfunction; and 5) Past criminality.

Latessa's work shows that policies and programs work only when they are based on a theory that intentionally addresses those characteristics and conditions that cause crime. Programs that do work assess offenders' needs and risks, use proven treatment models, understand the principles of effective intervention, and rely on credentialed people and agencies. On the other hand, ineffective programs target low-risk offenders for treatment and seek to change weak predictors of criminal behavior, such as self-esteem. Examples of programs that don't work include "scared straight" programs; boot camps; intensive supervision; wilderness programs; and psychoanalysis.

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This briefing report was edited by Elizabeth Gross, Bettina Friese, and Karen Bogenschneider. This summary was designed by Meg Wall-Wild.

A complimentary copy of the full report is available to state legislators by calling Mari Hansen at (608) 262-0369. Copies can be purchased from Cooperative Extension Publishing Operations, 432 N. Lake Street, Madison, WI 53706, Toll-free (877) 947-7827 (877-WIS-PUBS); <http://www1.uwex.edu/ces/pubs>. For further information contact the Director of the Family Impact Seminars, Karen Bogenschneider, at 1430 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706, kpbogens@wisc.edu, or (608) 262-4070. Karen is a Professor and Extension Specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension. You can also contact Associate Director Bettina Friese and State Coordinator Elizabeth Gross at the Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars at (608) 262-9161 or (608) 262-5779.



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What Other Resources Are Available to State Policymakers?

A Researcher Hotline

Identify University of Wisconsin researchers who are studying child and family issues by calling (608) 262-5779.

Briefing Reports

Download 19 briefing reports written specifically for Wisconsin policymakers on topics such as education; helping poor kids succeed; juvenile crime; long term care; parenting; prescription drugs; welfare reform; and preventing youth crime, smoking, and substance use (<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/familyimpact/wifs.htm>); download 57 briefing reports written specifically for state policymakers on topics such as children with incarcerated parents, early childhood education and care, the effect of changes in the tax codes, family preservation, prostituted teens, and rising health care costs.

Family Matters Newsletters

Download seven issues of Family Matters, a newsletter written specifically for Wisconsin policymakers. Newsletters provide cutting-edge research and a family perspective on current policy issues such as prescription drugs, early childhood care and education, the role of families in policymaking, rising health care costs, and children of incarcerated parents (<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/familyimpact/newsletters.htm>).

Audio Tapes or Web Audio

Listen to audiotapes and web audio of most seminar speakers.

Family Impact Assessment Tools

Use family impact assessment tools for examining how responsive policies and programs are to families. Tools are available for conducting family impact analysis of schools, communities, adolescent treatment centers, and state child and family service plans (<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/familyimpact/impact.htm>).

Web resources

This website is designed specifically for busy policymakers and professionals, and includes 70 briefing reports and seven newsletters written specifically for state policymakers, 21 reports specifically written for federal policymakers, 17 policy newsletters, and over 100 links to leading policy sites. Browse these resources and more at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/familyimpact/wisconsin>

The Family Impact Seminars produce seminars, briefing reports, newsletters, and discussion sessions which provide state policymakers with:

-  **Easy Access** to state-of-the-art, solution-oriented research on current policy issues such as education, juvenile crime, long term care, parenting, prescription drugs, and welfare reform
-  **Relevant Research** that responds to the issues legislators are debating
-  **Objective Information** on a range of policy options rather than a specific legislative agenda
-  **A Family Impact Perspective** that examines the impact of policies on families
-  **Neutral, Nonpartisan Settings** outside the political environment for discussing issues and seeking common ground

Gross, E., Friese, B., & Bogenschneider, K. (Eds.) (2003). *Corrections policy: Can states cut costs and still curb crime?*. (Wisconsin Family Briefing Report No. 19, 44 pgs.). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Center for Excellence in Family Studies.

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