

State of Florida



OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**POLICY REVIEW
OF**

REINCARCERATION IN FLORIDA'S PRISONS

ADMINISTERED BY THE

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

September 18, 1995

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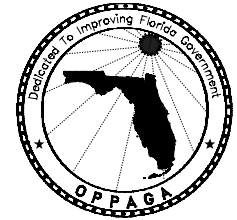
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State of Florida
OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS AND
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

JAMES L. CARPENTER
INTERIM DIRECTOR

September 18, 1995

The President of the Senate,
the Speaker of the House of Representatives,
and the Legislative Auditing Committee

I have directed that a policy review be made of Reincarceration in Florida's Prisons administered by the Department of Corrections. The results of the review are presented to you in this report. This review was made as a part of an ongoing program of performance auditing as mandated by Section 11.51(1), Florida Statutes. This review was conducted by Frank Alvarez under the supervision of D. Byron Brown.

We wish to express our appreciation to the staff of the Department of Corrections for their assistance.

Respectfully yours,

James L. Carpenter
Interim Director

Audit supervised by:

D. Byron Brown

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Contents

SUMMARY		i
CHAPTER I	SCOPE	1
CHAPTER II	FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Section 1	Reincarceration rates serve as a useful measure of recidivism because they are based upon the most tangible measure of offender failure: return to prison.	5
Reincarceration Rates: A Way to Measure Recidivism		
Section 2	Two out of every five inmates released from Florida's prisons return to prison within three years of their release dates.	6
Reincarceration Rate Data		
Section 3	For offenders released from prison in fiscal year 1990-91, Florida's reincarceration rate is lower than comparable rates for several large states, including Illinois, Texas, and Georgia.	11
Comparison With Other States		
Section 4	Offenders who are black, male, 24 years of age or younger, have been in prison more than once, or have committed property crimes such as burglary are the more likely to be reincarcerated. Recidivists tend to commit and be reincarcerated for the same types of crimes for which they were initially incarcerated.	13
Profile of Offenders Who Return to Prison		
Section 5	Most of the growth in the state prison population since 1985 is due to reincarceration rather than offenders entering prison for the first time.	19
Effect of Reincarceration		
Section 6	For inmates released from prison for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, the Department's database contains incomplete and unreliable data on inmate participation in and completion of the educational, substance abuse treatment, prison industries, and motivation programs.	20
Measuring the Effect of Strategies on Reducing Recidivism		

Contents

(Continued)

Section 7 Conclusions and Observations	To provide more complete information to the Legislature on the impact that programs and policies have on reducing recidivism, the Department should establish standard procedures for measuring and reporting reincarceration rates.	25
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LIST OF APPENDICES

A. Methodology	31
B. Department of Corrections Recidivism Measures	32
C. Response From The Department of Corrections	35

Policy Review of Reincarceration in Florida's Prisons

Purpose

Reincarceration rates represent a measure of recidivism, or the tendency of offenders to return to criminal behavior. For purposes of this report, the reincarceration rate is the percentage of released inmates who return to prison within three years of their release. Specific objectives addressed in this review were to:

- Determine reincarceration rates and identify trends and profiles for offenders released from Florida's prisons for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, who return to prison within three years of their release; and to
- Identify strategies implemented by the Department to reduce recidivism and determine the Department's efforts to assess the effects of these strategies on reducing recidivism.

Findings and Recommendations

Strategies to Reduce Recidivism

The Legislature and the Department have implemented a variety of strategies to reduce the tendency of offenders to return to criminal behavior after release from prison. These strategies include crime control strategies, such as increasing the percentage of time served and imposing longer sentences on habitual offenders, and rehabilitation strategies, such as education and substance abuse treatment. The measurement of recidivism is an important part of evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies.

Reincarceration Rates a Useful Measure of Recidivism

Reincarceration is a useful measure of recidivism in Florida for two primary reasons. First, reincarceration rates can be determined using the database of a single agency, and second, reincarceration focuses on those behaviors that place the greatest demand on state corrections resources. The Department's measure of recidivism excludes offenders returned to prison for technical violations, and includes offenders who are sentenced to probation or community control for new crimes.

Two of Every Five Inmates Released Return to Prison Within Three Years

Of the 183,692 offenders released from Florida's prisons for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, 41% returned to prison within three years of their prison release dates. We also found:

-
- An additional 20% of the offenders in our sample either came back to prison more than three years after their release date or received a new probation or community control term after release from prison;
 - The remaining 39% of all offenders released during this period had not had any further contact with the Department of Corrections as of February 28, 1992;
 - Florida's reincarceration rate peaked at 44% for offenders released from prison during the 1988-89 fiscal year and has since declined to 38% for the 1990-91 and 1991-92 fiscal years;
 - While the portion of offenders returning to prison for committing new crimes has decreased substantially, the portion of offenders returning to prison for violating the terms of post-release supervision has increased. Of 1987-88 releasees, 5% of those who were reincarcerated were returned to prison for technical violations, while 42% of the 1991-92 releasees were reincarcerated for technical violations;
 - For offenders released from prison in fiscal year 1990-91, Florida's reincarceration rate is lower than comparable rates for several large states, including Illinois, Texas, and Georgia;
 - Released offenders who are black, male, 24 years of age or younger, have been in prison more than once, or have committed property crimes, such as burglary, are more likely to be reincarcerated; and
 - Most of the growth in the state prison population since 1985 is due to reincarceration rather than offenders entering prison for the first time. During the ten-year period from June 30, 1985, to June 30, 1995, the state's prison population more than doubled from 28,310 to 61,992. Approximately 78% of this growth in the prison population is attributed to offenders returning to prison.

**Crime Rate and
Incarceration Rate
Down**

Determining the precise causes of decreases in reincarceration rates is complicated by the many factors that can influence offender behavior and the sanctions that offenders receive. However, we identified three primary factors that may have contributed to the decline in reincarceration rates over the three most recent years we reviewed. First, Florida crime statistics indicate that crime has declined since the late 1980s. Second, the rate at which convicted felons were sent to prison has declined from 31% in fiscal year 1989-90 to 21% in fiscal year 1993-94. Third, as of June 30, 1994, approximately 13% of the prison population were serving longer prison terms as habitual offenders, thus eliminating the opportunity to recidivate.

**More Offenders
Returned to Prison on
Technical Violations**

There are two primary factors affecting the increase in the technical violation rate. First, the number of offenders who are supervised by the Department after their release from prison increased by 166% from 8,389 offenders in fiscal year 1986-87 (42% of all releases) to 22,334 offenders in the 1990-91 fiscal year (64% of all releases). Second, the use of longer terms of supervision increase the likelihood for offenders on post-release supervision to return to prison for a technical violation.

**Deficiencies With Efforts
to Evaluate the
Effectiveness of
Strategies**

The Department is spending approximately \$40 million annually providing rehabilitation programs for inmates. We identified two primary deficiencies with efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of legislative and Department strategies on reducing recidivism. First, the Department's database contains incomplete and unreliable data on inmate participation in and completion of the educational, substance abuse treatment, prison industries, and motivational programs for inmates released from prison between July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992. Second, insufficient studies have been conducted to determine whether these programs are effective in reducing recidivism.

**Conclusions and
Recommendations**

Florida will spend over \$1 billion in 1995-96 on its state prison system. Determining the impact of specific programs and policies on reincarceration would assist the

Legislature and the Department in assessing the effectiveness of programs and policies on recidivism.

Standard Measure of Recidivism Needed

Although the Department has conducted isolated studies to measure recidivism, it has not established a commonly accepted measurement of recidivism. Without a standard procedure for measuring and reporting recidivism, studies that analyze program effects on recidivism will not be comparable. Therefore, we recommend the Department establish standard procedures for measuring recidivism and for reporting recidivism data.

Factors Outside the Department's Control Affect Recidivism

Although the effect of reincarceration rates is a key measure of the effectiveness of programs and policies, recidivism by itself cannot be used to evaluate each of these programs and policies. These programs and policies may serve other valuable purposes, such as serving the security goals of the institutions by reducing inmate idleness, protecting the public by keeping inmates incarcerated, or providing opportunities for inmate self-betterment. Factors outside the Department's control, such as an offender's inability to find a job, may offset the positive effects of rehabilitation programs. To provide the Legislature with more complete information about the value of legislative and Department programs and policies, we recommend the Department continue to identify additional outcome measures for each program and policy.

Agency Response

The Secretary of the Department of Corrections provided us a written response to our preliminary report. The response reflects the specific action taken or contemplated to address the deficiencies cited. He also emphasized that the Department was not responsible for the entry of most program data during the period under review. See Appendix C of our final report for the Secretary's full response and additional comments from the Interim Director of the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

Policy Review of Reincarceration in Florida's Prisons

CHAPTER I Purpose and Scope, Methodology

Purpose and Scope

The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability conducts policy reviews as part of the Legislature's oversight responsibility for public programs. The primary objective of policy reviews is to provide information the Legislature can use to improve programs and allocate limited public resources. In this review, we discuss the reincarceration of offenders released from Florida's prisons. Reincarceration rates represent a measure of recidivism, or the tendency of offenders to return to criminal behavior. For purposes of this report, the reincarceration rate is the percentage of released inmates who return to prison within three years of their release. Specific objectives addressed in this review were to:

- Determine reincarceration rates and identify trends and profiles for offenders released from Florida's prisons for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, who return to prison within three years of their release; and to
- Identify strategies implemented by the Department to reduce recidivism and determine the Department's efforts to assess the effects of these strategies on reducing recidivism.

Methodology

To accomplish these objectives, we obtained and analyzed data for offenders released from Florida's prisons for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992. We also interviewed Department of Corrections officials and corrections officials in other states. In addition, we reviewed Department documents relating to the Department's rehabilitation programs and reviewed national studies dealing with recidivism that have been published since 1980. (See Appendix A.)

CHAPTER II

Findings and Recommendations

The reincarceration of offenders who have previously been in prison has been a recurring concern to policymakers. Chapter 74-112, Laws of Florida, stated that "Florida spends each year in excess of \$60 million for its state correctional system, but Florida citizens have not received a fair return on that investment. Florida correctional institutions have contributed little to the reduction of crime. To the contrary, crime rates continue to rise; recidivism rates are notoriously high; and large prisons have for the most part become schools for crime, making successful reintegration into the community unlikely." Now, some 21 years later, Florida spends \$1.4 billion annually on its state correctional system, and it is still not clear to what extent incarceration contributes to a reduction of crime.

The Legislature and the Department have implemented a variety of strategies to reduce the tendency of offenders to return to criminal behavior after release from prison. These strategies can be categorized into two primary categories: crime control measures and rehabilitation programs. (See Exhibit 1.)

Crime control measures are intended to prevent or deter offenders from committing further crimes. For example, increasing the percentage of time inmates serve in prison is intended to deter criminal activity because it delays the opportunity for the inmate to commit additional crimes. In the Safe Streets Initiative of 1994, the Florida Legislature increased the percentage of time inmates serve in prison to a minimum of 55% of their sentences. In 1995, the Legislature further increased that percentage to 85% for most inmates.

Exhibit 1: Strategies Implemented to Reduce Recidivism

	Program, Strategy, or Policy (Year Implemented)	Purpose of Program, Strategy, or Policy	Number (%) of Inmates Participating (As of June 30, 1995)¹	Intermediate Outcomes
Crime Control Strategies/Policies	Increase the percentage of sentence served <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Safe Streets Initiative of 1994 ▶ Stop Turning Out Prisoners (STOP) Act of 1995 	The STOP Act of 1995 requires inmates to serve at least 85% of their sentences. This act replaced the Safe Streets Initiative of 1994 which resulted in inmates serving a minimum of 55% of their sentences.	STOP Act applies to all inmates with offense dates on or after October 1, 1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Eliminate unearned gain time ▶ Reduce incentive gain-time ▶ Return credibility to entire criminal justice system ▶ Increase deterrent effect of incarceration
	Deportation of Alien Inmates	Identify, process and deport selected illegal aliens	309 inmates (0.5%) have been deported (as of July 1, 1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Make available prison beds to house violent inmates ▶ Shift burden of costs for incarcerating aliens to federal government
	Expand Number of Available Prison Beds	Expansion of beds removed the need to release prisoners early to avoid overcrowding	14,652 inmates were released early through control release in the 1993-94 fiscal year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Return credibility to the criminal justice system ▶ Increase deterrent effect of reincarceration
Rehabilitation Programs	Work Release (1968)	Enables select inmates to work at paid employment in the community	2,616 inmates (4.2%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Improve chances for post-release success by providing opportunity for transition into society prior to release ▶ Establish / re-establish employment opportunities
	Prison Industries - PRIDE (1981)	Provides on-the-job training and employability education, post-release and job placement for inmates	2,838 inmates (4.6%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Improve inmate job training skills ▶ Improve chances for post-release success by supporting transition into society prior to and upon release ▶ Establish/re-establish employment opportunities
	Correctional Education - CESA (1986)	Provides basic education, special education, and vocational training to inmates	6,922 inmates (11.1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop inmate educational, occupational, and life management skills
	Basic Training Program (1987)	Provides specialized programming for selected youthful offenders in a military-style basic training setting	76 inmates (0.1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Promote responsibility, improve decision-making, and foster productive and responsible life adjustments
	Motivational Programs	Programs such as GODEV (Growth Orientation, Inc.) and SEDNET (Severely Emotionally Disturbed Network) provide self-betterment and psychological programming for selected inmates	Not Available ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Teach inmates social and functional skills ▶ Improve psychological symptoms, such as hostility, depression, and paranoia ▶ Provide counseling in areas of goal setting, motivation, communications, emotional control, family relations, and job development ▶ Reduce violent behavior within the institution
	Substance Abuse Treatment Program (1987)	Provides individual and group substance abuse counseling for drug dependent inmates	4,649 treatment slots (7.5%) ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Increase sobriety ▶ Reduce frequency of drug relapse

Note: Inmates may participate in more than one rehabilitation program at a time.

¹ N = 61,992 - inmate population on June 30, 1995.

² The actual number of inmates participating in motivational and substance abuse programs as of June 30, 1995, was not yet available.

Source: Compiled by Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability using Department of Corrections documents.

Rehabilitation programs are intended to correct inmate problems or deficiencies that may contribute to repeated criminal behavior. For example, the Department has implemented motivational programs to teach inmates practical life skills they can apply to a variety of situations once they are released. In addition, the Department provides psychological treatment for inmates with drug or alcohol abuse problems. As of June 1995, as many as 17,101 inmates (28% of the incarcerated population) were participating in work release, prison industries, correctional education, basic training, or substance abuse treatment.¹

In this report, we:

- Discuss the measurement of recidivism through the use of reincarceration rates;
- Determine reincarceration rates for Florida prisoners released between July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992;
- Compare those reincarceration rates with comparable rates in other states;
- Identify offender characteristics that tend to be associated with higher reincarceration rates;
- Discuss the effect of recidivism on the state's prison population; and
- Discuss the use of reincarceration rates to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to reduce recidivism.

¹

This total is higher than actual because some inmates may participate in more than one of these programs. Participation can be full-time or part-time.

Section 1 Reincarceration Rates: A Way to Measure Recidivism

Reincarceration rates serve as a useful measure of recidivism because they are based upon the most tangible measure of offender failure: return to prison.

Measuring recidivism, or determining whether offenders return to criminal behavior, is hindered by the fact that we do not have perfect knowledge of their behavior after their release from prison. Recidivism is usually measured using some indicator of criminal behavior, such as rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration. Our interviews with officials in 25 other states disclosed that reincarceration within the state prison system is the most commonly used measure of recidivism.

For the purposes of this report, we have chosen to measure recidivism by calculating the percentage of released inmates who are reincarcerated in Florida's prison system within three years of their release from prison. Reincarceration is a useful measure of recidivism in Florida for two primary reasons. First, reincarceration rates can be determined using the database of a single agency, the Department of Corrections. To measure rates of rearrest or reconviction would require the matching of offender identifiers from the Department of Corrections database with identifiers from the Department of Law Enforcement or the State Courts System databases. Second, the use of reincarceration as a measure of recidivism focuses on those behaviors that place the greatest demand upon state corrections resources. The use of rearrest or reconviction may pick up arrests for which the charges are subsequently dropped or convictions for relatively minor offenses, whereas reincarceration measures whether or not the offender has been sent back to prison after having been released.

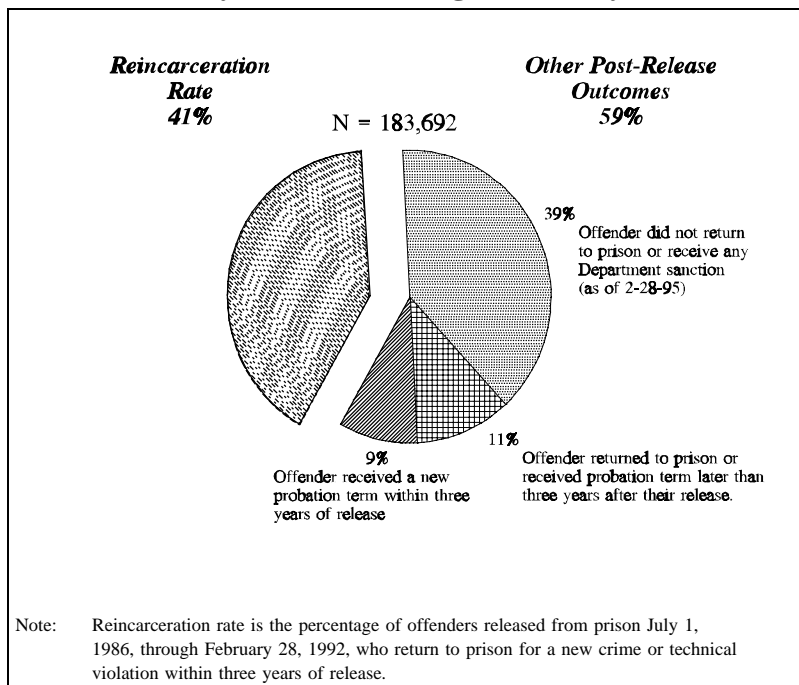
Although the Florida Department of Corrections measures recidivism rates similarly to the methodology that we have used in this report, there are some important differences in the methodology used by the Department. In Appendix B, we discuss the methods that the Department has used to measure recidivism, how these methods differ from ours, and how the recidivism rates calculated by the Department would differ from ours.

Section 2 Reincarceration Rate Data

Two out of every five inmates released from Florida's prisons return to prison within three years of their release dates.

To determine the overall reincarceration rate, we obtained information on 183,692 offenders released from prison for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992. As shown in Exhibit 2, 41% of these offenders returned to prison within three years of their prison release dates. Another 9% of these offenders received a probation term within three years of their release and 11% either came back to prison or were given a probation term more than three years from their release date. The remaining 39% of all offenders released during this period had not had any further contact with the Department of Corrections as of February 28, 1995.

Exhibit 2: Post-Release Outcomes for Offenders Released From Prison for the Period of July 1, 1986, Through February 28, 1992

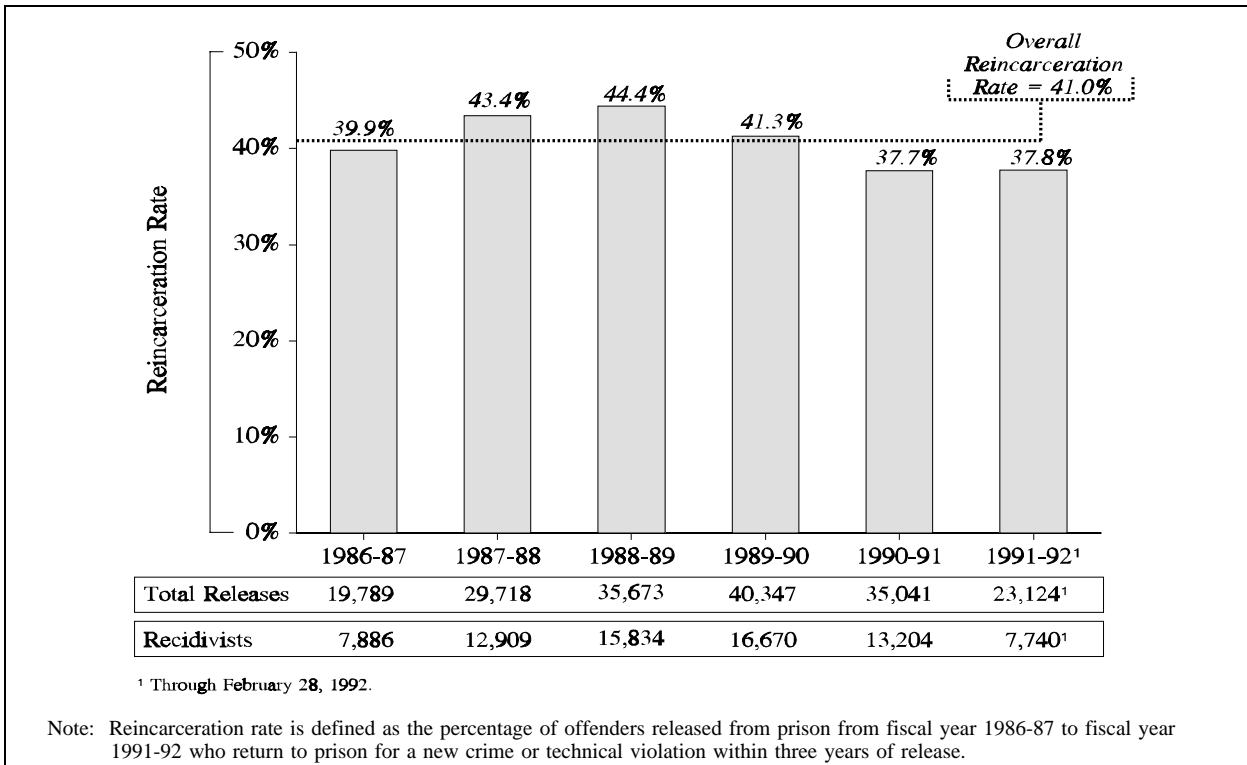


Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

Florida's reincarceration rate peaked at 44.4% for offenders released from prison during the 1988-89 fiscal year, and has since declined to 37.7% for the 1990-91 fiscal year. The portion of offenders returning to prison for committing new crimes has decreased substantially while the portion of offenders returning to prison for violating the terms of post-release supervision has increased.

To identify trends in the reincarceration rate across time, we determined the reincarceration rate for offenders released from prison for each fiscal year from fiscal year 1986-87 to fiscal year 1991-92. For example, of the 19,789 offenders released from prison during the 1986-87 fiscal year, 7,886 (39.9%) returned to prison within 3 years of their release dates. As shown in Exhibit 3, Florida's reincarceration rate over the six fiscal year period has ranged from a high of 44.4% for fiscal year 1988-89 releases to a low of 37.7% for offenders released in fiscal year 1990-91.

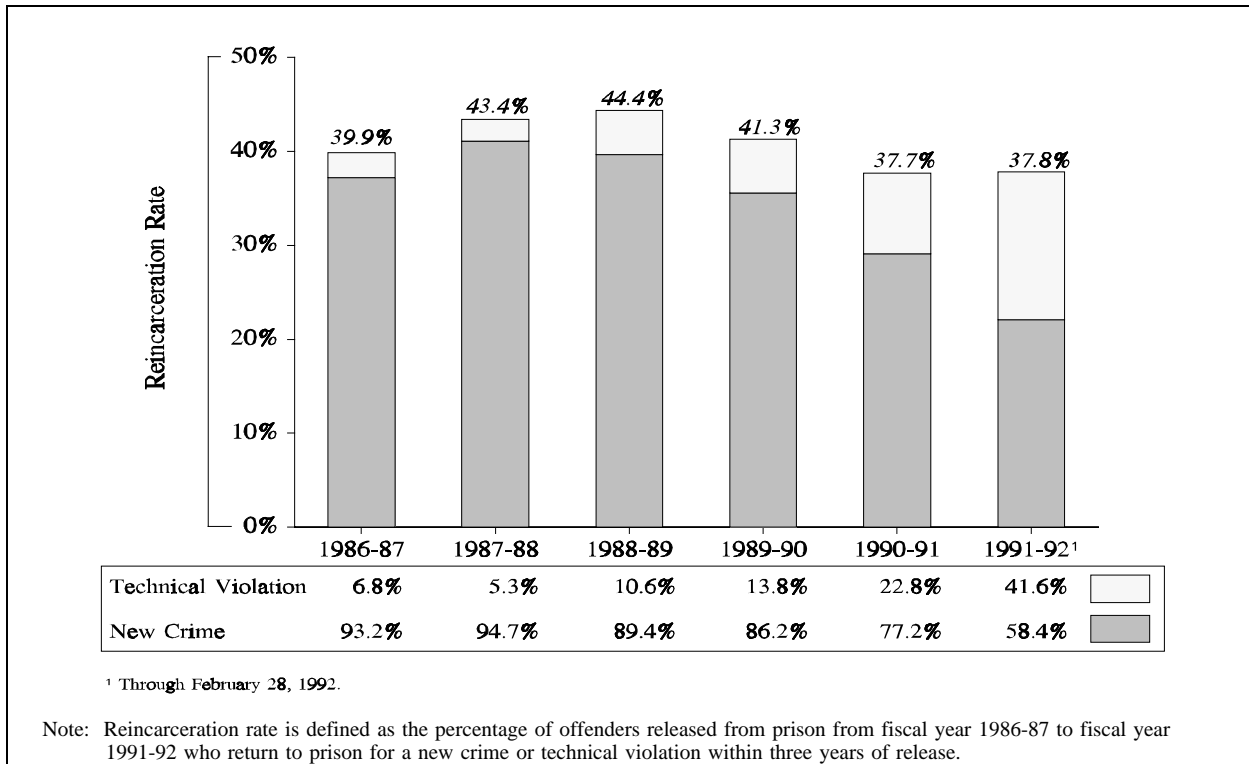
Exhibit 3: Reincarceration Rate by Fiscal Year



Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

For the six fiscal years we reviewed, the portion of offenders returning to prison for committing new crimes has steadily decreased while the portion of offenders returning to prison for committing "technical violations" has increased substantially.² For example, as shown in Exhibit 4, the portion of offenders returning to prison for committing new crimes decreased from a high of 95% for fiscal year 1987-88 releases to a low of 58% for offenders released in the 1991-92 fiscal year. Conversely, the portion of offenders returning to prison for technical violations increased by 37% from a low of 5% to a high of 42% during the same period of time.

Exhibit 4: Composition of Reincarceration Rates



Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

² Offenders who are released on control release, conditional release, or other forms of post-release supervision can be returned to prison for violations of their supervision requirements. For example, the Florida Parole Commission can send a released offender back to prison for not complying with post-release supervision requirements, such as reporting regularly to the Department or maintaining stable employment or residency, or for failing substance abuse tests.

Decline in Reincarceration Rate

Determining the precise causes of decreases in reincarceration rates is complicated by the many factors that can influence offender behavior and the sanctions that offenders receive. For example, law enforcement agencies, State Attorneys' offices, circuit court judges, and the Parole Commission may change policies or practices in a way that changes the number of offenders returning to prison. However, we identified three primary factors that may have contributed to the decline in reincarceration rates over the three most recent years we reviewed:

- **Decline in Florida crime rate.** Florida crime statistics indicate that crime has declined since the late 1980s. From 1989 to 1994, the Uniform Crime Reports indicated a drop in Florida's index crime rate from 8,857 per 100,000 population to 8,148, a decrease of 8%. Furthermore, criminal filings declined by 13% from 184,543 in 1989 to 160,038 in 1994. This decline in reported criminal activity corresponds to the 17% decline in the percentage of offenders returning to prison for committing new crimes since fiscal year 1988-89.
- **Fewer felons sent to prison.** The rate at which convicted felons were sent to prison has declined from 31% in fiscal year 1989-90 to 21% in fiscal year 1993-94. These incarceration rates indicate that the sentencing courts were less likely to send a person convicted of a felony to prison in fiscal year 1993-94 than in fiscal year 1989-90, using non-prison alternatives such as drug offender probation, community control, or county jail, to sanction the offender.
- **Impact of habitual offender legislation.** Since habitual offender legislation was enacted in 1988, over 13,000 repeat offenders have been sentenced to serve longer prison terms as habitual offenders. As of June 30, 1994, 7,883 of these offenders remained in prison, accounting for about 13% of the incarcerated population, thus eliminating the opportunity to recidivate.

Increase in Technical Violation Rate

There are two primary factors affecting the increase in the technical violation rate: (1) the increased use of post-release supervision, and (2) longer post-release supervision terms. First, the number of offenders who are supervised by the Department after their release from prison increased by 166% from 8,389 offenders in fiscal year 1986-87 (42% of all releases) to 22,334 offenders in the 1990-91 fiscal year (64% of all releases). The number of offenders being supervised grew because of the implementation of post-release supervision programs for offenders being released early from prison to avoid prison overcrowding, programs which were less selective than earlier supervision programs. In 1986-87, the Department primarily provided post-release supervision to offenders who had been selected for and participated in work release or who had been paroled by the Parole Commission, both discretionary actions based upon such factors as prison behavior and post-release work plans. In contrast, Provisional Release Supervision, which began in 1988, and Control Release, which began in 1990, provided supervision to offenders who were released from prison due to the need to avoid prison overcrowding rather than positive inmate characteristics such as prison behavior or post-release plans.

Second, the use of longer terms of supervision increased the likelihood for offenders on post-release supervision to return to prison for a technical violation. Beginning in fiscal year 1990-91, the Legislature established Control Release, which resulted in an increase in the length of supervision for offenders from 90 days to 1 year or longer. As a result, the percentage of offenders released on supervision who returned to prison on a technical violation increased substantially beginning in the 1990-91 fiscal year. For example, prior to fiscal year 1990-91, 9% of all offenders released on supervision returned to prison on a technical violation. By contrast, because they were serving longer terms of supervisions, 18% of all offenders released on supervision during fiscal year 1990-91 and beyond returned to prison on a technical violation.

Section 3 Comparison With Other States

For offenders released from prison in fiscal year 1990-91, Florida's reincarceration rate is lower than comparable rates for several large states, including Illinois, Texas, and Georgia.

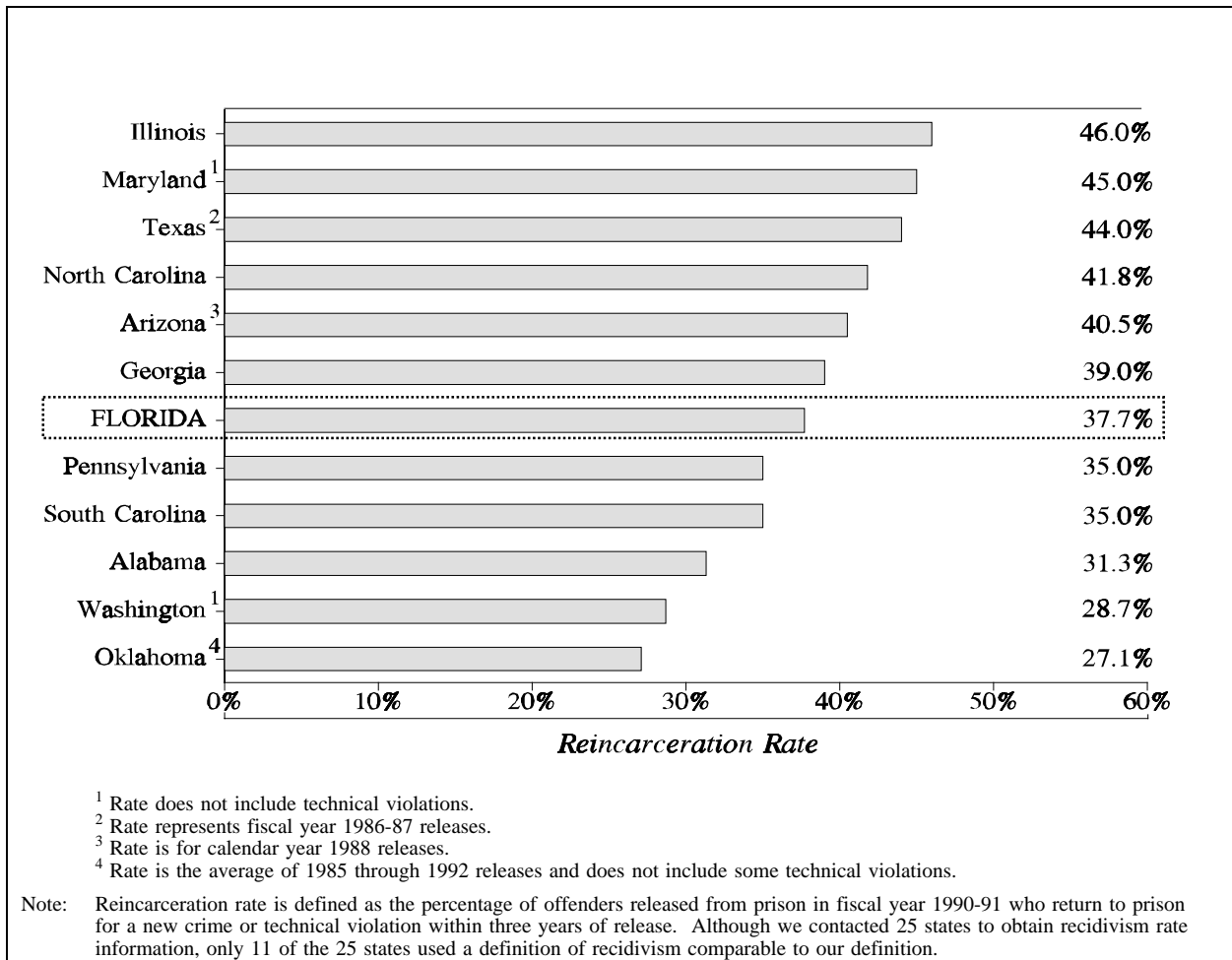
To compare Florida's three-year reincarceration rate to reincarceration rates for other states, we interviewed corrections officials in 25 other states with the largest prison populations.³ Eleven states used comparable measures for determining reincarceration rates. Of the remaining 14 states, 4 states did not collect data to report reincarceration rates, 2 states used other measures, and 8 states used comparable measures but used different timeframes. For example, to report reincarceration rates, California tracks offenders for one year after their release from prison and New York tracks offenders for five years after their release.

As shown in Exhibit 5, Florida's three-year reincarceration rate for offenders released in fiscal year 1990-91 is 37.7%. For offenders released in fiscal year 1990-91, Florida's reincarceration rate is lower than comparable rates for several large states, including Illinois, Texas, and Georgia.

To determine whether there are any factors that might explain why some states have lower reincarceration rates than Florida's, we interviewed corrections officials from those states with lower reincarceration rates. We found that Washington and Oklahoma have both excluded from their reincarceration rates certain groups of inmates who come back to prison for committing technical violations. If those groups of inmates were included in their reincarceration rates, these states' reincarceration rates would be higher. In addition, Alabama does not have an early release program like Florida's, which would tend to increase the reincarceration rate. An April 1993 Department analysis indicated that inmates who are released early are significantly more likely to re-offend than those inmates who are not released early.

³ The Comparison of Florida's reincarceration rate to similar rates in other states is provided for general reference. While we attempted to identify states that have measured recidivism similarly, there may be variations in the methods of measurement or the quality of data in these states that account for some of the differences we identified.

Exhibit 5: Comparison of Reincarceration Rate Across States



Source: Interviews with corrections officials in other states; Department of Corrections data.

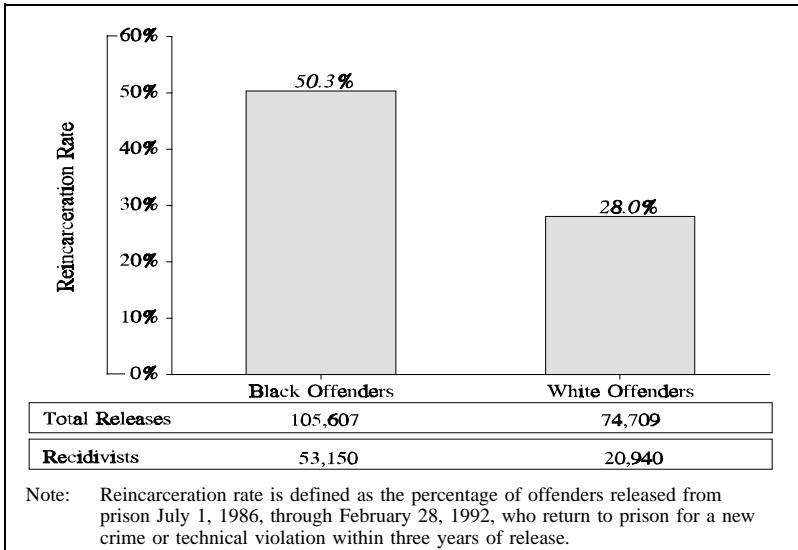
Section 4 Profile of Offenders Who Return to Prison

Released offenders who are black, male, 24 years of age or younger, have been in prison more than once, or have committed property crimes such as burglary are more likely to be reincarcerated. Recidivists tend to commit and be reincarcerated for the same types of crimes for which they were initially incarcerated.

In analyzing data for 183,692 offenders released from Florida's prisons for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, we used selected personal and offense characteristics to determine a profile of offenders who return to prison. We obtained demographic information on these offenders, such as race and gender, as well as age at time of release. We also obtained information about the primary offense for which these offenders were incarcerated.

As shown in Exhibit 6, black offenders have a higher reincarceration rate than white offenders. Approximately one-half of all black offenders released during the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, returned to prison within three years of their release dates while 28% of released white offenders returned within three years of release.

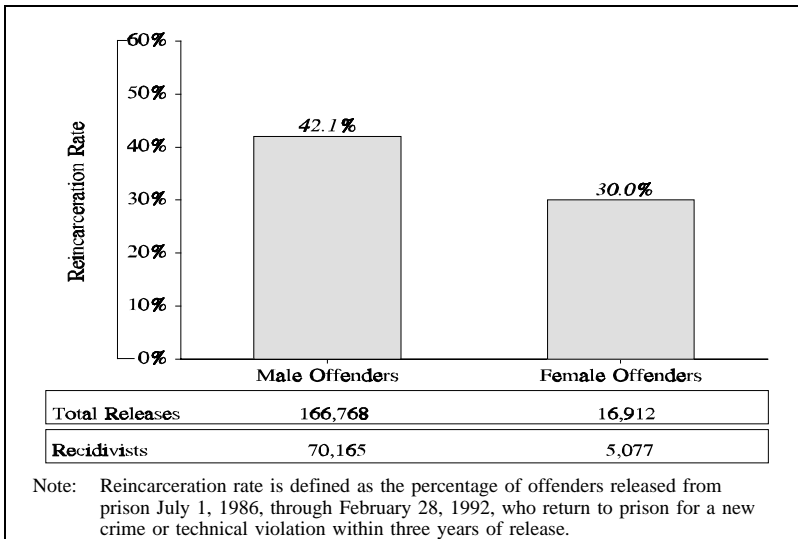
Exhibit 6: Reincarceration Rates by Race



Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

As shown in Exhibit 7, male offenders return to prison more often than female offenders. For example, 42% of all male offenders released from prison during the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, returned to prison within three years of their release dates while 30% of female offenders returned within three years of their release.

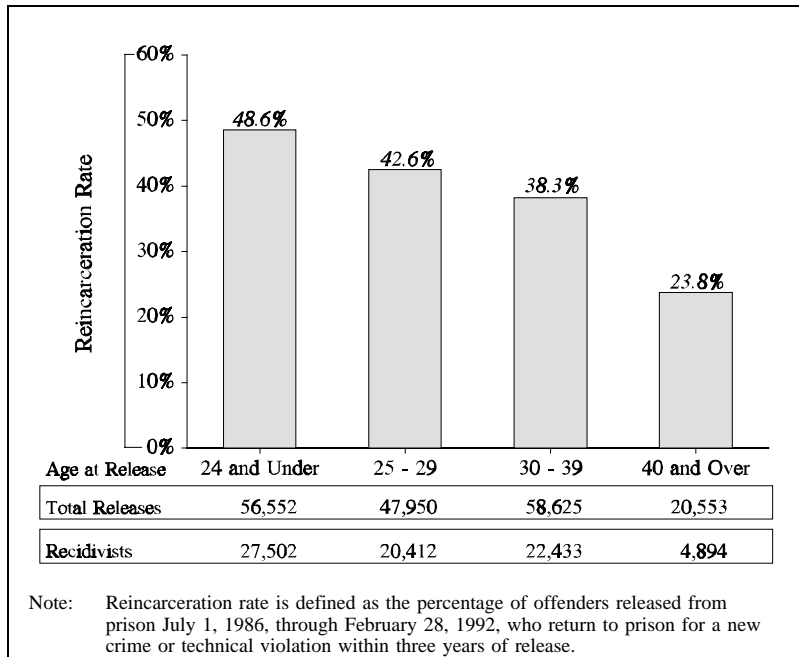
Exhibit 7: Reincarceration Rates by Gender



Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

In addition, the younger the offender is at the time of release, the more likely the offender will return to prison. Approximately one-half of all offenders released from prison during the time period we reviewed who were 24 years of age or younger returned to prison within three years of their release dates while less than one-fourth of all released offenders age 40 or older returned to prison within the same timeframe. (See Exhibit 8.)

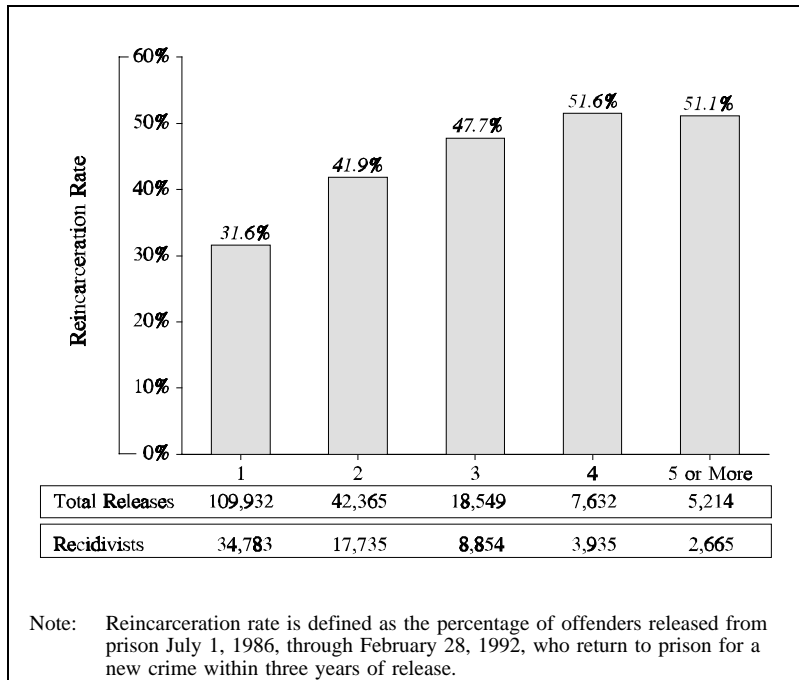
Exhibit 8: Reincarceration Rates by Age of Offender At Time of Release



Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

We also found that the more times an offender has been previously incarcerated, the more likely the offender will return to prison. More than one-half of all released offenders with four or more previous incarcerations returned to prison within three years of their release dates. By contrast, less than one-third of all released first-time offenders (i.e., those offenders who had been incarcerated only one time) returned to prison within three years of their release dates. (See Exhibit 9.)

**Exhibit 9: Reincarceration Rates
By Number of Prior Incarcerations**

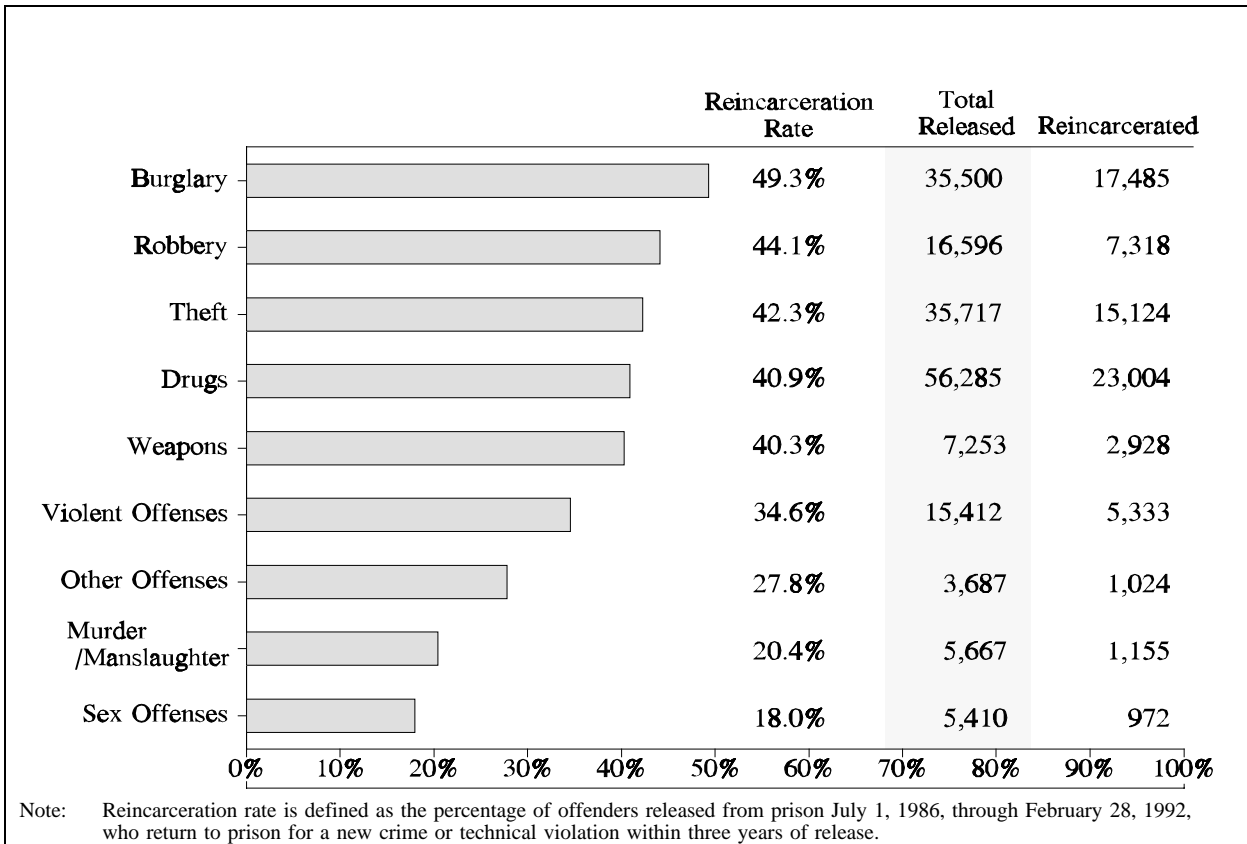


Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

To determine whether offenders who were incarcerated for certain types of crimes were more likely to return to prison than others, we reviewed reincarceration rates by primary offense category for all offenders released from prison during the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992. We found that burglars had the highest reincarceration rate while sex offenders had the lowest reincarceration rate. As shown in Exhibit 10, approximately one-half of all offenders incarcerated for burglary returned to prison within three years of their

release dates. By contrast, fewer than one out of every five released sex offenders returned to prison within three years of their release dates. We identified two primary reasons why the reincarceration rate for sex offenders was the lowest of any group of offenders. First, nearly one-third of released sex offenders are over the age of 40. As discussed previously, older offenders are less likely to re-offend. Second, nearly one-half of released sex offenders had committed lesser sex offenses, such as lewd and lascivious behavior, rather than more violent sex offenses. The reincarceration rate for offenders released on lewd and lascivious charges is 14%, which is lower than the reincarceration rate for all sex offenders.

Exhibit 10: Reincarceration Rates by Primary Offense Category



Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

Our interviews with corrections officials in 25 other states and our review of correctional literature corroborated that these personal and offense characteristics are associated with higher reincarceration rates. For example, at least

one-half of the other states that had collected data to identify profiles of offenders who return to prison mentioned that offenders who are young, black, and had committed property offenses are most at-risk of returning to prison. In addition, in reviewing national studies conducted on recidivism since 1980, the most commonly mentioned personal and offense characteristics associated with higher reincarceration rates were offenders who are younger, had committed property offenses, and had prior criminal histories.

In addition, offenders who return to prison tend to commit and be reincarcerated for the same types of crimes for which they were initially incarcerated. For example, nearly two-thirds of the offenders who returned to prison within three years for committing property or drug offenses had previously been incarcerated for committing the same types of offenses. (See Exhibit 11.)

Exhibit 11: Comparison of Types of New Crime Committed By Reincarcerated Offenders With Their Original Offense

Original Offense	Type of New Crime		
	Violent	Property	Drug
Violent (N = 12,053)	43%	33%	24%
Property (N = 31,241)	15%	66%	19%
Drug (N = 18,674)	12%	25%	63%

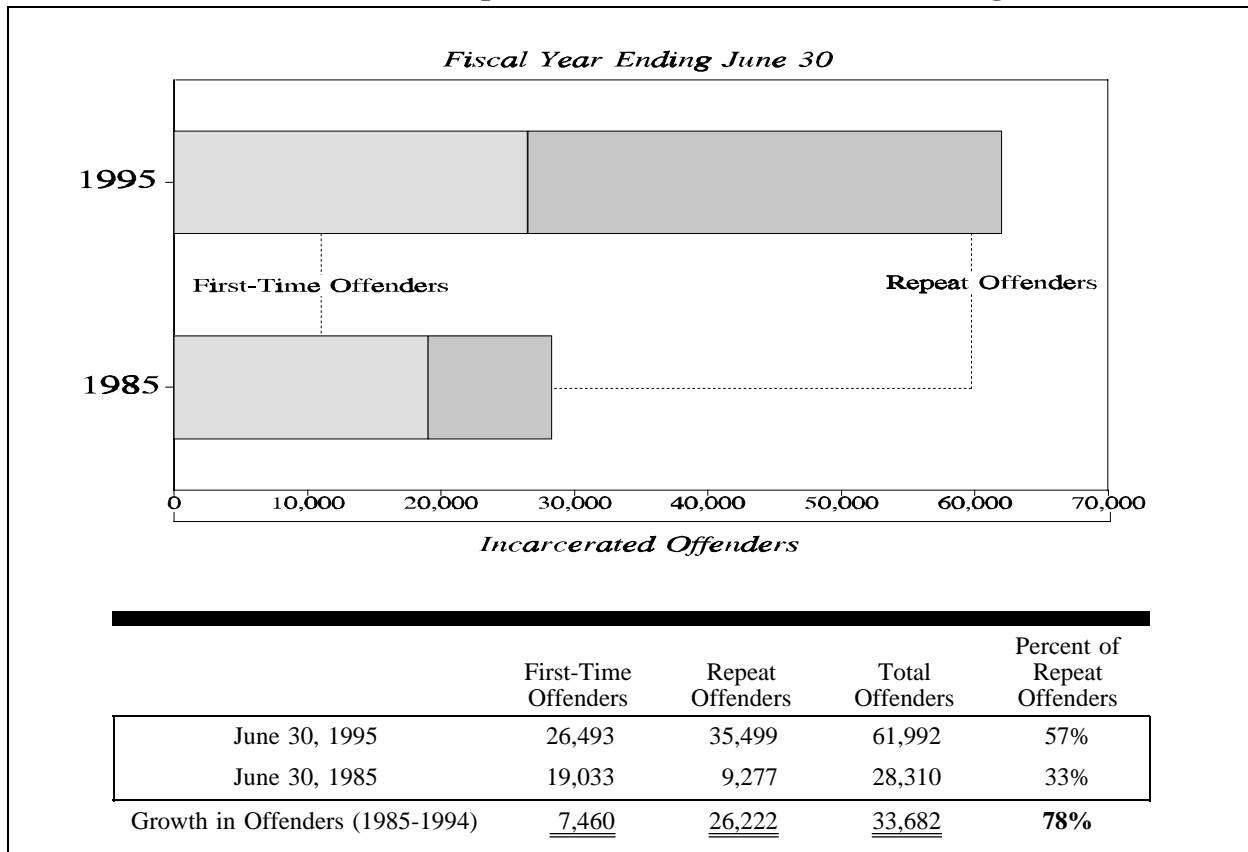
Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

Section 5 Effect of Reincarceration

Most of the growth in the state prison population since 1985 is due to reincarceration rather than offenders entering prison for the first time.

If reincarceration could be reduced, then the growth of the prison system could be slowed down. During the nine-year period from June 30, 1985, to June 30, 1995, the state's prison population more than doubled from 28,310 to 61,992. While the prison population grew by 33,682 during this nine-year period, 78% of the growth (26,222) in the prison population is attributed to offenders returning to prison while only 22% of the growth (7,460) is attributed to first-time offenders. As shown in Exhibit 12, offenders returning to prison comprised 32.8% of the total incarcerated population on June 30, 1985, but 57% of the total incarcerated population on June 30, 1995.

Exhibit 12: Growth of Prison Population From June 30, 1985, Through June 30, 1995



Source: Department of Corrections Annual Report data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

Section 6 Measuring the Effect of Strategies on Reducing Recidivism

The Legislature and the Department have implemented a number of crime control strategies and rehabilitative programs that have the reduction of recidivism as a goal. For example, the Legislature has implemented policies to incarcerate habitual offenders for longer sentences and has expanded the size of the prison system to enable offenders to serve longer portions of their sentences. Rehabilitative programs like education, prison industry, and substance abuse treatment have been established to provide opportunities for inmates to prepare for their return to society.

To determine funding priorities, the Legislature and other policymakers need complete and reliable information on the extent to which legislative and Department strategies are effective in reducing recidivism. In this section, we assess efforts to evaluate the effects of these strategies on reducing recidivism.

We identified two primary deficiencies with efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of legislative and Department strategies on reducing recidivism. First, the Department's database contains incomplete and unreliable data on inmate participation in and completion of the educational, substance abuse treatment, prison industries, and motivational programs. Second, insufficient studies have been conducted to determine whether these programs are effective in reducing recidivism. As a result, the Legislature and other policymakers have insufficient information to determine whether legislative and Department strategies are effective in reducing recidivism.

Database Generally Contains Incomplete and Unreliable Data

For inmates released from prison between July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, the Department's database contains incomplete and unreliable data on inmate participation in and completion of the educational, substance abuse treatment, prison industries, and motivational programs.

Using data obtained from the Department for all offenders released between July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, we attempted to determine reincarceration rates for offenders participating in the Department's rehabilitative programs. These reincarceration rates could be useful to assess the effectiveness of rehabilitative programs on reducing recidivism. For example, these rates can be

compared to rates obtained for similar groups of inmates who did not participate in rehabilitative programs and to rates obtained for inmates participating in these programs in subsequent years.

Due to deficiencies with the Department's database, we were unable to determine reincarceration rates for four of the six previously mentioned rehabilitative programs.⁴ For the period we reviewed, data within the Department's database on participation in and completion of educational, substance abuse treatment, and motivational programs was incomplete and unreliable. For example, as reported in Auditor General Report No. 12225 and Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability Report No. 94-12, the Department's database did not include information on all the inmates that participated in or completed the educational and substance abuse treatment programs.

Similarly, data on participation in and completion of the PRIDE program was incomplete. PRIDE officials indicated that prior to June 1991 records on inmate workers who had worked for PRIDE had not been compared against the Department's database. Therefore, neither PRIDE nor the Department's database did not contain complete data during our sample period to be useful to assess the effects of the PRIDE program in reducing recidivism.

We were able to determine reincarceration rates for the remaining two rehabilitative programs: the work release and boot camp programs. The Department's database included complete data for offenders that had participated in the work release program and had been released from work release centers during the period we reviewed. In addition, the Department provided us with a complete list of boot camp graduates during the period.

⁴ In some cases, CESA or PRIDE, rather than the Department, have been responsible for the accuracy and completeness of certain data on inmates assigned to education or prison industries. We have previously noted deficiencies in this data in performance audits of those entities.

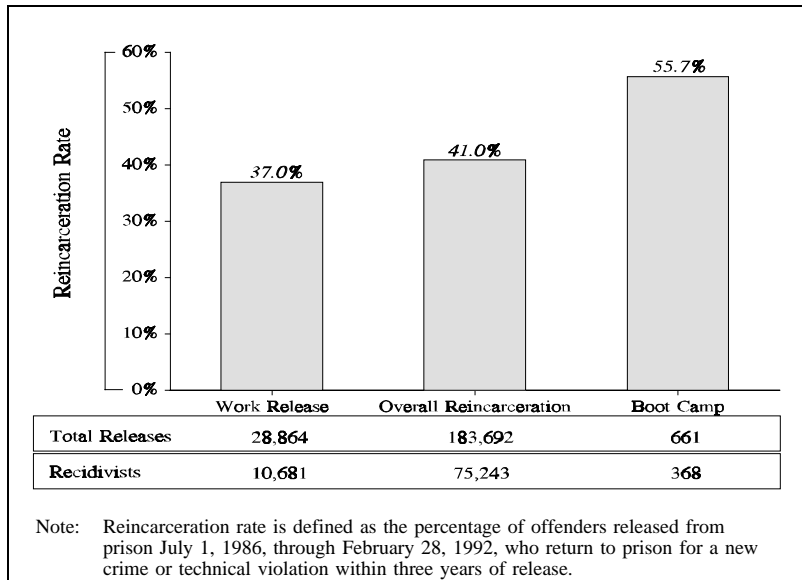
**Work Release
Reincarceration Rates
Are Somewhat Lower
While Boot Camp Rates
Exceed 55%**

Reincarceration rates for offenders participating in the Department’s work release program are somewhat lower than for other offenders, while reincarceration rates for boot camp graduates exceed 55%.

Offenders released from the work release program were less likely to return to prison than offenders released from other types of facilities and institutions. Of the 28,864 offenders released from work release centers, 37.0% returned to prison within three years of their release dates, compared to a recidivism rate of 41.7% for offenders not released from work release centers. This indicates that work release may have a slight positive impact on improving the chances an offender may succeed upon release.

Of the 661 boot camp graduates in our sample, 368 (55.7%) had returned to prison within three years of their release dates. (See Exhibit 13.) This compares with a general recidivism rate of 49.9% for first time offenders age 21 and under.

Exhibit 13: Reincarceration Rates for Work Release and Boot Camp Participants



Source: Department of Corrections data, compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

These data may be useful for setting benchmarks and targets to evaluate the effects of these programs on reducing recidivism. For example, these reincarceration rates can be compared with rates obtained for inmates participating in these programs in subsequent years. However, these data alone are insufficient to conclude whether these programs are effective in reducing recidivism. To enable more definitive conclusions, the Department needs to conduct routine and periodic studies that compare the reincarceration rates of inmates participating in Department rehabilitative programs with those of similar groups of inmates who do not participate in such programs.

Available studies provide inconclusive information on the extent to which these strategies achieve intended results, including reducing recidivism.

In recent years, the Department, PRIDE, and Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program have each been involved in efforts to study the effect of four rehabilitative programs on reducing recidivism.⁵ In addition, the Department has recently conducted a study of prison admissions that concluded that longer terms of incarceration were the most important determinate of reducing prison admissions. Although each of these efforts has resulted in some indications that the interventions may reduce recidivism, none of the studies has yet resulted in conclusive data on the effect of interventions on reducing recidivism.

These studies have not been conclusive in determining the degree to which these programs are effective in reducing recidivism for one or more of the following reasons: (1) not providing a comparison of reincarceration rates for inmates participating in rehabilitative programs with those of similar groups of inmates who did not participate in these programs; (2) not accurately identifying inmates who participated in or completed the program being evaluated; and (3) not controlling for the personal and offense characteristics, mentioned earlier in this report, to determine

⁵ Studies have been conducted on educational, substance abuse treatment, prison industries, and boot camp programs.

if lower recidivism is related to program participation or other factors.

Rather than conducting individual studies of crime control strategies and rehabilitative programs every few years, the Department needs to develop a system to evaluate and report reincarceration rates for all strategies that are implemented with the intent of reducing recidivism. These rates should be reported annually to keep the Legislature apprised of the impact that each of the programs and policies it funds are having on reducing recidivism.

Section 7 Conclusions and Observations

The number of inmates incarcerated in Florida's prisons has continued to increase over the years, and the growth in the number of inmates has caused the state to construct additional prisons. The increase in the number of inmates and prisons has also placed a strain on limited state resources. During the past nine years, more than three-fourths of the growth in the state's prison population can be attributed to repeat offenders coming back into prison. For example, our review found that 41% of the inmates released from prison from July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992, were reincarcerated within three years of their release from prison. To reduce recidivism, and thus slow the growth of the prison population, the Legislature and the Department have implemented a wide range of programs and policies.

Due to the increase in the number of offenders being incarcerated in Florida's prisons in recent years, the Legislature needs to know which programs and policies, if any, have a positive impact on reducing recidivism in order to effectively allocate limited resources. To provide this information, the Department should establish standard procedures for measuring and reporting reincarceration rates that reflect the effects of specific policies and programs.

The impact of specific programs and policies on reincarceration rates of inmates would assist the Legislature and the Department in assessing the effectiveness of programs and policies on recidivism. Programs and policies should be evaluated through the use of reincarceration rates after programs or policies have been implemented for several years (five or six) to enable analyzing trends of specific offender groups.

Evaluating The Effects of Programs and Policies

The Department is spending approximately \$40 million per year providing rehabilitation programs for inmates.⁶ Information regarding the effect of these rehabilitation

⁶ PRIDE does not receive funds from the Department or the state. PRIDE reported a payment of \$1.2 million to the Department for the 1994-95 fiscal year; a payment representing 1.5% of PRIDE sales.

programs on recidivism will rarely be the sole determinant as to whether a particular program or policy is good public policy. A program or policy that is effective in reducing recidivism could generate substantial savings to the state. Currently, each inmate costs the state approximately \$15,000 per year to incarcerate. Therefore, if the reincarceration rate for the 20,000 inmates released in 1994-95 could have been reduced from the 41% average to 36%, over \$15 million could have been saved in operating costs, excluding the cost of constructing additional beds for those offenders.⁷

Identifying Specific Offender Groups Not Responding to Existing Programs

Analysis of the reincarceration data provides some indication of groups of offenders who may warrant special attention in the development of rehabilitation programs. For example, our data indicates that the reincarceration rates for black offenders are typically 20% higher than the rates for white offenders, even when controlling for age, number of prior offenses, and type of offense. Although the literature suggests that economic and social conditions may be responsible for the higher reincarceration rates among blacks, the fact that 60% of black offenders under age 22 return to prison within three years compared to 40% of white offenders of the same age indicate the need to identify and address those factors contributing to this higher rate. As of June 30, 1994, blacks comprised 58% of Florida's inmate population.

Evaluating Policy Alternatives

Another use for reincarceration data is to enable policymakers to evaluate various policy alternatives. For example, the Department spends over \$18 million annually on institutional substance abuse treatment programs. Reincarceration data could be used to determine whether such substance abuse treatment programs are more effective in sanctioning and rehabilitating offenders with alcohol or drug abuse problems than other non-incarceration strategies, such as drug courts. Reincarceration rates could be compared between groups of offenders who received institutional substance abuse treatment and those sentenced to drug courts.

⁷ This estimate assumes just a one year sentence for those returning. Probably two years or more would be more accurate.

Similarly, the Department could use reincarceration data to determine whether the practice of reincarcerating technical violators is resulting in a reduction in criminal behavior or if it would be more cost-effective to place these offenders in alternative, less costly sanctions. Our review indicates that the number of prison releasees reincarcerated for technical violations has increased by 465% from fiscal year 1986-87 to fiscal year 1990-91. While returning these offenders for technical violations may prevent the commission of additional crimes, it is using costly prison resources for offenders who could be placed in alternative, less costly sanctions.

Improvements Needed in Department Data

Problems with the completeness and reliability of program participation and completion data in the Department's information system impede evaluations of the effects of these programs and policies on reducing recidivism.⁸ For example, the Department's database did not include sufficient information on inmate participation in and completion of such activities as educational programs, substance abuse treatment, prison industries, and motivational programs to allow evaluations of the effect of those programs on recidivism. To provide complete and reliable information and allow the effective allocation of limited resources, we recommend that the Department continue to improve the completeness and reliability of program data within its database. The Department should be able to identify inmates who have obtained GEDs, earned vocational certificates, made substantive academic gains, completed substance abuse treatment, completed other motivational programs, worked for PRIDE, and who have otherwise participated in the various programs that may affect recidivism.

Although the Department has conducted isolated studies to measure recidivism, it has not established a commonly accepted measurement of recidivism and communicated the studies to policymakers. Different Department documents

⁸ Previous performance audits of the Institutional Substance Abuse Treatment Program Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) Report No. 94-12, the Inmate Intake Process (OPPAGA Report No. 94-26), and the Correctional Education School Authority (Auditor General Report No. 12225) have identified deficiencies in data regarding inmate need for, participation in, and completion of programs. The Department has taken steps to correct the deficiencies noted in those reports.

have used different measures for recidivism. Without a standard procedure for measuring and reporting recidivism, studies that analyze program effects on recidivism will not be comparable. Therefore, we recommend that the Department establish standard procedures for measuring recidivism and for reporting recidivism data.

Factors outside the Department's control could also affect whether offenders return to prison. Therefore, to provide the Legislature with more complete information about the effectiveness of programs and policies in reducing recidivism, the Department needs to develop measures other than reincarceration rates for each program and policy. These measures should include the effect on reducing inmate idleness and on intermediate outcomes such as academic gain, attitudinal changes, and post-release employment rates to provide more complete information on the value of programs and policies.

Although the effect of reincarceration rates is a key measure of the effectiveness of programs and policies, recidivism cannot by itself be used to evaluate each of these programs and policies. These programs and policies may serve other valuable purposes, such as serving the security goals of the institutions by reducing inmate idleness, protecting the public by keeping inmates incarcerated, or providing opportunities for inmate self-betterment. For example, as of June 30, 1995, the Department could assign up to 28% of the inmate population to rehabilitation programs such as academic and vocational education, substance abuse treatment, PRIDE, and work release.

While reincarceration rates provide valuable information, the determination of whether an offender commits a crime upon his release from prison is an individual choice that may not be related to his participation or lack of participation in a rehabilitation program. Factors outside the control of the Department, such as an offender's inability to find a job, may offset the positive effects of state programs.

To provide the Legislature with more complete information about the value of legislative and Department programs and

policies, we recommend that the Department continue to identify additional measures for each program and policy. For example, measures of academic gain, attitudinal changes, and post-release employment success need to be developed for specific programs.

List of Appendices

Appendices

A. Methodology	31
B. Department of Corrections Recidivism Measures	32
C. Response From the Department of Corrections	35

Appendix A Methodology

To determine the overall reincarceration rate and to identify trends across time, we obtained information for 183,692 offenders released from Florida's prisons for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992. We obtained demographic information on these offenders, such as race, gender, and age at release, as well as information about the primary offense for which these offenders were incarcerated.

To determine how Florida's reincarceration rate compares with rates for other states, we contacted corrections officials in 25 other states with the largest prison populations. We obtained comparable reincarceration rates from 11 other states. The remaining 14 states either did not collect reincarceration data or used other definitions or different timeframes in their definitions.

To identify personal and offense characteristics associated with higher reincarceration rates, we analyzed data for over 183,000 offenders released from Florida's prisons for the period of July 1, 1986, through February 28, 1992. To identify any additional characteristics that were not identified through our data analysis, we interviewed corrections officials in 25 other states with the largest prison populations and reviewed 102 national studies published since 1980 that deal with reincarceration.

To assess the effect of recidivism, we reviewed Department statistics on the growth of the state prison system since 1985. In addition, we interviewed Department of Corrections officials and reviewed other Department documents relative to the problems caused by high recidivism rates.

To identify strategies the Department has implemented to reduce recidivism and to determine the Department's efforts to assess the effects of these strategies on reducing recidivism, we reviewed Department documents relative to the Department's rehabilitation programs. To obtain additional information about these programs, we interviewed Department officials and reviewed prior reports issued by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability and the Office of the Auditor General. To determine whether similar strategies have been effective at reducing recidivism, we reviewed 102 national studies dealing with recidivism and the effects of rehabilitative programs on reducing recidivism.

Appendix B

Department of Corrections Recidivism Measures

The Department of Corrections has used two basic methods of measuring recidivism in recent years. First, in its 1994 Agency Strategic Plan, the Department sets forth an objective to reduce the "recommitment rate," by 10% by June 30, 1996, from the 48.8% rate for the 1990-91 fiscal year. This recommitment rate represents the percentage of offenders admitted to the Department in the 1990-91 fiscal year who had been previously incarcerated. Because this figure is based upon the number of new admissions rather than the total number of releases, the number is not actually a recidivism rate, but simply a measure of the effect of recidivism. This recommitment rate will go up as the number of prison releases in society increases, and will go down if fewer offenders are released from prison. However, it is not useful in determining whether specific programs are effective in reducing the likelihood that offenders will return to prison.

The Department's second method of measuring recidivism is similar to the method we use in this report. According to the Department's Director of Planning and Research, the Department uses "the number of offenders readmitted to prison or community supervision for an offense committed within two years of release" as its measure of recidivism. This definition excludes offenders who comprise a significant number of the offenders we identified in our reincarceration rate. The Department's measure excludes offenders who have been returned to prison by the Parole Commission, the Court, or the Department for technical violations of the terms of community supervision. Although these offenders have not been convicted for new crimes, we believe that the fact that they have been returned to prison indicates that should be considered as failures rather than successes. Exclusion of these offenders from our calculation of recidivism rates would drop our rate from 41% to 35% for the period we reviewed.

On the other hand, the Department's measure includes as recidivists offenders who are sentenced to probation or community control for new offenses even though these offenders are not reincarcerated in the state prison system. We have excluded these offenders because the court has allowed them to continue to live in society with the potential for post-release success. Had we included these offenders within our sample, it would have increased our rate from 41% to 44%.

The Department also excludes offenders who are transferred out of Florida upon release from prison from its definition. Since there is nothing that prohibits those offenders from eventually returning to Florida, we have included them in our analysis.

Table B-1: Comparison of Department of Corrections (DCOR) and Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA)

How the Department's measure differs from OPPAGA's measure	Comment	Effect of Change on OPPAGA Reincarceration Rate
The Department uses date of re-offense rather than the date of readmission to prison.	Use of re-offense date is intended to exclude those offenders who are reincarcerated for crimes committed prior to their release from prison. However, it also excludes offenders released to probation and re-sentenced to a new commitment on old crime.	-6%
The Department does not count offenders returned to prison for technical violations of the conditions of post-release supervision as recidivists.	These offenders have not been convicted of new crimes, and thus may not have returned to criminal behavior. However, the technical violators have failed to live in compliance with the law, and their return to prison represents a post-release failure. In some cases, state attorneys may not pursue the prosecution of offenders for new crimes if those offenders can be returned to prison on the technical violations.	-5%
The Department includes offenders sentenced to new terms of probation or community control as recidivists, whereas OPPAGA excluded this group.	A new term of probation or community control is an indication that the offender has committed a new crime. However, by allowing these offenders to continue to live in the community, the court has given the offender a continuing opportunity for ultimate post-release success.	+3%
The Department prefers to use a two-year time period after release rather than the three-year period we have used.	A two-year window shortens the amount of time before one can begin to measure the effect of programs on post-release success. However, because the Department does not measure recidivism until the offender is recommitted to prison or to community supervision, the Department must still wait at least two and a half years to allow enough time for the judicial processes to be completed.	-3%

Source: Compiled by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

Appendix C

Response From the Department of Corrections

In accordance with the provisions of s.11.45(7)(d), F.S., a list of preliminary and tentative review findings was submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Corrections for his review and response.

The Secretary's written response is reprinted herein beginning on page 35.

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

September 5, 1995

Mr. Jim Carpenter, Interim Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis and
Government Accountability
111 West Madison Street, Room 312
Post Office Box 1735
Tallahassee, Florida 32302

Dear Mr. Carpenter:

Pursuant to section 11.45 (7)(d), Florida Statutes, enclosed is my response to the preliminary and tentative audit findings and recommendations related to:

Policy Review of Reincarceration in Florida's Prisons

This response reflects the specific action taken or contemplated to address the deficiencies cited.

Thank you for your continued cooperation and presentation of recommendations for the improvement of our operations.

Sincerely,

Harry K. Singletary, Jr.
Secretary

Florida Department of Corrections Response to
Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability Report:
Policy Review of Reincarceration in Florida's Prisons

Recommendation #1: "The Department continue to improve the completeness and reliability of program data within its database" (page 30).

On page 23, the statement is made that the "Department's" database is incomplete and unreliable in terms of educational, drug, prison industries, and motivational program participation and completion. This criticism is specifically referencing data on inmates released between July 1, 1986 through February 28, 1992 and in most part is not applicable today.

The department was not responsible for two of the major programs operating within the correctional system during this period. The Correctional Education School Authority (CESA) was responsible for the educational and vocational prison programs during this period and PRIDE has been an continues to be responsible for prison industries. **THE DEPARTMENT WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ENTRY OF MOST PROGRAM DATA DURING THE PERIOD UNDER REVIEW SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED ALTHOUGH IT IS ACKNOWLEDGED IN A FOOTNOTE ON PAGE 24.**

The department's drug treatment programs began under federal grant funding and there was a paper system of data collection established to meet the immediate requirements of the federal funding source. The department developed the data screens necessary to input drug treatment data into the database in FY 1992-93. Resource constraints have prevented the complete implementation of this new paper-less system, however, there has been significant improvements to the data system in recent months.

Until this current fiscal year, motivational programs have been operated by volunteers in the prison setting or administered, without funding, by highly motivated correctional officers. These programs are not structured in the same way that funded programs are and, therefore, expending resources to enter participation data into the database cannot be expected.

Auditing of correctional education and vocational program data has already begun with the transfer of these programs to the department in July 1995. The research data system to measure whether these programs impact recidivism are in place and will be utilized in the near future to produce routine outcome reports.

The department believes it has been making significant progress towards providing the legislature with outcome information on correctional programs under its control.

Recommendation #2: "We recommend the Department establish standard procedures for measuring recidivism and for reporting recidivism data" (page 31).

The department has already accomplished this with the statistics and detailed recidivism definition contained in the report: "Recidivism Rates of Inmates Released From Florida's Prisons: FY 1988-89 through FY 1991-92", Florida Department of Corrections, Bureau of Planning Research and Statistics (May 1995). The department's 1995 Agency Strategic Plan under production since May 1995 and distributed to the Governor's Office in August 1995 has adopted the recidivism measure specified in the cited department report.

Interim Director's Comment

The Department's standard definition of recidivism mentioned in the Secretary's response is described in Appendix B. This measure does not include offenders reincarcerated for technical violations, as a result the Department's measures understates the extent to which inmates return to prison. Exhibit 4, page 24, illustrates the variance in reported reincarceration rates caused by omitting technical violations from the measure.

Recommendation #3: "To provide the Legislature with more complete information about the value of legislative and Department programs and policies, we recommend that the Department continue to develop additional measures for each program and policy. For example, measures of academic gain, attitudinal changes, and post-release employment success need to be developed for specific programs" (page 32).

The department has conducted several program evaluation studies which utilize measures other than recidivism. The psychological effects of the drug Tier II and III programs was conducted in 1991. The Growth Orientation Inc. Personal Development Program (GODEV) for inmates preparing for release was evaluated for psychological effects in February 1992. two pilot self betterment programs (Vital Issues Project in April 1995 and Breaking Barriers in September 1994) were evaluated using experimental and control groups with before and after program measures. the effect of these programs on psychological variables and on disciplinary problems in the institutional setting were examined and reported. All of these studies have been published and are available upon request.

Additionally, the department has been developing more capabilities to measure institutional behavior and program participation and completion to enable more of the type of research the report is recommending. There are some measures, such as post-release employment success which the department has limited control over and therefore, need to be used carefully in outcome evaluations of program effectiveness.

Interim Director's Comment

Studying the effect of programs on psychological variables and on prison behavior is potentially useful, but the intent of our recommendations is to encourage the Department to identify intermediate outcomes that are more directly related to reducing recidivism and reincarceration.