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Overall number of people in state prisons drops for first time since 1972

However, feds and half of states see prison populations continue to climb

For the first time since 1972, the number of people in state prisons fell. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), state prison populations decreased by nearly 3,000 people between 2008 and 2009. The Justice Policy Institute (JPI), a non-profit research and policy organization dedicated to reducing society's reliance on incarceration, believes that while this is a move in the right direction, an overall increase in the number of people in prison over the past year, and the fact that half the states continue to increase their prison populations, means we still have a long way to go.

"The economic downturn has made both policymakers and taxpayers more aware of the financial price of incarceration," stated Tracy Velázquez, executive director of JPI. "We hope that as the economy improves, we will see states continue to use smart, effective public safety strategies that reduce the unnecessary warehousing of millions of people in prisons and jails."

JPI's analysis of the BJS data also revealed that only six states reduced their prison populations since 2000: New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Michigan, Delaware and Illinois. Velázquez noted that a number of these states have been engaged in justice reforms that focus on reducing incarceration rates.

"New York's revision of the Rockefeller drug laws, New Jersey's focus on reducing returns to prison for parole violations and its increase in treatment and diversion, Maryland's improved use of evidence-based practices such as risk assessments and Michigan's reforms to parole and investments in re-entry all demonstrate that intentional efforts to create smart policy, improve outcomes and reduce incarceration pay off," stated Velázquez. "These sustained reductions are not a matter of chance."

JPI recently released a number of briefs providing guidance to policymakers on how to continue to lower incarceration rates in ways that protect public safety. [For Immediate Release, The Costs of Confinement, Pruning Prisons](#) and other relevant reports can be found at www.justicepolicy.org.

Location	Prisoners on 12/31/2000	Prisoners on 12/31/2008	Prisoners on 12/31/2009	% change, 2008-2009	Overall change, 2000 - 2009
U.S. Total/a	1,391,261	1,609,759	1,613,656	0.2	16.0%
Federal Prisons	145,416	201,280	208,118	3.4	43.1%
State Prisons	1,245,845	1,408,479	1,405,538	-0.2	12.8%
New York	70,199	60,347	58,687	-2.8	-16.4%
New Jersey	29,784	25,953	25,382	-2.2	-14.8%
Maryland	23,538	23,324	22,255	-4.6	-5.5%
Michigan	47,718	48,738	45,478	-6.7	-4.7%

Delaware/a	6,921	7,075	6,794	-4	-1.8%
Illinois	45,281	45,474	45,161	-0.7	-0.3%
Texas	166,719	172,506	171,249	-0.7	2.7%
Kansas	8,344	8,539	8,641	1.2	3.6%
California	163,001	173,670	171,275	-1.4	5.1%
Massachusetts	10,722	11,408	11,316	-0.8	5.5%
Mississippi	20,241	22,754	21,482	-5.6	6.1%
Connecticut/a	18,355	20,661	19,716	-4.6	7.4%
Iowa/b	7,955	8,766	8,813	:	10.8%
Missouri	27,543	30,186	30,563	1.2	11.0%
South Carolina	21,778	24,326	24,288	-0.2	11.5%
Wisconsin	20,754	23,379	23,153	-1	11.6%
Rhode Island/a	3,286	4,045	3,674	-9.2	11.8%
Ohio	45,833	51,686	51,606	-0.2	12.6%
Louisiana	35,207	38,381	39,780	3.6	13.0%
Oklahoma	23,181	25,864	26,397	2.1	13.9%
Nebraska	3,895	4,520	4,474	-1	14.9%
Utah	5,637	6,552	6,533	-0.3	15.9%
Montana	3,105	3,545	3,605	1.7	16.1%
Hawaii/a	5,053	5,955	5,891	-1.1	16.6%
Georgia/b	44,232	52,719	53,371	1.2	20.7%
Alabama	26,332	30,508	31,790	4.2	20.7%
New Hampshire	2,257	2,702	2,731	1.1	21.0%
Tennessee	22,166	27,228	26,965	-1	21.7%
New Mexico	5,342	6,402	6,519	1.8	22.0%
Washington	14,915	17,926	18,233	1.7	22.2%
Wyoming	1,680	2,084	2,075	-0.4	23.5%
Nevada	10,063	12,743	12,482	-2	24.0%
Virginia	30,168	38,276	38,092	-0.5	26.3%
Alaska/a	4,173	5,014	5,285	5.4	26.6%
North Carolina	31,266	39,482	39,860	1	27.5%
Arkansas	11,915	14,716	15,208	3.3	27.6%
Vermont/a	1,697	2,116	2,220	4.9	30.8%
South Dakota	2,616	3,342	3,434	2.8	31.3%
Maine	1,679	2,195	2,206	0.5	31.4%
Idaho	5,535	7,290	7,400	1.5	33.7%
Colorado	16,833	23,274	22,795	-2.1	35.4%
Oregon	10,580	14,167	14,403	1.7	36.1%
North Dakota	1,076	1,452	1,486	2.3	38.1%
Pennsylvania	36,847	49,215	51,429	4.5	39.6%
Indiana	20,125	28,322	28,808	1.7	43.1%

Kentucky	14,919	21,706	21,638	-0.3	45.0%
Florida	71,319	102,388	103,915	1.5	45.7%
Arizona/b	26,510	39,589	40,627	2.6	53.3%
Minnesota	6,238	9,910	9,986	0.8	60.1%
West Virginia	3,856	6,059	6,367	5.1	65.1%
a: integrated jail and prison system					
b: prison population based on custody counts.					

Source: Heather C. West, *Prisoners at Yearend 2009—Advance Counts*, Appendix Table 1. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010) <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/py09ac.pdf>