

# “Lock them up”

has been the overriding theme of recent U.S. crime policy. As a result, we now have **the world’s largest incarcerated population.**

About 2.2 million Americans are behind bars at any given time—

at a cost to the government of **\$30 billion per year.**



Pennsylvania’s overfilled system of **28 state prisons** spends more than **\$30,000 per prisoner** per year. Even **county jails**, which generally house less serious offenders, cost more than **\$17,000 per prisoner.**

## What “lock them up” costs us



	<b>Pennsylvania State/Federal Prisons</b>	<b>Southwestern Pennsylvania County Jails</b>
<b>Number of Prisoners</b>	42,446 (as of 12/05)	4,887 (2005 avg.)
<b>Total Prison Budget</b>	\$1.32 billion (2005–06)	\$84.6 million (2005)
<b>Cost per Prisoner</b>	\$31,143	\$17,311

Pennsylvania’s state prison system can’t keep up with increases in the number of prisoners

	<b>System capacity</b>	<b>Number of prisoners</b>
<b>1996</b>	27,132	<b>34,537</b>
<b>2007</b> (as of 1/31)	39,045	<b>44,625</b>

Do these sizable expenditures contribute to public safety? Perhaps for a while. But the great majority of prisoners eventually return to society. **Each year 650,000 Americans are released from state and federal prisons and another 7 million are released from county and local jails. These ex-prisoners are typically at a great disadvantage in seeking housing and employment.** Many of them quickly return to a life of drugs and crime, causing more damage in their communities before getting arrested again. A 1994 federal study of 40,000 inmates released in 15 states found that 62 percent were back in prison within three years.

## Prisoner reentry: Rebuilding lives, reducing crime, saving money

### There’s another way.

Prisoner reentry programs seek to rehabilitate criminals and assist their readjustment to society upon their release so that they are less likely to commit new crimes and return to jail.



Because the costs of prosecution and imprisonment are so high,

**even a 2 percent reduction in the recidivism rate—** the rate at which ex-cons end up back in jail—

**saves public dollars.**

**It also makes our communities safer while restoring broken lives and families.**



### Successful reentry programs are reducing recidivism by more than 50 percent.

For example:

- In **Poughkeepsie, N.Y.**, the county jail works intensively with inmates while they are in jail and for one year after they are released to implement successful transitions. The recidivism rate for program participants is just **21 percent.**
- In **Baltimore**, the Maryland Re-Entry Partnership Initiative coordinates comprehensive delivery of educational, vocational, and social services to prisoners returning to city neighborhoods. Violent crime has been reduced and the program has attained a benefit-cost ratio of 3:1.
- In **Allegheny County, Pa.**, the State Forensic Support Services Program has reintegrated more than 300 individuals with behavioral health diagnoses into the community, with a three-year recidivism rate of less than **18 percent.** A collaborative reentry program involving the Allegheny County Jail and human services organizations is also reducing recidivism and achieving significant cost savings.

Helping prisoners with education, housing, employment, and human services issues doesn't mean getting soft on crime. On the contrary, it means safer communities at less cost—and more money available for positive community investments rather than spent on locking people up.

**"Analysts are nearly unanimous in their conclusion that continued growth in incarceration will prevent considerably fewer, if any, crimes—and at substantially greater cost to taxpayers."**

—Don Stemen,  
Vera Institute of Justice



According to a 2006 Zogby International poll, **87 percent of Americans** are in favor of rehabilitative services for prisoners as opposed to a punishment-only system.

For more information, contact the Allegheny County Department of Human Services at **412-350-5701**.

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# When you lock up prisoners,

# you also lock up dollars.

# Maybe there's a better option.