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The Vast Majority of Prison Inmates Are Violent or Repeat Criminals: Over 94 percent of Arizona's Prison Inmates Are Repeat Felony Offenders or Have a History of Felony Violence, New Report Shows

Analysis is the most in-depth statistical profile of the Arizona prison population ever attempted

TUCSON, ARIZONA - Over 94 percent of Arizona inmates are either violent or repeat felony offenders or both according to the report, **"Prisoners in Arizona: A Profile of the Inmate Population,"** released today by the Arizona Prosecuting Attorneys' Advisory Council (APAAC). The report offers an accurate, comprehensive and vivid portrait of our state's prison inmates and counters the erroneous belief that many of the inmates in Arizona's state prisons are first-time or non-violent offenders.

The report provides an in-depth analysis of the offenses for which the men and women behind bars in Arizona have been incarcerated. It explains the sentences they are serving, provides information on their histories of felony violence, details their prior criminal records and other relevant factors related to their imprisonment.

The report found that more than 65 percent of inmates in the Department of Corrections can be classified as violent offenders, and reveals that more than 50 percent of the inmates in the Arizona Department of Corrections are currently incarcerated for one or more violent offenses.

"These findings make clear that the majority of men and women behind bars in Arizona are violent and repeat criminals who don't belong on our streets," said Derek Rapier, Greenlee County Attorney and the Chairman of APAAC.

The 90-page report, **"Prisoners in Arizona: A Profile of the Inmate Population,"** was prepared by Dr. Daryl R. Fischer, Ph.D. at the request of the Arizona Prosecuting Attorneys' Advisory Council. Dr. Fischer is the former research manager at the Department of Corrections, having served in that capacity for nearly 20 years. APAAC, created by the legislature in 1977, coordinates and provides training, education and support to Arizona prosecutors.

"This report is the most in-depth profile of the Arizona prison population ever attempted," said Pima County Attorney Barbara LaWall, who serves on the Council. "Its findings come at a critical time, as Arizona faces the most severe budget crisis in the 98-year history of our state. It is in our best interests to ensure that the significance of this report is fully understood."

Among the report's key findings:

- As of September 30, 2009, a total of 40,514 inmates were held in the custody of the Department of Corrections.
- More than 94 percent of the inmate populations, a staggering 38,088 inmates, are either violent criminals, repeat criminals or violent repeat criminals.
- Overall, 83.8 percent (33,896) of inmates were found to have one or more prior adult felony convictions or juvenile felony adjudications and more than half, 56 percent (22,639) of inmates have two or more prior felonies. A total of 41.8 percent of the inmate population had three or more prior felony convictions.
- More than 44 percent of the inmate populations (17,947) have been previously committed to the Arizona Department of Corrections.
- Nearly 23 percent of Arizona's inmates (9260) are suspected or confirmed members of prison or street gangs. Almost 80 percent of these gang members have a history of felony violence.

The report notes that the 2010 budget for the Department of Corrections was \$1 billion – 12 percent of Arizona's total state budget. "With this level of investment in the prison system," Fischer writes, "it is important to know that tax dollars are being spent wisely."

The report's findings indicate that the considerable investment Arizona taxpayers are making in their criminal justice system is paying off in a priceless dividend: a drop in serious crime.

"This report is full of startling numbers," LaWall said. "But among the most significant is evidence that the increased use of incarceration contributed to a 42 percent drop in serious crime from 1995 to 2008. This means that our investment in public safety results in safer Arizona communities."

The report also notes that Arizona's prison rehabilitation programs resulted in an average 25 percent reduction in recidivism rates for inmates who participated in them while in custody. The groups experiencing the greatest reduction in recidivism – more than 45 percent – were inmates serving 10 or more years in prison. Conversely, the only inmate categories showing increases in recidivism were those in which less than two years were served.

"These findings tell us that correctional intervention really does rehabilitate offenders, but that it takes time for inmates to benefit from rehabilitation," LaWall said. As the report states, "it is certainly not in the best interests of this state for correctional program budgets to be cut to save money."

One much-discussed way to save money concerns the possible early release of offenders and the reduction of staff at the Department of Corrections. Either of these steps, she said, could have serious implications for public safety and prison security.

"Given the likelihood of their reoffending, releasing them back on the streets costs society much more than keeping them behind bars," LaWall said.

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