

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STUDY FINDS THAT REPEAT/VIOLENT OFFENDER PRISON POPULATION GROWS AS
CRIME RATE FALLS

Phoenix, AZ (December 5, 2014). Against a backdrop of another decline in the crime rate, the concentration of repeat and/or violent offenders in Arizona's prisons continues to grow.

In a third installment of the long term study of the Arizona prison population, the statistics show what the members of the Arizona Prosecuting Attorneys' Advisory Council (APAAC) have known from being on the front lines: the highest concentration of offenders in Arizona's prisons is in the repeat and/or violent offender groups. "This data, which tracks prison population since 1971, once again dispels the myth that Arizona's prisons are laden with low level offenders. While the net population totals continue to rise over time, that is a function of the nature of the type of offenders held; in the repeat/violent categories the terms are longer, thus decreasing the impact of releases on the net number of people in prison", observed Sheila Polk, Yavapai County Attorney and APAAC chair. "As our crime rate continues to fall, one must presume there is a connection between these two facts; moreover incapacitation is a legitimate tool for protecting the community from violent and career criminals," offered Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery.

Between 2009 and 2013 as a percentage of the confined population:

The concentration of violent offenders increased 5.3%
Nonviolent offenders decreased 5.25%

Repeat and/or violent offenders constitute over 95%
Nonviolent first offenders make up less than 5%

As of 2013, FBI statistics show that the crime rate has fallen 4.4% nationally over 2012 estimates overall, and 5.1% for violent crimes. This continues a decade long trend which has seen a 14.5% decrease in national crime rates since 2004. Ironically, according to a November Gallup poll, the public perception is that crime is trending upward.

In Arizona, DPS statistics show a 5.7% drop in overall crime from 2012 to 2013. A major public safety goal of the criminal system is keeping the offender off the street thus

rendering the criminal unable to offend. The corollary is the decrease in the number of victims of crime in our society.

Since the 2009 report the number of violent offenders in prison has increased over 5%, while nonviolent offender totals fell by a similar number. First offenders numbers remain steady but this category is a bit of a labeling problem because very often in plea agreements priors are not alleged. Even so, of those first offenders 2/3 committed violent offenses. The percentage of non-violent repeat offenders has been steadily decreasing over time; however, the prior offenses themselves may have been violent as the classification is based upon the current incarceration.

This data clearly shows that the system continues to incarcerate the right people for the right reasons. In this year of state budget challenges, these facts should help dissuade policy makers of the notion that tinkering with our sentencing scheme is prudent. One must remember that the vast majority of these cases are the result of plea agreements that do not necessarily reflect the gravity of all the offenses committed. And the net savings to the public in terms of crimes avoided and insuring a safe community for the public who can remain confident that the bad guys are removed from the communities where they live and work are factors that cannot be overlooked.

Working on the backend to curb recidivism and modify crime-driving attitudes and behaviors, coupled with proper diversion on the front end to stop those behaviors before they start are the smart approaches to crime. Arizona is making strides in these areas, but it will take beefing up treatment capacity which is sorely lacking at the present time.

Prisoners in Arizona is authored by Daryl R. Fischer, Ph.D., a widely respected expert on criminal justice statistical analysis and former Research Manager for the Arizona Department of Corrections. The study builds on the information presented in earlier studies Dr. Fischer conducted in 2010. Prisoners in Arizona is available for download at www.azsentencing.org.