

The Economic Impact of Incarceration

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How much is the U.S. willing to waste on incarceration? Tens of billions of dollars were poured into the U.S prison system for locking up millions of people behind bars. While The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports approximately \$80 billion were spent on the prison system, the actual cost far exceeds this number with various other underlying collateral costs.

Why should we care about the economic loss associated with incarceration? As Shelia A. Bedi put it: “Every penny our government spends on prisons and jails is a penny that does not fund schools, health care, economic development, and transportation infrastructure.”¹ In fact, many states already spend more money per inmate than per student, this difference even went as far as \$27,000 in 15 states.² Similarly, every penny the inmates and their families lost translated to a collateral impact on labor productivity, child welfare, and self-care. Not to mention the lasting damage to mental and physical health as well as the rising criminogenic tendency associated with incarceration.

This report will discuss both the direct costs and collateral costs of incarceration from four levels: individual, family, community & state, and the U.S. as a whole.

The Cost for Individuals

1. Costs Involved in Going Through the Criminal Justice System (\$66.7 billion)

Going through the criminal justice system can give incarcerated people and their families a significant financial burden as they have to pay not only considerable fines for their crimes but also costly court fees. Based on a 2015 report, on average, going through the criminal justice system costs \$13,607 for each person, excluding commissary and court-related programs.³ Each year, there were at least 4.9 million arrested people.⁴ By multiplying these two numbers, we could know \$66.7 billion was spent each year by people going through the criminal justice system.

(1) Bail/Bond Fees

Bail is a cash payment which defendants have to make if they want to be released from jail prior to a court hearing; and this payment will be returned after the case disposition.⁵ Except for capital crimes or major felony charges, a bail will be allowed for most defendants.⁶ Instead of paying the bail by oneself, the defendant has another option: bail bond, which is a bail bondsman’s pledge to make good on the bail if the defendant does show up in the court hearing. If the defendants choose this option, they have to pay around 10% of the value of the bond.⁷

Bail amounts are influenced by many factors including age, criminal history, perceived threat to the public, etc. For misdemeanor crimes, the average bail amount ranges from as low as \$200 (public intoxication) all the way up to \$15,000 (violating a restraining order).⁸ For Felony crimes,

¹ “The Costs Of Imprisonment Are Too High For Everyone.” Talking Points Memo, March 31, 2014.

² Valerie Bauman Social Affairs Reporter For Dailymail.com. “Incarceration vs. Education: America Spends More on Its Prison System than It Does on Public Schools.” Daily Mail Online. Associated Newspapers, October 25, 2018.

³ Saneta deVuono-powell, Chris Schweidler, Alicia Walters, and Azadeh Zohrabi. Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families. Oakland, CA: Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design, 2015.

⁴ Bertram, Wanda. “New Report, Arrest, Release, Repeat, Reveals How Many People Go to Jail Each Year and How Many Times They Go.” Prison Policy Initiative

⁵ Fines, Fees, And Bail: Payments in the Criminal Justice System that Disproportionately Impact the Poor, Council of Economic Advisers Issue Brief, Dec. 2015

⁶ Network, Bail Bonds. “Bail Amounts by Crime – How Much Is Bail? Average Bail Prices.” Bail Bonds Network - Bail Bondsman Near You - Learn About Bail Process and How Bail Works, How Much Bail Costs & More, May 4, 2021.

⁷ “Bail vs Bond.” Diffen.

⁸ “Bail Amounts by Crime - Average Bail Prices by Offense.” Bail Agent Network, October 9, 2020.

the bail cost is between \$500 (illegal possession of a loaded weapon in some states) and around \$1,000,000 (1st degree murder).⁹

The median bail amount for a felony in the U.S. is around \$10,000, which means 8 months' income for typical detained defendants, who are likely from the low-income class.¹⁰ As indicated by a 2018 report, half a million un-convicted people had to stay in jail because they cannot afford the bail.¹¹ What makes things worse is that the inability to pay bail increases the likelihood of being convicted by 13% because those who cannot afford bail will usually take a guilty plea just to end their detention as quickly as possible.¹²

(2) Fines

Criminal fines have long been included as part of criminal punishment. They generally apply to less serious offenses.¹³ Though it varies by state, fines are determined by statute, type of crime, and judge's discretion.¹⁴ For example, in the state of Connecticut, fines range between \$500 (Class C misdemeanor) and \$20,000 (Class A felony).¹⁵ Overall, the fine for a misdemeanor is usually between \$0 to \$1,000 (Misdemeanors of the First Degree).¹⁶ For felony crimes, the fines vary greatly depending on its classification. As indicated by the U.S. code, a fine of not more than \$250,000 may apply to a felony; and a fine of no more than \$100,000 may apply to a misdemeanor.¹⁷

(3) Crime Lab Analysis Fees

Though a comprehensive study of crime lab analysis fees in the U.S. cannot be found, some state examples can provide a glimpse for us about how much this procedure costs. In Washington state, a convicted adult has to pay \$100 for each crime lab analysis unless the defendant can provide a verified petition confirming his/her inability to pay the fee.¹⁸ In the state of North Carolina, the amount for a convicted individual is \$600.¹⁹

(4) Diversion Program Fees

A diversion program is a type of pretrial sentencing, in which the offender receives a rehabilitative sentence (such as joining a rehabilitation program) instead of receiving a conviction and criminal record.²⁰ Diversion programs are usually only available for defendants who committed minor crimes.²¹ The cost for participating in a diversion program varies in each state and depends on the type of crime. In Georgia, the diversion program fee is different in each county but will not exceed \$1,000.²²

⁹ "Bail Amounts by Crime - Average Bail Prices by Offense," October 9, 2020.

¹⁰ Sawyer, Wendy and Wagner Peter. "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020." Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020 | Prison Policy Initiative.

¹¹ Wykstra, Stephanie. "Bail Reform, Which Could Save Millions of Unconvicted People from Jail, Explained." Vox. Vox, October 17, 2018.

¹² Stevenson, Megan. Distortion of Justice: How the Inability to Pay Bail Affects Case Outcomes, November 8, 2016

¹³ Peeler, Travis. "Criminal Fines." LegalMatch Law Library. LegalMatch, January 14, 2020.

¹⁴ Peeler, Travis. "Criminal Fines." LegalMatch Law Library. LegalMatch, January 14, 2020.

¹⁵ Norman-Eady, Sandra. Crimes and Their Maximum Penalties, OLR Research Report

¹⁶ "Minimum and Maximum Penalties for All Misdemeanor Charges." Fort Lauderdale Crime Lawyer.

¹⁷ "18 U.S. Code § 3571 - Sentence of Fine." Legal Information Institute. Legal Information Institute.

¹⁸ RCW 43.43.690: Crime laboratory analysis fee-Court imposition-Collection.

¹⁹ North Carolina State Crime Laboratory Statutory Fees, North Carolina State Crime Laboratory

²⁰ "Diversion Program." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, May 5, 2021.

²¹ Larson, Asron. "What Is Pre-Prosecution Diversion." ExpertLaw, May 8, 2018.

²² "Diversion." Georgia Criminal Lawyer.

(5) Registration or Application Costs Associated with Obtaining a Public Defender

According to the sixth amendment of the United States, in 1971, “in all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall ... have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.”²³ In the 1990s the state and local government began to charge the accused a public defender fee as a form of cost-recovery for providing counsel.²⁴ While some states use a capped fee, other states choose to bill the public defender by the hour.²⁵ In the United States, every defendant will be required to pay a \$50 registration fee before the trial in order to use the public defender service, however, the defendant still has the right to have a public defender if they cannot afford this fee.²⁶ After the case disposition, the Public Defender’s Office will determine how much legal costs the defendant shall cover based on their financial situation.²⁷

(6) Hiring a Private Defense Attorney

Similar to a public defender, a private defense attorney typically bills by the hour or charges a capped fee. The average hourly fee of a criminal defense attorney can go as low as \$100 and as high as \$750 depending on the type of case and the expertise of the attorney.²⁸ Monthly legal bills will usually be between \$10,000 and \$15,000.²⁹ For a felony crime, the total legal cost can go as high as \$100,000.³⁰ In addition to these legal costs, private defense attorneys may need to hire expert witnesses and investigators for additional support, and their average retainer fee is \$2,500.³¹

(7) Pretrial and Post-Conviction Supervision Fees

Pretrial supervision is used for monitoring defendants before their trials in order to maximize the likelihood they will attend their trial and not re-offend.³² Pretrial supervision is significantly less costly than detention. For example, just by increasing the pretrial release rate by 5% saved Kentucky \$25 million in jail costs.³³ In 2017, the annual cost to supervise a person in the community pending trial was \$4,026, which means \$11 per day.³⁴ The annual cost for supervising a person after sentencing is \$4,392, or \$12 per day.³⁵

Sometimes, court may order the defendant to wear an ankle monitoring device before the trial or after the conviction; it is noteworthy to mention that wearing an ankle monitoring device increases the likelihood of a more lenient sentence.³⁶ However, an ankle monitor can be very costly: except for Hawaii, defendants in all states have to pay \$5 to \$35 per day for an ankle monitor, and it is more common that a defendant is required to cover the entire cost.³⁷

(8) Costs of Prosecution

²³ “U.S. Constitution - Sixth Amendment: Resources: Constitution Annotated: Congress.gov: Library of Congress.” Constitution Annotated.

²⁴ Paying For Justice: The Human Cost of Public Defender Fees, American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California

²⁵ Carroll, David. “Right to Counsel Services in the 50 States,” March 2017.

²⁶ “Public Defender News and Resources By State: Free Consultation.” Bakersfield Personal Injury Law, April 27, 2021.

²⁷ “Public Defender News and Resources By State: Free Consultation.” Bakersfield Personal Injury Law, April 27, 2021.

²⁸ “How Much Are Criminal Defense Attorney Fees?” Thumbtack, October 27, 2016.

²⁹ “Criminal Defense Lawyer Cost 2020: Average Attorney Fees.” Canterbury Law Group, March 20, 2020.

³⁰ “Criminal Defense Lawyer Cost 2020: Average Attorney Fees.” Canterbury Law Group, March 20, 2020.

³¹ “Criminal Defense Lawyer Cost 2020: Average Attorney Fees.” Canterbury Law Group, March 20, 2020.

³² “Bail and Pretrial Release: A Q and A: May 2012 .” National Conference of State Legislatures.

³³ “Pretrial Justice: How much does it cost?” Pretrial Justice Institute, January 12, 2017.

³⁴ “Incarceration Costs Significantly More than Supervision.” United States Courts.

³⁵ “Incarceration Costs Significantly More than Supervision.” United States Courts.

³⁶ Gabriel, Brian. “When Will the Court Order a GPS Monitoring Device: Ankle Monitors.” Law Office of Gabriel & Gabriel, LLC, May 27, 2020.

³⁷ “Ankle Monitors Are Replacing Cash Bail, But At A Cost.” Fines and Fees Justice Center, October 22, 2020.

As its name suggests, the cost of prosecution refers to the costs incurred during the investigation of the case; this cost is typically billed to the convicted defendant because there is generally no law against transferring this cost to them.³⁸ This cost varies according to the crime. Even though we could not know the cost of prosecution a defendant has to pay, we could get a sense of how much it costs by looking at judicial cost. For example, a homicide prosecution costs the judicial system \$22,000 to \$44,000 and a burglary prosecution costs between \$200-\$600.³⁹

2. Loss of Government Benefits

Social Security benefits, SSDI* (Social Security Disability Insurance) and SSI* (Supplemental Security Income) will be suspended if the receiver is sent to jail/prison but will be reinstated after their release.⁴⁰ As for SSDI, an individual who is a recent parolee or who is unemployed is ineligible for it. However, a confinement period for more than 12 consecutive months will automatically terminate the eligibility for SSI and the receiver needs to file a new application after being released.⁴¹

Social Security benefits depend on age and earnings history. For an estimation of your social security benefit, please refer to the Social Security Calculator linked below. Since January 1, 2020, SSI* is \$783 for an individual and \$1,175 for a couple.⁴² SSDI* is determined by the average lifetime earnings before disability began. On average, SSDI recipients receive \$800-\$1,800 per month with an average of \$1,277.⁴³

3. The Cost of Fatal Injuries While Incarcerated (\$6.2 billion in 2019)

Suicide has long been the most prominent cause of death in U.S. prisons. In 2014, per 100,000 inmates, 45 committed suicide; this rate is 3 times the average suicide rate of the U.S. general population in 2018^{44,45}. Multiplying the number of incarcerated people who committed suicide with the value of a person's life results in the estimated economic cost of fatal injuries in prison, which was \$6.2 billion in 2019.

- Total incarcerated population in 2019⁴⁶: 1,430,805
 - Incidence rate: 0.045 %
 - Value of a person's life: \$ 8.66 million in 2014 dollars⁴⁷ (\$ 9,643,225 in 2020 dollars)
- $1,430,805 * 0.045\% * \$9,643,225 = \6.2 billion

4. The Cost of Lost Wages (\$123.7 billion + \$332.4 billion in 2019)

The lost wages of the incarcerated population involve two components: the lost wages while incarcerated and the reduction in lifetime earnings. Wage depends largely on educational level. According to a report by Bureau of Justice Statistics, among the total incarcerated population, 41.3% do not have a high school diploma, 23.4% are high school graduates, and 12.7% had obtained

³⁸ Christopher Coble, Esq. "When Do You Have to Pay the Costs of Prosecution?" Findlaw, April 9, 2019.

³⁹ Hunt, Priscillia. "First Estimates of Judicial Costs of Specific Crimes, from Homicide to Theft." RAND Corporation, August 25, 2016.

⁴⁰ "What Prisoners Need to Know," Social Security Administration

⁴¹ "What Prisoners Need to Know," Social Security Administration

⁴² "Understanding Supplemental Security Income (SSI)-- SSI Benefits." Understanding SSI - SSI Benefits.

⁴³ Bethany K. Laurence, Attorney. "How Much in Social Security Disability Benefits Can You Get?"

⁴⁴ Clarke, Matthew. "Department of Justice Releases Reports on Prison and Jail Deaths." Prison Legal News

⁴⁵ "FastStats - Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 1, 2021.

⁴⁶ Carson, Ann E. "Prisoners in 2019," October 2020

⁴⁷ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. The economic burden of incarceration in the US. *Institute for Advancing Justice Research and Innovation. Washington University in St. Louis*, 2016, 9

some postsecondary education.⁴⁸ The median lifetime earnings for these three educational levels are \$973,000, \$1,304,000, and \$1,727,000 respectively⁴⁹. Therefore, the weighted average yearly income (assuming a 40-year working lifespan) is \$23,200 ((41.7% * \$973,000 + 23.4% * \$1,304,000 + 12.7% * \$1,727,000)/40). The total loss can be obtained by multiplying the average time in state/federal prison, the number of people in state/federal prison, and the average yearly income.

	Average time in prison (in year)	*	Number of people	*	Average yearly income	total
state	2.6 ⁵⁰		1255689 ⁵¹		23200	76 billion
federal	11.75 ⁵²		175,116 ⁵³			47.7 billion
						Total: 123.7 billion

Due to occupational restrictions, discriminations, weaker social network, and reduced human capital, formerly incarcerated people suffer from reduced lifetime earnings when they are released; and research indicates this reduction ranges between 10% and 40%⁵⁴. In the following calculation, we will use the median reduction percentage: 25%. Using the same calculation method as above with a consideration of educational level parameters, the average loss in lifetime earnings for an incarcerated individual is \$232,000 (\$274,000 in 2020 dollars⁵⁵). The loss of the total incarcerated population in 2019 is \$332.4 billion.

	percentage	*	Lifetime earning	*	Total incarcerated population ⁵⁶	*	Average wage Reduction percentage	=	Total
Without high school diploma	41.3 %		\$973,000		1,430,805		25%		144.2 billion
High school graduate	23.4 %		\$1,304,000						109 .5 billion
With postsecondary education	12.7 %		\$1,727,000						78.7 billion
									Total: 332.4 billion

5. The Cost of Nonfatal Injuries While Incarcerated (10.89 billion in 2019)

Violence and abuse are not uncommon in the prison system. From a 2005 report, 31.6% of male inmates have reported physical assault during a 6-month period.⁵⁷ This implies in 2019, there were more than 4 million physical assaults in prison (1,322,850*31.6%). The most common physical assaults are being slapped, hit, kicked, bit, as well as being threatened or harmed by a knife or shank⁵⁸. Due to the lack of statistics of female inmates experiencing physical assault and the fact that only 8% of U.S. inmates in 2019 are female, the following calculation will only include

⁴⁸Harlow, Caroline Wof, "Education and Correctional Population," Bureau of Justice Statistics, January, 2003

⁴⁹Pettus-Davis, C. et al. The economic burden of incarceration in the US. *Institute for Advancing Justice Research and Innovation. Washington University in St. Louis*, 2016, 7

⁵⁰ Kaeble, Danielle. "Time Served in State Prison, 2016," U.S. Department of Justice, November 2028, 2

⁵¹ Carson, Ann E. "Prisoners in 2019," October 2020, 3

⁵² "Quick Facts: Federal Offenders in Prison," May 2019, 2

⁵³ Carson, Ann E. "Prisoners in 2019," October 2020, 3

⁵⁴ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. The economic burden of incarceration in the US, 2016, 7

⁵⁵ Calculation is based on CPI inflation calculator in U.S. Bureau of Labors Statistics

⁵⁶Kang-Brown, Jacob. Montagnet, Chase. Schattner-Elmaleh, Eital. Hinds, Oliver "People in Prison in 2019," Vera Evidence Brief, May 2020.

⁵⁷ Wolff, Nancy. Shi, Jing. "Contextualization of Physical and Sexual Assault in Male Prisons: Incidents and Their Aftermath," 2010

⁵⁸ Wolff, Nancy. Shi, Jing. "Contextualization of Physical and Sexual Assault in Male Prisons: Incidents and Their Aftermath," 2010

the cost of physical assaults among male inmates.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, physical assault is only part of the picture as 13.7% of female inmates and 4.2% of male inmates are also victims of sexual assault.⁶⁰ The cost for each rape is \$47,000 in 1989 dollars (\$101,092 in 2020 dollars⁶¹) and the cost for each assault is \$15,000 (\$32,263 in 2020 dollars⁶²).⁶³ Since sexual assault includes rape, we will use the average cost of rape and assault in our calculation, which is \$66,677 in 2020 dollars $(\$101,092 + \$15,000) / 2$. Combining the economic cost of physical assaults and sexual assaults generates a total cost of \$10.89 billion for nonfatal injuries in prison for 2019.

		inmate	*	Percentage of incidence	*	Cost of incidence	=	Economic cost
Male	Physical Assault	1,322,850		31.6%		\$15,000		6.2 billion
	Sexual Assault	1,322,850		4.2%		\$66,677		3.7 billion
Female	Sexual Assault	107,955		13.7%		\$66,677		0.99 billion
								Total: 10.89 billion

6. The Cost of Mental Illness (10.6 billion)

Prison imposes serious mental health risks for incarcerated people and their family members. In fact, 66% of them have experienced mental health issues ranging from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)⁶⁴. One major reason for this higher risk is the extended period of isolated confinement which can last more than 23 hours a day for some inmates. During this period of time, the inmate does not have access to programming or meaningful social interactions⁶⁵. The costs for the three aforementioned mental illnesses are as follows⁶⁶:

PTSD	\$5,900 - \$10,300
Major depression	\$15,460 - \$25,760
PTSD with major depression	\$12,430 - \$16,890

Since the higher limit of these estimates results from the loss of life due to suicide, this study will only use lower limit to avoid double-counting suicides, which was covered in an earlier section.⁶⁷

- Total incarcerated population in 2019⁶⁸: 1,430,805
- Incidence rate: 66%
- Incidence cost (average from three low estimates): $(\$5,900 + \$15,460 + \$12,430) / 3 = \$11,263$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Total cost} &= \text{Incarcerated population in 2019} * \text{Incidence rate} * \text{Incidence cost} \\ &= 1,430,805 * 66\% * \$11,263 = \$10.6 \text{ billion} \end{aligned}$$

7. Higher Mortality Rate of Formerly Incarcerated (3.3 billion in 2019)

In a 2007 report studying the risk of death after incarceration with a sample size of 30,237, 443

⁵⁹ Carson, Ann E. "Prisoners in 2019," October 2020

⁶⁰ "PREA Data Collection Activities, 2012," U.S. Department of Justice, June 2012

⁶¹ Calculated by CPI inflation calculator from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8125436/>)

⁶² Calculated by CPI inflation calculator from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8125436/>)

⁶³ Miller, T. R. et al. "Victim costs of violent crime and resulting injuries. *Health affairs (Project Hope)*" 1993

⁶⁴ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. The economic burden of incarceration in the US, 2016, 11

⁶⁵ "Incarceration Nation," American Psychological Association, October 2014, Vol 45, No.9

⁶⁶ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. The economic burden of incarceration in the US, 2016, 11

⁶⁷ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. The economic burden of incarceration in the US, 2016, 11

⁶⁸ Carson, Ann E. "Prisoners in 2019," October 2020

of the subjects died within 2 years after being released. This means in every 100,000 former inmates, 777 of them die every year, a mortality rate that is 3.5 times of average state residents' mortality rate.⁶⁹ The most common causes for such a high mortality rate are drug overdoses, cardiovascular disease, homicide, and suicide.⁷⁰ Taking 2019 as an example, a total of 45,075 inmates were released⁷¹. Within 2 years, approximately 350 of them will die. Multiplying this number by the value of a person's life, we can arrive at the conclusion that in a single year, the increased mortality rate of formerly incarcerated people incurred a cost of \$3.3 billion in 2020 dollars.

8. Loss of Voting Rights

Felon disenfranchisement is a common practice in most states. Among the 50 states and Washington, D.C., only 3 of them (District of Columbia, Maine, and Vermont) do not deprive felons of their right to vote. 37 states deprive the felon's voting right until the completion of their incarceration or parole/probation.⁷² In the rest of the 11 states, released felons have to wait an extra period of time after their sentence or take additional actions in order to restore their voting rights.⁷³ Though it does not impose any economic cost on taxpayers, the loss of voting rights is a heavy cost for former prisoners as the deprivation of part of their civil rights prevent restoring them to responsible, contributing citizens, creating additional barriers for their reentry to society.⁷⁴

9. Travel Restrictions

People who have been convicted of certain types of felony crimes face domestic travel restrictions. For example, sex offenders face certain restrictions on visiting other states.

Individuals under supervised release or probation also face travel restrictions. For the first 60 days of supervised release, they are not allowed to leave their judicial district except for travelling for employment purposes.⁷⁵ Otherwise, individuals under supervised release or probation can only travel with permission by the court or a Probation Officer.^{76,77} Specific travel restrictions usually depend on the circumstances of the case, the defendant's habits, the defendant's employment, and other factors.⁷⁸

A conviction can also impact a U.S. citizen's eligibility to travel internationally. First, the passports of people who have been convicted of certain crimes will be revoked by domestic laws, such as felony drug charges that involve crossing international boundaries.^{79,80} Secondly, many countries require individuals who have a criminal history to complete extra steps for pre-clearance before entering, or prohibit them from entering completely.⁸¹

Even though travel restrictions do not directly impose an economic cost on individuals, it can create significant barriers and bring financial costs. For example, being unable to travel may cause the released individual to lose precious business and work opportunities.

⁶⁹ "Release from Prison — A High Risk of Death for Former," Federal Bureau of Prisons, April 2021

⁷⁰ "Release from Prison — A High Risk of Death for Former," Federal Bureau of Prisons, April 2021

⁷¹ "Release from Prison — A High Risk of Death for Former," Federal Bureau of Prisons, April 2021

⁷² "Felon Voting Rights," National Conference of State Legislatures, April, 2021.

⁷³ "Felon Voting Rights," National Conference of State Legislatures, April, 2021.

⁷⁴ Colson, Charles W., "Why Punish Ex-Offenders with a Voting Ban," *The Washington Post*, January 19, 2012.

⁷⁵ "FAQs," The United States Probation Office District of Colorado

⁷⁶ Santos Michael, "Supervised Release," Prison Professors, November 11, 2020.

⁷⁷ "Chapter 2: Leaving the Judicial District (Probation and Supervised Release Conditions)," United States Courts

⁷⁸ "Travel Restrictions While on Probation," HG.org

⁷⁹ "International Travel Restrictions Based on Criminal Record," Collateral Consequence Resource Center, January 2, 2015

⁸⁰ Spengler Teo, "Traveling With a Criminal Record," USA Today Travel Tips, October 20, 2017.

⁸¹ "International Travel Restrictions Based on Criminal Record," Collateral Consequence Resource Center, January 2, 2015

Today, there are 19,219 employment restrictions that keep people with criminal records out of the workplace. 1,033 housing restrictions keep them from being able to rent an apartment. 3,954 restrictions limit their civic participation and 1,612 constrain their family and domestic rights.⁸²

The Cost for Families

1. Visitation & Communication Costs (417 + 4.8 million)

Maintaining contact with family members who are in jail/prison is costly. In fact, the cost associated with making phone calls and visiting incarcerated family members is so high that it has put 34% of families into debt.⁸³

Most incarceration facilities are located in rural areas beyond the reach of public transportation systems.⁸⁴ From a 2014 survey, the weighted average travel time for families to visit their incarcerated family member is 4.72 hours.⁸⁵

Distance	Proportion	Travel time*
Between 0 and 50 miles	15.7%	0.45
Between 50 and 100 miles	20.9%	1.36
Between 101 and 500 miles	53.2%	5.45
Between 501 and 1,000 miles	7.9%	13.6
More than 1,000 miles	2.2%	18.2

*In the above calculation, we used the median distance for each category (for example, the travel time for between 0 and 50 miles was calculated by 25 miles divided by 55 miles per hour). For distance of more than 1000 miles, we used the lower limit of 1,000 miles.

*For the calculation of travel time, the U.S. average speed in Highway is used, which is 55 miles per hour.⁸⁶

The per hour opportunity cost for each person is \$18.66 in 2014 dollars (\$20.58 in 2020 dollars⁸⁷)⁸⁸. Therefore, if we assume the inmate received 3 visits from one family member in 2019, each family had to spend \$264 per year for visiting, excluding the transportation costs. The total opportunity cost will be \$417 million (1,430,805*4.72*3*20.58). In addition to the transportation cost and opportunity cost of time, some states even charge a background check fee for each visiting family member. For example, Arizona charges a \$25 background check fee per visitor.⁸⁹ These practices further render the prison visits unaffordable.

Besides visitation costs, the communication cost is so exorbitant that it makes phone calls with incarcerated people a luxury. In fact, incarcerated people and their families are charged more than

⁸² Miller, Reuben Jonathan, "‘You Have One Minute Remaining.’ Why I’ll Always Drop Everything to Answer My Brother’s Calls From Prison," TIME, February 16, 2021.

⁸³ Saneta deVuono-powell et al. Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families. Oakland, CA: Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design, 2015, 30

⁸⁴ Bedi, Sheila A. "The Costs of Imprisonment Are Too High for Everyone," TPM, March 31, 2014.

⁸⁵ Rabuy, Bernadette. Kopf, Daniel, "Separation by Bars and Miles: Visitation in State Prisons," Prison Policy Initiative, October 20, 2015

⁸⁶ Clevenson, Larry et al. "The Average Speed on the Highway," *The College Mathematics Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (May, 2001), pp. 169-171, Mathematical Association of America,

⁸⁷ Calculated by CPI inflation calculator from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8125436/>)

⁸⁸ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. "The economic burden of incarceration in the US," 2016

⁸⁹ Saneta deVuono-powell, Chris Schweidler, Alicia Walters, and Azadeh Zohrabi. Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families. Oakland, CA: Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design, 2015, 30

2.5 times as much for phone calls as non-incarcerated people because prison telecom is usually controlled by a single provider, who maintains their monopoly status by giving kickbacks to governments.⁹⁰ In fact, a minute on the phone with an inmate can cost as high as \$3.⁹¹ Each month, families with an incarcerated loved one spend \$103 on jail phone calls alone.⁹² Due to the incredibly low wage level in the prison, families with incarcerated members usually bear the communication cost. In 2017, over \$4.8 million were spent on phone calls in total.⁹³

2. Moving & Eviction Costs (\$1.66 billion + \$0.5 billion)

One family member's incarceration increases the chance that other family members will relocate.⁹⁴ For example, the family may move closer to the incarceration facility or live with other relatives. Similarly, when a former inmate returns, the family is more likely to change their residence again.

The average cost of an intrastate and an interstate move is \$1,170 and \$5,630 respectively.⁹⁵ In 2019, the approximate moving rate is 10% according to United States Census Bureau, which means one in every ten families relocated.⁹⁶ If we assume the same relocation rate applies to new admissions to prison/jail, the 4,889,000 unique jail admissions in 2019 translates to 488,900 relocations.⁹⁷ Considering the weighted average cost of a move, \$3,400 $((1170+5630)/2)$, the total cost associated with relocation is \$1.66 billion.

The released individual and their family face enormous barriers to find a place to stay and continue their lives. In a 2015 survey, 79% of participants were either ineligible for or denied housing because of their own or their family member's conviction history.⁹⁸ Almost one in every five families with a former inmate reported being evicted or denied housing.⁹⁹ Part of the reason for it is that to apply for public housing, the former inmate and their family have to undergo a criminal background check and are likely to be rejected due to a conviction history.¹⁰⁰ Financial reasons also contribute to the higher eviction rate for families with incarcerated members because they lost one source of income.¹⁰¹ Therefore, considering the average cost of an eviction is \$1,635 in 2014 dollars (\$1,803 in 2020 dollars¹⁰²), the total cost of eviction is \$515 million in 2019 $(1,430,805 * 0.2 * 1803)$.¹⁰³

3. Expenditures in Prison

When we think of staying in prison, there is a common myth that the government covers any expenses for the incarcerated population. Unfortunately, this is far from truth. Incarcerated people have to pay for everything from toilet paper to snacks to laundry to sending emails. What makes things worse is that everything from commissary is notoriously expensive: sometimes twice as

⁹⁰ Katie Schaffer et al. "Paying for Jail: How County Jails Extract Wealth from New York Communities," 2019.

⁹¹ Bedi, Sheila A. "The Costs of Imprisonment Are Too High for Everyone," TPM, March 31, 2014.

⁹² Katie Schaffer et al. "Paying for Jail: How County Jails Extract Wealth from New York Communities," 2019.

⁹³ Katie Schaffer et al. "Paying for Jail: How County Jails Extract Wealth from New York Communities," 2019.

⁹⁴ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. "The economic burden of incarceration in the US," 2016

⁹⁵ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. "The economic burden of incarceration in the US," 2016

⁹⁶ "CPS Historical Geographic Mobility/Migration Graphs," United States Census Bureau, December 15, 2020

⁹⁷ Bertram, Wanda. Jones, Alexi. "How many people in your state go to local jails every year?" Prison Policy Initiative, September 18, 2019.

⁹⁸ Saneta deVuono-powell et al. "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families," 2015.

⁹⁹ Saneta deVuono-powell et al. "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families," 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Saneta deVuono-powell et al. "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families," 2015.

¹⁰¹ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. "The economic burden of incarceration in the US," 2016

¹⁰² Calculated by CPI inflation calculator from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8125436/>)

¹⁰³ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. "The economic burden of incarceration in the US," 2016

high as on the outside.¹⁰⁴ A former inmate reported that in prison, a 13” TV costs \$200, a bag of popcorn costs \$1.65, and a pack of Ramen noodles costs \$1.09; these things typically cost \$60, €72, and €10 on the outside.^{105,106,107} The reason is that these goods are also sold by a few private vendors who form a monopoly and whose only goal is profit maximization.¹⁰⁸

Based on a report investigating the prison system in Illinois, Massachusetts, and Washington, each incarcerated individual has to spend \$947 per year, for purchasing mostly life necessities.¹⁰⁹ On average, 75% of their total spending is on food, and this might be due to the small amount and bad quality of prison cafeteria food as prisons spend only \$2.32 per inmate on food.^{110,111} This yearly spending looks more dire when taking the prisoners’ wage level into consideration: the hourly wage for incarcerated people in federal prison is €12-€40 for jobs serving the prison and is €23 -\$1.15 for outside factories.¹¹² Usually, a prisoner’s yearly wage ranges between \$180 and \$660.¹¹³ Furthermore, due to the overpopulation of prisons, many incarcerated people could only get a prison job nominally. Therefore, most prisoners will still rely on their families to get financial support.

In 2019, the incarcerated population and their families spent \$1.35 billion (1,430,805*947) in prison, for purchasing mostly life necessities at an inflated price.

The Cost for Local Communities and States

1. Decreased Property Value in the Area Where Former Inmates Are Released (\$25.3 billion)

Released inmates negatively impact property value as people are reluctant to live near former inmates and are willing to move at their own costs¹¹⁴. As a result, the reentry of former inmates into a community reduces the demand for local property and thus depresses the average home value in that area. In a 2014 report, it is estimated that as the incidence of property crime increases for one standard-deviation, the property value decreases by 10%.¹¹⁵ A single sex offender’s reentry will cause the housing price in proximity to decline between \$3,500 and \$5,500 (which is approximately 2.3% to 4%).¹¹⁶ Multiplying the average depreciation rate and the average home value in 2019, we can know the average depreciation value is \$17,702 (6.58%*269039).¹¹⁷ Therefore, the total incarcerated population will incur \$25.3 billion dollars (1,430,805*17,702) loss in property value when they are released (assuming each released inmate impacts 2

¹⁰⁴ Miller, Reuben Jonathan, “‘You Have One Minute Remaining.’ Why I’ll Always Drop Everything to Answer My Brother’s Calls From Prison,” TIME, February 16, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Phillips, Eric, “In prison, what are some typical prices for commissary items?” Quora answer,

¹⁰⁶ Wood Brian, “In jail, inmates pay \$1.09 for ramen noodles,” Standard-Examiner, November 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Bedi, Sheila A. “The Costs of Imprisonment Are Too High for Everyone,” TPM, March 31, 2014.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/12/17/the-hidden-cost-of-incarceration>

¹⁰⁹ Raheer Stephen, “The Company Store:

A Deeper Look at Prison Commissaries,” Prison Policy Initiative, May 2018.

¹¹⁰ Raheer Stephen, “The Company Store:

A Deeper Look at Prison Commissaries,” Prison Policy Initiative, May 2018.

¹¹¹ Bedi, Sheila A. “The Costs of Imprisonment Are Too High for Everyone,” TPM, March 31, 2014.

¹¹² Decker Charles, “Time to Reckon with Prison Labor,” Yale ISPS.

¹¹³ Raheer Stephen, “The Company Store:

A Deeper Look at Prison Commissaries,” Prison Policy Initiative, May 2018.

¹¹⁴ Immerman, David, “The Economic Impact of Incarceration: Measuring and Exploring Incarceration-Related Costs across the United States,” Economics Student Theses and Capstone Projects. 54, 2017

¹¹⁵ Gibbon, Steve, The Costs of Urban Property Crime

¹¹⁶ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. The economic burden of incarceration in the US, 2016

¹¹⁷ “United States Home Values,” Zillow, accessed Feb 25, 2021 <https://www.zillow.com/home-values/>

households).¹¹⁸

2. Prevention Costs vs. Incarceration Costs

According to a 2017 report by the Prison Policy Initiative, \$80.7 billion, \$63.2 billion, and \$29 billion were spent on public corrections agencies, policing, and the judicial & legal system respectively.¹¹⁹ Within the cost of running the correctional system, half was spent on corrections employees.¹²⁰ The average annual cost per inmate in each state was \$31,286 in 2012 dollars (\$35,607 in 2020 dollar) and 91.5% of the money came from states' general funds instead of federal government.¹²¹ For the state prisons, the annual cost per inmate ranges between \$14,780 (Alabama) and \$38,644 (Wisconsin), which indicates a range of \$16,314 - \$42,656 in 2020 dollars.^{122,123} For federal prison, the average annual cost per inmate is \$36,299 in 2017 dollars¹²⁴ (\$38,560 in 2020 dollars).

Prevention includes both proactive early prevention programs as well as prevention programs in prison (such as prison university project) to prevent recidivism.

Early prevention programs save money by lowering both the crime rate and the net costs of criminal activities.¹²⁵ From a 2001 cost-benefit quantitative analysis reviewing more than 400 programs, the net direct cost of prevention programs, which includes programs for age groups spanning from early childhood to adult, can save up to \$18,478 per participant.¹²⁶ Some programs aiming for juvenile offenders are proved to be the most economically beneficial. For example, juvenile boot camps can save taxpayers \$15,424 per participant, and diversion with services like treatment programs can save \$127 per participant.¹²⁷

Instead of just locking people up, prisons could implement many other programs to reduce the criminality of inmates when they are released in the future. One of the most effective crime prevention methods is education, as it has been shown that educational programs in prison significantly lower the re-arrest rate by 22%.¹²⁸ It is found that the re-arrest rate of inmates who received at least two years of college education is 50% lower than the national average rate, which is 60%.¹²⁹ Furthermore, providing higher education in correctional facilities is not costly. In the state of New York, while the average cost of incarceration per inmate per year is \$25,000 in 1997 dollars, the cost of providing higher education is only one tenth of this number: \$2,500 annually in 1997 dollars.¹³⁰ Weighing its benefit, it is evident that educational programs in prison are economically efficient. Apart from education, jail diversion programs are also popular in treating people who suffer from alcohol and substance abuse.¹³¹ In such programs, instead of serving time in jail, people would get help from counselors and learn strategies to deal with alcohol and/or

¹¹⁸ Carson, Ann E. "Prisoners in 2019," October 2020

¹¹⁹ Wagner, Peter et al. "Following the Money of Mass Incarceration." Prison Policy Initiative. January 25, 2017

¹²⁰ Wagner, Peter et al. "Following the Money of Mass Incarceration." Prison Policy Initiative, 2017

¹²¹ "State Spending for Corrections: Long-Term Trends and Recent Criminal Justice Policy Reforms," Prison Policy, September 11, 2013.

¹²² "Prison spending in 2015," Vera, 2015.

¹²³ Calculated by CPI inflation calculator from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8125436/>)

¹²⁴ Aos, Steve et al. "THE COMPARATIVE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PROGRAMS TO REDUCE CRIME," Washington State Institute for Public Policy, May 2001.

¹²⁵ Aos, Steve et al. "THE COMPARATIVE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PROGRAMS TO REDUCE CRIME," 2001.

¹²⁶ Aos, Steve et al. "THE COMPARATIVE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PROGRAMS TO REDUCE CRIME," 2001.

¹²⁷ Aos, Steve et al. "THE COMPARATIVE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PROGRAMS TO REDUCE CRIME," 2001.

¹²⁸ "Education as Crime Prevention," Open Society Institute, Occasional Paper Series No.2 September 1997, Prison Policy, 5

¹²⁹ "Education as Crime Prevention," Open Society Institute, Occasional Paper Series No.2 September 1997, Prison Policy, 5

¹³⁰ "Education as Crime Prevention," Open Society Institute, Occasional Paper Series No.2 September 1997, Prison Policy, 6

¹³¹ "Jail and Drug Court Diversion Programs For Drug Addiction," Burning Tree Programs, June 11, 2011.

substance abuse.¹³²

3. Debunking the Myth: Are Prisons Economic Catalysts?

Though the released inmate tends to bring a negative impact to local property value, the presence of a prison was generally not considered to have such an undesirable connotation. Instead, correctional facilities were regarded as an economic boost, a “recession-proof form of economic development.”^{133,134} This misconception became prevalent in the 1980s, a period when the prison population exploded. At that time, every additional 100 inmates generated 35 jobs.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the influx of both inmates and their families into the community created a larger demand for local consumer services.¹³⁶

However, despite the gain in government employment and a short-term boost to the construction industry, counties that host a prison compared to those without a prison show no significant difference in their long-term economic performance, according to a report from 1976 to 2001.¹³⁷ What is worse is that the presence of a prison can bring substantial collateral costs. For example, a prison reduces the potential of other private businesses investing in the local area and produces environmental issues.^{138,139}

The Cost for the U.S.

1. Cost of Incarceration (80.7 billion)

From a report by The Bureau of Justice Statistics, the cost of incarceration in 2012 was \$80.7 billion.¹⁴⁰ Considering the prison population decreased by 9.76% and assuming the cost per inmate does not change, in 2019, the U.S. spent \$83.1 billion in 2020 dollars.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, this number is an underestimation as it excludes policing costs, court costs and every collateral cost mentioned above.¹⁴² If we consider the cost incarcerated individuals, their families, and their communities must bear, the cost exceeds \$1 trillion.¹⁴³

Where did the documented \$83.1 billion funds go? The answer is that the majority of them went to security. In a report from Los Angeles Times, of the \$43,287 the state spent per inmate annually, 50% was spent on security while only 5% was reserved for education and job training.¹⁴⁴ However, it is this 5% that is most economically efficient as they significantly reduce the

¹³² “Jail and Drug Court Diversion Programs For Drug Addiction,” Burning Tree Programs, June 11, 2011.

¹³³ Whitfield Dexter, “Economic Impact of Prisons in Rural Areas A Literature Review,” European Services Strategy Unit. September 2008.

¹³⁴ Whitfield Dexter, “Economic Impact of Prisons in Rural Areas A Literature Review,” European Services Strategy Unit. September 2008.

¹³⁵ King, Ryan S., Mauer, Marc and Huling, Tracy. “Big Prisons, Small Towns: Prison Economics in Rural America”, February 2013.

¹³⁶ “Who Benefits When A Private Prison Comes To Town?” NPR, November 5, 2011.

¹³⁷ King, Ryan S. et al. “Big Prisons, Small Towns: Prison Economics in Rural America,” February 2013.

¹³⁸ “Who Benefits When A Private Prison Comes To Town?” NPR, November 5, 2011.

¹³⁹ Whitfield Dexter, “Economic Impact of Prisons in Rural Areas A Literature Review,” European Services Strategy Unit. September 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Carson, Ann E. “Prisoners in 2019,” October 2020.

¹⁴¹ Carson, Ann E. “Prisoners in 2019,” October 2020.

¹⁴² “Mass Incarceration Costs \$182 Billion Every Year, Without Adding Much to Public Safety,” Equal Justice Initiative, February 6, 2017.

¹⁴³ Ferner, Matt. “The Full Cost Of Incarceration In The U.S. Is Over \$1 Trillion, Study Finds,” Huffpost. September 13, 2016.

¹⁴⁴ Vogel, Nancy. “Rehab in prison can cut costs, report says,” Los Angeles Times. June 30, 2007.

recidivism rate. In addition, considering 90% of the inmates will be eventually released and re-enter the community, providing them with such rehabilitation programs to aid their successful reintegration appears even more critical.¹⁴⁵

Reduction in cost without sacrificing public safety is not improbable. Nowadays, almost half of prisoners (46%) are behind bars due to drug offenses, the leading type of crime committed.¹⁴⁶ This number far exceeds the crimes committed in the second leading category, “Weapon, explosive, Arson,” by 26%.¹⁴⁷ “If only 10 percent of drug-addicted offenders received drug rehabilitation instead of jail time, the criminal justice system would save \$4.8 billion compared to current costs. If 40 percent of addicted offenders received treatment instead of jail, those savings would rise to \$12.9 billion.”¹⁴⁸

2. Hindered Labor Participation (\$113 billion)

Incarceration creates consequential loss in the U.S. labor market as 61% of the inmates are in their prime working age (18-39 years old).¹⁴⁹ This vast exclusion of able-bodied workers detracts from the quality of the general U.S. labor force. Furthermore, this profound loss was hidden from the public as inmates are not included in civilian labor force or “not in the labor force” category.¹⁵⁰ In a 2007 report, each U.S. worker generated \$63,885 worth of wealth annually (\$81,641 in 2020 dollars).¹⁵¹ In 2019, 56.2% of the inmates were in their prime working age while 96.8% of them were in the working age (15-64 years old).¹⁵² Therefore, in 2019 alone, the loss of output brought by incarceration was equivalent to \$113 billion.

The pernicious impact of incarceration continues after the release of inmates as they can hardly find a job due to stigma, further creating a sizable loss in U.S. annual output which is estimated to be between \$57 billion and \$ 65 billion.¹⁵³ In 2008, there was one ex-offender in every 17 working-age men.¹⁵⁴ It is estimated that former inmates reduced employment by about 1.5-1.7 million workers.¹⁵⁵

3. Increased Government Assistance Payout (\$3.9 billion)

Reentry programs are designed to help former inmates re-integrate into society because unsuccessful integration often leads to recidivism. Reentry issues of top priority include improving public safety, employability, health, and acquiring education as well as stable housing.¹⁵⁶ In 2015, with 1,400 federally-funded reentry programs and a \$2,093,772 average cost, these reentry programs cost \$2.9 billion dollar (\$3.2 billion in 2020 dollars¹⁵⁷).¹⁵⁸ In 2010, another \$110 million was poured into the reentry programs, which include job training, education, mentoring, substance abuse and mental health treatment, family-based services, literacy classes, housing and

¹⁴⁵ Vogel, Nancy. “Rehab in prison can cut costs, report says,” Los Angeles Times. June 30, 2007.

¹⁴⁶ “Offenses,” Federal Bureau of Prisons, May 1, 2021.

¹⁴⁷ “Offenses,” Federal Bureau of Prisons, May 1, 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Zarkin, G. A et al. (2015). Lifetime Benefits and Costs of Diverting Substance-Abusing Offenders From State Prison. *Crime & Delinquency*, 61(6), 829–850.

¹⁴⁹ Bowling Julia, “Mass Incarceration Gets Attention as an Economic Issue (Finally),” Brennan Center, September 13, 2013.

¹⁵⁰ Western Bruce, “The Penal System and the U.S. Labor Market,” Prison Legal News, October 15, 2000.

¹⁵¹ “U.S. Workers World’s Most Productive,” CBS News, September 3, 2007.

¹⁵² Carson, Ann E. “Prisoners in 2019,” October 2020, 16

¹⁵³ “Growth of Ex-Offender Population in United States Is a Dramatic Drag on Economy,” CEPR, November 15, 2010.

¹⁵⁴ “Growth of Ex-Offender Population in United States Is a Dramatic Drag on Economy,” CEPR, November 15, 2010.

¹⁵⁵ “Growth of Ex-Offender Population in United States Is a Dramatic Drag on Economy,” CEPR, November 15, 2010.

¹⁵⁶ “Reentry Program,” The United States Attorneys Office. United States Department of Justice.

¹⁵⁷ Calculated by CPI inflation calculator from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8125436/>)

¹⁵⁸ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. “The economic burden of incarceration in the US,” 2016

employment assistance.¹⁵⁹

Apart from the difficulties of finding a job, released inmates frequently face the problem of gaining stable housing. It is estimated that 25% to 50% of the homeless people are former inmates. Based on a report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the homeless population in 2019 was 567,715, meaning approximately 212,893 of them are former inmates.¹⁶⁰ Considering each supportive housing costs \$4,800 per year, the government must spend \$1 billion for finding a shelter for released inmates who have no place to live.¹⁶¹ Unfortunately, this number is a significant underestimate since many homeless people cannot get this support. When they are not getting such support, the cost increases eightfold from the supportive housing cost (\$4,800) to \$35,578 per person annually.¹⁶²

4. Child Welfare Costs (\$21 billion)

The surge in prison population in the 1980s included many female inmates. In fact, the female prison population has increased more than 750%.¹⁶³ The rising female inmate population led to more minors unattended who consequently needed foster care. In Texas, the state with the most female prisoners since 2017, approximately 20,000 children were taken by the foster care system annually due to parental incarceration since 2016.^{164,165}

From 1985 to 2000, the national foster care caseloads doubled.¹⁶⁶ In 2019, more than 80% of the 107,955 females behind bars were primary caretakers of minors.^{167,168} Though we do not know the exact number of children entering foster care, we can estimate this number based on a report by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. In 2019, Child Protective Services (CPS) received 4.4 million referrals alleging maltreatment of about 7.9 million children and 54.5% of referrals triggered an investigation by CPS.¹⁶⁹ Suppose one third of these referrals with an investigation resulted from parental incarceration and considering each child entering the welfare system costs \$7,726 in 2012 (\$8,817 in 2020 dollars), parental incarceration resulted in a \$21 billion cost in child welfare in 2019.¹⁷⁰

5. Divorce, Separation of Couples, and Reduced Marriage (\$14.1 billion)

Divorce and separation of couples hinder economic development as they disrupt economies of scale and diminish human capital, the principal momentum for economic growth.¹⁷¹ Considering human capital contributes to at least 22% of the economic growth and divorce decreases 25% of human capital, annual GDP could be 0.118% higher (2.161%*22%*25%) if no divorce happened in 2019.^{172,173} Since 47% of inmates experienced divorce or separation from their partner due to

¹⁵⁹ “Department Announces \$110 Million for Reentry Programs; Efforts to Reduce Spending on Corrections,” The United States Department of Justice. October 8, 2010.

¹⁶⁰ “HUD RELEASES 2019 ANNUAL HOMELESS ASSESSMENT REPORT,” HUD No.20-003, HUD.gov. January 7, 2020. 3

¹⁶¹ “Ending Chronic Homelessness Saves Taxpayers Money,” National Alliance to End Homelessness. February 17, 2017.

¹⁶² “Ending Chronic Homelessness Saves Taxpayers Money,” National Alliance to End Homelessness. February 17, 2017.

¹⁶³ Levin Dan. “As More Mothers Fill Prisons, Children Suffer ‘A Primal Wound,’” New York Times. December 28, 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Levin Dan. “As More Mothers Fill Prisons, Children Suffer ‘A Primal Wound,’” New York Times. December 28, 2019.

¹⁶⁵ Carson, Ann E. “Prisoners in 2019,” October 2020

¹⁶⁶ Swann, C.A., Sylvester, M.S. The foster care crisis: What caused caseloads to grow. *Demography* 43, 309–335 (2006).

¹⁶⁷ Levin Dan. “As More Mothers Fill Prisons, Children Suffer ‘A Primal Wound,’” New York Times. December 28, 2019.

¹⁶⁸ Carson, Ann E. “Prisoners in 2019,” October 2020, 16

¹⁶⁹ “Child Maltreatment 2019,” U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau, 2021. 10

¹⁷⁰ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. “The economic burden of incarceration in the US,” 2016

¹⁷¹ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. “The economic burden of incarceration in the US,” 2016

¹⁷² Pettus-Davis, C. et al. “The economic burden of incarceration in the US,” 2016

¹⁷³ “GDP Growth (annual%)-United States,” The World Bank, 2019.

incarceration, the 576,956 new admissions in 2019 translates to about 271,169 divorces or separations, which is 36.2% of the total divorces.^{174,175,176} Therefore, the divorce and separation of couples caused by incarceration resulted in a cost of \$9.2 billion (21,433,226 million * 0.118% * 36.2%) because the U.S GDP in 2019 is \$21,433,226 million according to the World Bank¹⁷⁷.

Apart from divorce and the separation of couples, incarceration decreases a person's likelihood to get married by 25%.¹⁷⁸ Since reduced marriage has the same economic effect as a divorce, which is $\$33,761 \left(\frac{9155 \text{ million}}{271,169} \right)$, nearly \$4.9 billion was lost due to the lack of marriages in 2019 (576,956*25%*33761).

6. The Criminogenic Nature of Prison (\$40 billion)

Prison is criminogenic for several reasons. First, it gives people who committed misdemeanors or who are amateur criminals a chance to meet more seasoned career criminals, increasing their criminal prowess.¹⁷⁹ Second, a released inmate can feel anxious when being released due to not being able to adapt to a new life, which could lead to substance abuse.¹⁸⁰ Thirdly, toxic prison culture and the lack of contact with pro-social people could foster anti-social behaviors and eventually cause the released inmates to turn back to crimes.¹⁸¹ Apart from the above reasons, prison regime, damaged social relationships, and lowered employability can also lead to recidivism. What makes thing more dire is that when former inmates commit new crimes, they often commit new types of offenses that are more serious.¹⁸² From three previous publications, the estimated criminogenic effect of prison is between 4% and 23%, therefore, we will use the midpoint 13.5%.¹⁸³ Considering the \$295.6 billion was spent on criminal justice system in the U.S according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the estimated cost of criminogenic nature of prison is about \$40 billion (13.5%*295.6 billion)

The Cost in the U.S. Compared to Other Countries

With less than 5% of the world population but 20% of the world's prisoners, mass incarceration in the U.S. creates a huge economic toll for not only the inmates and their families, but also all taxpayers in the U.S. Below is a chart comparing the relative cost of prison as well as the percentage cost of incarceration in GDP in different countries.

¹⁷⁴ Carson, Ann E. "Prisoners in 2019," October 2020

¹⁷⁵ "National Marriage Divorce Rates," CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System, 2018.

¹⁷⁶ "Number of divorces in the United States from 1981 to 2019 (*in millions*)," Statista. March 2, 2021.

¹⁷⁷ "GDP (current US\$)-United States," The World Bank, 2019.

¹⁷⁸ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. "The economic burden of incarceration in the US, " 2016

¹⁷⁹ Stefanski, Ron. "Prison Recidivism: Cause and Possible Treatments," OCCUPY, August 19, 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Stefanski, Ron. "Prison Recidivism: Cause and Possible Treatments," OCCUPY, August 19, 2019.

¹⁸¹ "CRIMINOGENIC NEEDS: THE RISK OF RETURNING TO PRISON," Prison Fellowship.

¹⁸² Mueller-Smith, Michael. "THE CRIMINAL AND LABOR MARKET IMPACTS OF INCARCERATION," Department of Economics, University of Michigan. August 8, 2015.

¹⁸³ Pettus-Davis, C. et al. "The economic burden of incarceration in the US, " 2016.

Country	Number of inmates per 100,000 habitants ¹⁸⁴	Cost per inmate per day ¹⁸⁵ (2018)	Cost per inmate per year (2018)	Total cost of incarceration per year	GDP ¹⁸⁶ (in billion)	Percentage of cost of incarceration in GDP
Norway	60.6	396.4	144,671	47,158,1601.1	403	0.117
Bulgaria	106.7	6.7	2,460	18,374,486.9	68	0.027
Sweden	59.7	733.1	267,589	1,603,256,154	530	0.303
Germany	76.7	161.4	58,911	3,773,693,680	3,861	0.098
Italy	89	312.2	113,953	21,541,344,656	2,003	1.075
UK	130	138.9	50,711	4,757,759,941	2,829	0.168
Spain	122	103.2	37,668	1,816,824,974	1,393	0.130
France	104.5	122.9	44,844	3,052,113,951	2,715	0.112
Russia	386.1	2.8	1,037	583,825,343.6	1,699	0.034
Country	Number of inmates per 100,000 habitants	cost	Cost per year	Total cost of incarceration per year	GDP	Percentage of cost of incarceration in GDP
Japan	38 ¹⁸⁷	16.6	6,070	1,790,000,000	5,081	0.035
US	639 ¹⁸⁸	368.2 ¹⁸⁹ (2016)	134,393	282,592,000,000	21,433	1.318
Canada	104 ¹⁹⁰	314 ¹⁹¹ (2016)	114,610	4,459,181,698	1,736	0.257
South Africa	248 ¹⁹²	164	59,860	23,848,973 ¹⁹³	351	0.007
Australia	160 ¹⁹⁴	292 ¹⁹⁵ (2013)	106,580	4,297,817,184	1,396	0.308
India	35	4.1	1,483	709,087,476 ¹⁹⁶ (2015)	2,869	0.025
brazil	357	2.4 ¹⁹⁷	870	655,123,470.8	1,840	0.036
Mexico	166	136.6	49,864 ¹⁹⁸	10,560,000,000	1,268	0.833

Notes:

1. For all European countries, the cost per inmate per day refers to the cost spent by penal institutions, which includes cost of security, health care, services (such as maintenance),

¹⁸⁴ Marcelo F. Aebi; Mélanie M. Tiago, Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2019: Key Findings of the SPACE I report, Council of Europe

¹⁸⁵ Aebi, M. F., & Tiago, M. M. (2020). *SPACE I - 2019 – Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics: Prison populations*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe

¹⁸⁶ “Gross Domestic Product 2019,” World Bank, 2020.

¹⁸⁷ “World Prison Brief Data- Japan,” World Prison Brief. retrieved in March 2021.

¹⁸⁸ “World Prison Brief Data- United States of America,” World Prison Brief. retrieved in March 2021.

¹⁸⁹ Hayes, Tara O’Neill, “The Economic Costs of the U.S. Criminal Justice System,” American Action Forum, July 16, 2020.

¹⁹⁰ “World Prison Brief Data- Canada,” World Prison Brief. retrieved in March 2021.

¹⁹¹ “Update on Costs of Incarceration,” Canada Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, March 22, 2018.

¹⁹² “World Prison Brief Data- South Africa,” World Prison Brief. retrieved in March 2021.

¹⁹³ “Department of Correctional Services Annual Report 2018/1029,” VOTE NO.18, Department: Correctional Services Republic of South Africa, 2019, 30

¹⁹⁴ “World Prison Brief Data- Australia,” World Prison Brief. retrieved in March 2021.

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administration, support (such as food and inmate employment), and rehabilitation programs¹⁹⁹

2. For Canada, the cost per inmate per day includes the operation of penal institutions, services, and support. It is noteworthy that three quarters of operation costs are staff salaries and benefits. The cost does not include correctional intervention and internal services.²⁰⁰
3. For South Africa, the cost includes administration, incarceration, rehabilitation, care and social reintegration²⁰¹
4. For Australia, the cost includes operating cost and capital costs, net of operating revenues and excluding payroll tax.²⁰²
5. For India, the cost includes operating cost (food, vocational education, medical, welfare activities, clothing) and maintenance costs.²⁰³
6. For Japan, the cost includes clothing, food (29%), medical care, education, transportation (for working outside), incentive remuneration (\$ 0.85) and housing for inmates' daily lives²⁰⁴

Within the daily cost of \$368.2, \$177.5 (48.2%) goes to police protection. \$110.2 (29.9%) is the operation cost of prisons, jails, and parole as well as probation systems. The rest \$80.5 (21.9%) is reserved for the judicial and legal system.²⁰⁵ However, this number is just a fraction of how much the prison system costs the U.S as it does not include all the collateral costs mentioned above.

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