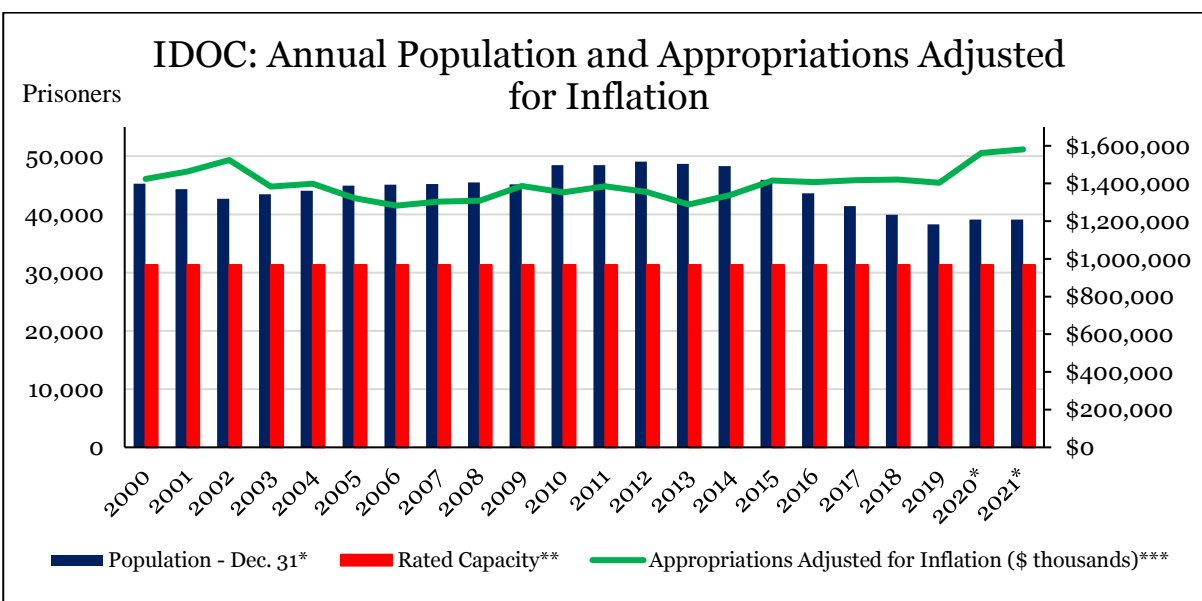


**Testimony in support of the SFY 2021 Proposed Budget for the Illinois Department Corrections to the House Appropriations—Public Safety Committee of the 101st Illinois General Assembly, March 4, 2020.**

**I. Correctional experience and expertise:**

John Howard Association (JHA): JHA is the only independent citizen correctional oversight organization that goes into Illinois’ prisons to directly observe conditions and speak with staff, administrators and prisoners.



**II. JHA puts forth the following recommendations regarding the proposed budget for IDOC, SFY 2021:**

1. Do not reduce IDOC’s budget. IDOC has not been adequately resourced for decades; reducing the Department’s budget will further erode programming and treatment for people in prison and worsen already poor living conditions.
2. Fully enact the recommendations put forth by the Criminal Justice Reform Commission in December of 2016 to safely reduce IDOC’s population.
3. Reform the cumbersome procurement process and relieve the undue administrative burdens IDOC is subjected to so the Department may efficiently utilize scarce resources.
4. Conduct an independent assessment of IDOC infrastructure to gauge viability and determine a realistic cost estimate of required maintenance and upgrades.

**Recommendation 1:** Do not reduce IDOC’s budget. IDOC has not been adequately resourced or properly managed for decades.<sup>1</sup>

IDOC is not, and has not been, adequately funded or structured in a way that allows the Department to fulfill its goal of increasing public safety by promoting positive change and rehabilitation of people who are imprisoned, operating successful reentry programs, and reducing victimization. Currently the Department can merely incapacitate the majority of the people in its custody, but cannot provide the level of care, education, training, and treatment necessary to further its stated mission or serve the best interests of Illinois. IDOC is also not in full compliance with several statutes, including the Crime Reduction Act of 2009, which calls for much more than implementing risk assessment instruments, one of the areas of this law that the Department is finally beginning to execute on.

The static prison population is low relative to the past 15 years. However, this is attributable to a reduction in new court admissions, which is likely the result of a reduced number of arrests for criminal offenses. IDOC has no control over how many people are sentenced to prison, and the downward trend of arrests can reverse at any time.

The state’s failure to adequately resource IDOC for decades, and its unwillingness to maintain and modernize IDOC’s infrastructure has resulted in a perilous deficit. Thus, the relatively low prisoner population should not be viewed as an impetus for reducing IDOC’s budget. On the contrary, the reduced prisoner population may, at best, provide IDOC an opportunity to make up for lost ground.

It is likely that IDOC’s average daily population will remain constant in the years to come even if the number of new court admissions remain steady because of long sentences resulting from Truth in Sentencing guidelines and automatic sentence enhancements. This will correlate with a rise in the average age of prisoners over time, increasing costs.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, there are more prisoners diagnosed with a mental illness in IDOC now than there were twenty years ago. Like elderly prisoners, these prisoners require more resources to incarcerate than others.

**Recommendation 2:** Fully enact the recommendations put forth by the Criminal Justice Reform Commission in December of 2016 to safely reduce IDOC’s population.

If the prison population is safely reduced, the Department will be able to do more for the people in its custody, as resources will not be stretched so woefully thin. Lower prisoner to staff ratios (security and non-security) will improve programmatic outcomes for prisoners. Also, reduced demand upon the limited physical space and scarce necessities available within Illinois’ prisons will improve living conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> “IDOC has not been...properly managed for decades” is not meant to be a derogatory statement aimed at current IDOC administrators; JHA recognizes that numerous political actors impact governance of IDOC, in addition to politically appointed IDOC administrators.

<sup>2</sup> It costs over twice as much to house an elderly prisoner in comparison to younger prisoners according to the National Institute of Justice (see <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/018735.pdf>)

A further reduced prison population will also address many of the safety concerns routinely voiced by both prisoners and staff, and improve working conditions for the front-line staff whom we depend upon to implement the policies that will improve outcomes in corrections.

**Recommendation 3:** Reform the needlessly cumbersome procurement process and relieve the undue administrative burdens IDOC is subjected to so the Department may efficiently utilize scarce resources.

JHA acknowledges the reality of the state's financial situation. It is unrealistic to expect the Department's operating budget to be substantially increased to the extent required, or that the capital spending the Department desperately needs will be provided in the foreseeable future.

Thus, JHA calls on the legislature to allow IDOC to more efficiently utilize the limited tax dollars provided to the Department. To further this end, IDOC should have its own procurement officer, furnished with a well-trained and educated staff who can implement a reasonable procurement process conducive to corrections.

Domain knowledge is an essential component of a functional bureaucracy, and there are many aspects of corrections that make the framework in which contracts involving IDOC are formed and executed very distinct from other state agencies. If IDOC is granted control of its procurements, the Department will be better positioned to do more with the tax dollars allocated to it.

**Recommendation 4:** Conduct an independent assessment of IDOC infrastructure to gauge viability and determine a realistic cost estimate of required maintenance and upgrades.

IDOC undoubtably requires a significant amount of capital funding to fix its decaying prisons, and additional funding will be essential for IDOC to modernize its outmoded operations and facilities. JHA believes the following actions are required before Illinois can remedy the cumulative effects of lack of long-term planning and neglecting to properly maintain or modernize IDOC's infrastructure:

1. Articulate achievable goals for corrections;
2. A comprehensive evaluation should be conducted by independent entities as to what corrections requires to achieve these goals, including, but not limited to, a thorough appraisal of the viability of the physical structures IDOC operates. And, if it is expected that a prison will be utilized by corrections for decades to come, what modifications, in any, are essential to meet immediate and projected security and programmatic needs;
3. Create a plan of action based on this evaluation;
4. Develop a cost estimate for the implementation of this plan;
5. Implement the plan.

Leaking roofs, broken equipment, and failed plumbing are but a few of the many problems that seem to be ubiquitous throughout IDOC. I have witnessed these issues firsthand as a professional independent monitor who routinely goes into prisons to observe and document the condition of Illinois' correctional facilities. I have heard from many of IDOC's prison staff concerning the immense challenges they routinely face when trying to implement modern correctional practices using antiquated equipment in outdated facilities, and the legitimate security concerns created by problems such as failing communication systems. Also, I have heard from thousands of prisoners who wish to participate in rehabilitative programming, but are denied this opportunity because the demand for such programming far exceeds the supply.

In closing, JHA asks this committee to consider this submitted testimony and the recommendations contained herein. IDOC must be adequately resourced, and better manage these scarce resources so that the Department has a realistic chance to fulfill its mandate to operate safe and rehabilitative correctional facilities.

Respectfully Submitted,

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<sup>i</sup> \*2020 prison population numbers are a projection generated by the Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council (SPAC). SPAC projected the prison population for FY2019-2035 using the average prison admissions, sentences, and policy positions of FY2018. The projection model projects the prison population to decrease to around 39,100 and then to stay relatively flat. Source: [https://spac.icjia-api.cloud/uploads/2019\\_Baseline\\_IDOC\\_Population\\_Projection\\_FINAL-20191029T21514462.pdf](https://spac.icjia-api.cloud/uploads/2019_Baseline_IDOC_Population_Projection_FINAL-20191029T21514462.pdf)  
\*\*Rated Capacity as listed in the IDOC Daily Population Report generated March 21, 2019  
\*\*\*Appropriations/expenditures for SFY 2000 through 2009 do not include retirement costs so that major object budget items are consistent for SFY 2000 through 2020; Dollar amounts are represented in 1,000's.