



Pennsylvania

Department of Corrections

BUDGET TESTIMONY

2026-27



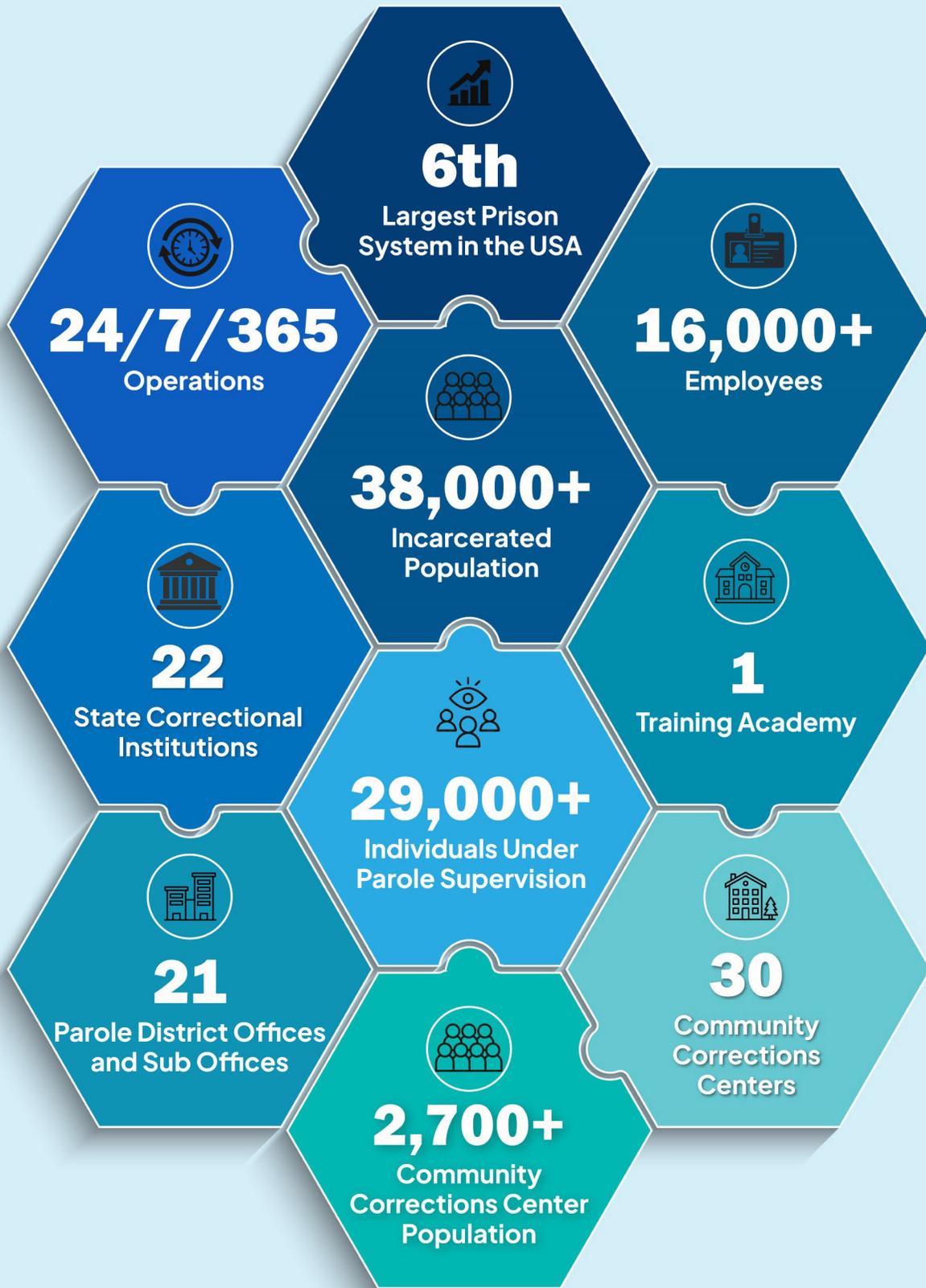
Creating Success, Inside and Out

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW



\$3.4 Billion Total Budget

\$198/day for Incarcerated Individual | \$15/day for Parolee Supervision



Introduction:

Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for providing this opportunity to discuss Governor Shapiro’s Fiscal Year 2026-27 budget proposal for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections operates the sixth largest state prison system in the nation. At year-end 2025, the department housed approximately 38,144 incarcerated individuals, 2,721 reentrants in community correction centers¹, and supervised 29,346 individuals on parole. The department is also the largest employer in the Commonwealth government, with an authorized complement of 16,851 employees at year-end 2025.

The department is committed to safe, humane, and innovative correctional practices, supports the rehabilitative needs of individuals in custody, and remains focused on its most important responsibility: protecting public safety.

2025 Accomplishments

Answering Governor Shapiro’s call to “get stuff done,” the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections formulated a new five-year strategic plan, centered on four keys to future success: optimizing safety and security; reducing recidivism; demonstrating operational excellence; and building and sustaining an engaged, effective workforce.

The accomplishments outlined below reflect how the department used the General Assembly’s FY25–26 appropriation to advance these strategic priorities while containing costs and delivering measurable results.

Strategic Goal – Optimizing Safety and Security

- *Piloted facial recognition software to control ingress/egress from facilities, reduce the odds of escape and minimize overtime associated with correction officer “walk time” during shift changes.*
- *Implemented DEESCALATE training for corrections officer trainees and expanded training to existing staff in 2026.*
- *Initiated a legal mail search pilot program through the department’s Security Processing Center (SPC) and intercepted 24 pieces of purported legal correspondence that tested positive for illicit substances worth more than \$1.4 million if distributed within a facility.*
- *Completed comprehensive security vulnerability assessments of transportation procedures and parole field offices. Plans to reduce vulnerabilities in these areas are in progress and are anticipated to lower risks to staff.*

¹ Includes approximately 1,062 residential and non-residential reentrants participating in the State Drug Treatment Program (SDTP) and 1,659 parolees in centers as of December 31, 2025.

Strategic Goal – Reducing Recidivism

- *Launched the Recidivism and Desistance Initiative (RDI), setting the goal of reducing recidivism by ten percentage points by year-end 2030 and establishing facility level performance monitoring and recognition.*
- *Expanded access to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) in response to the Department of Justice guidance, litigation and the Trump Administration’s Drug Policy Priorities. Department research found that recidivism rates lowered by 35% for incarcerated individuals who were prescribed Suboxone – providing a return on investment of \$6.17 in reduced incarceration costs for each dollar spent.*
- *Realized \$28 million in savings from Justice Reinvestment Initiative 2 (JRI2) legislation in calendar year 2025 and piloted Swift, Predictable and Brief (SPB) violation sanctions authorized by JRI2. Pilot SPB results found savings of \$601 in incarceration days per participant. Moreover, county probation departments enjoy the sustained benefits of \$38.8 million in permanent annual funding – up from \$16 million at the start of JRI2.*

Strategic Goal – Demonstrating Operational Excellence

- *Closed two underutilized Community Corrections Centers (CCCs) and initiated the closure of the Quehanna Boot Camp and State Correctional Institution (SCI) at Rockview. Anticipated cost avoidances may begin to be realized during the final quarter of FY25-26. The closures:*
 - *Align the department’s bed space with its population.*
 - *Avoid approximately \$100 million future annual operational expenses.*
 - *Eliminate approximately \$81 to \$100 million in future capital investments.*
- *Secured approximately \$37 million in annual drug costs savings through the 340B and PACE prescription drug programs.*
- *Maintained the temporary closure of the equivalent of 14 housing units to control overtime needs until announcement of facility closures.*
- *Restructured procurement procedures for fire protection, surveillance and building management systems through new Invitation to Qualify (ITQ) contracts - increasing micro-business participation and spurring approximately \$2.5 million in annual savings.*

Strategic Goal – Building and Sustaining an Engaged, Effective Workforce

- *Reduced correctional vacancy rates to 5% or less at 13 facilities at year-end 2025 (up from 12 in 2024), despite a regional hiring freeze affecting seven of 24 SCIs due to the pending closures. Seventeen facilities are expected to reach this milestone after staff are redeployed following closures.*
- *Despite a regional hiring freeze affecting seven of 24 facilities, the Department held the year-end overall vacancy rate increase to 0.8 percent.*
- *Laid the groundwork for agency’s vacancy rate to drop to approximately 3% once closure staff are reassigned.*

FY26-27 Budget Priorities:

The confluence of committed staff and adequate funding to reach beyond the status quo enabled the above accomplishments. To meet the challenges of tomorrow, the department respectfully requests

approval of Governor Shapiro’s FY26-27 budget proposal of \$3.379 billion for the department and the independent boards the department supports.

If the proposal is enacted, the department will continue to uphold public safety, efficiently operate its facilities, improve reentry, target recidivism and strategically invest in initiatives with opportunities for measurable gains.

Priority Investment Areas:

- **Technology and security enhancements:** deployment of body worn cameras for parole agents, replacement of inmate padlocks, implementation of the next generation of inmate tablets – enabling expansion of inmate communications and services, expansion of facial recognition technology, initiation of automated housing assignments and improvements in drug interdiction technology.
- **Reentry preparation and recidivism reduction:** provide marketable job experience in self-sustaining professions through expansion of correctional industries programs such as braille, denture lab, and concrete plant operations; extension of the “Little Scandinavia” housing concept to additional locations, and addiction services including Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT).
- **Operational excellence and cost control:** digital transformation of paper processes, including digital tracking of disciplinary and administrative custody placements and out of cell activities, inmate driver’s license/identification tracking and computerizing overtime hiring for corrections officers.
- **Specialty services to adapt to changing demographics:** skilled care, memory care, senior living, women-centered services and reentry opportunities for hard-to-place reentrants.
- **Workforce sustainability:** wellness services focused on reducing missed workdays and improving retention, pay increases to reduce competition with some county prisons and entry-level private sector work and training opportunities that promote career progression and leadership development.
- **Capital investment:** address deferred maintenance within our aging institutions before critical failures trigger costly emergency repairs.

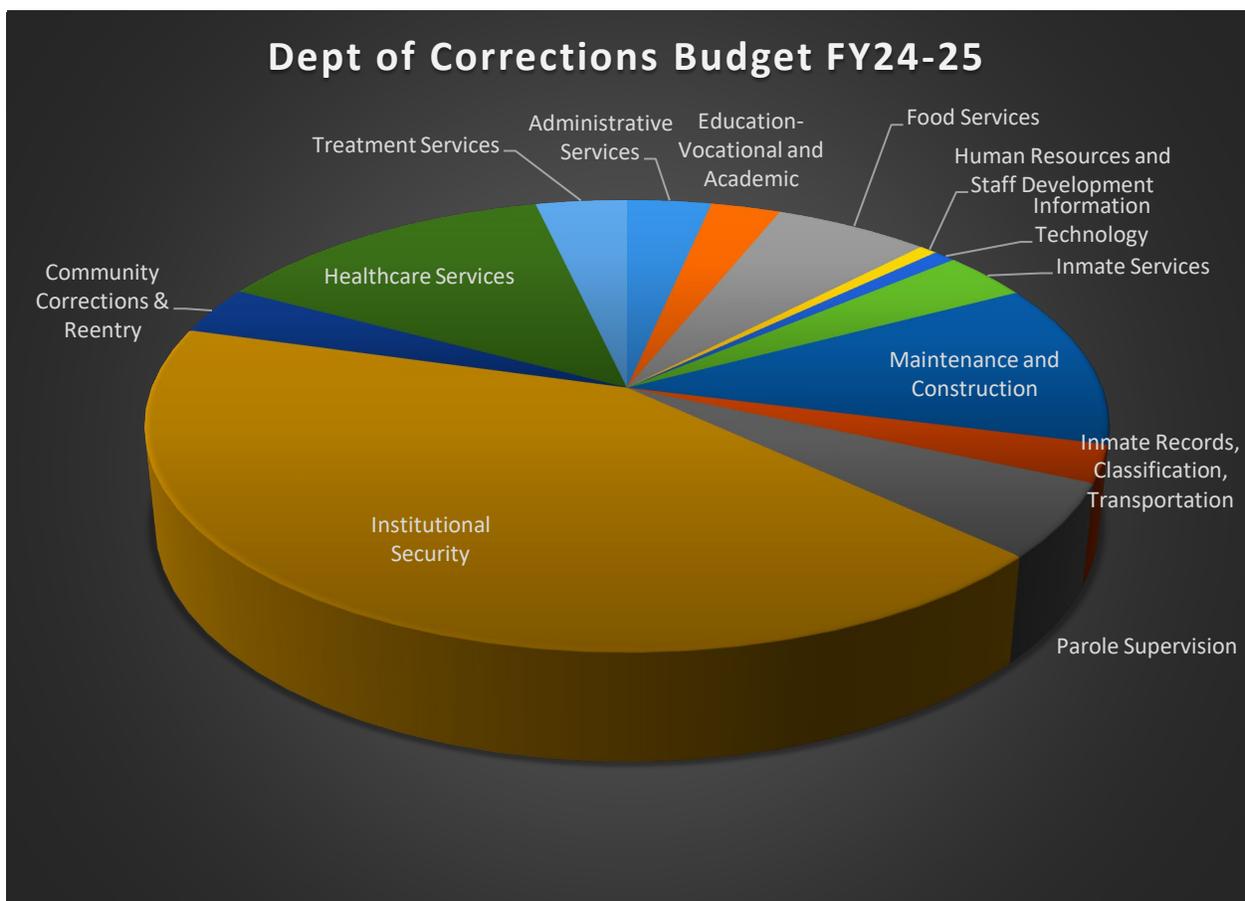
Contributors to Cost Growth

Notwithstanding the department’s continued efforts to curb costs and strategically spend in those areas with demonstrated returns on investment, cost factors beyond the department’s control will drive budget growth in FY26-27. Although anticipated cost avoidances achieved through closures will help mitigate growth, cost avoidances will be overshadowed by:

- Inflation, which continues to diminish purchasing power. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) notes food costs increased by 3.1% in 2025 – even higher at 3.9% for staples such as meats, poultry and eggs.
 - The department’s actual current food costs per day in January 2026 increased by 8.8% from FY24-25.
- Contractual raises across the department’s bargaining units are expected to add \$85.7 million in labor costs in FY26-27.

- *Litigation and federally driven growth of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). Enrollment doubled in 2025, and more than 4,000 inmates await evaluation for treatment eligibility. Nearly one in four medication dollars are now spent on MAT.*
 - *The average annual cost per patient in FY24-25 was approximately \$10,738.*
- *Health care and mental health care costs continue to increase with greater demands for medically necessary care that cannot be provided within department facilities – incurring costs for both the service and security escorts to community providers.*
- *Consistent with national trends², high levels of workforce attrition remain, with significant numbers of new hires leaving within the first nine months of employment. This churn negates investments in training and pressures both recruitment and training.*

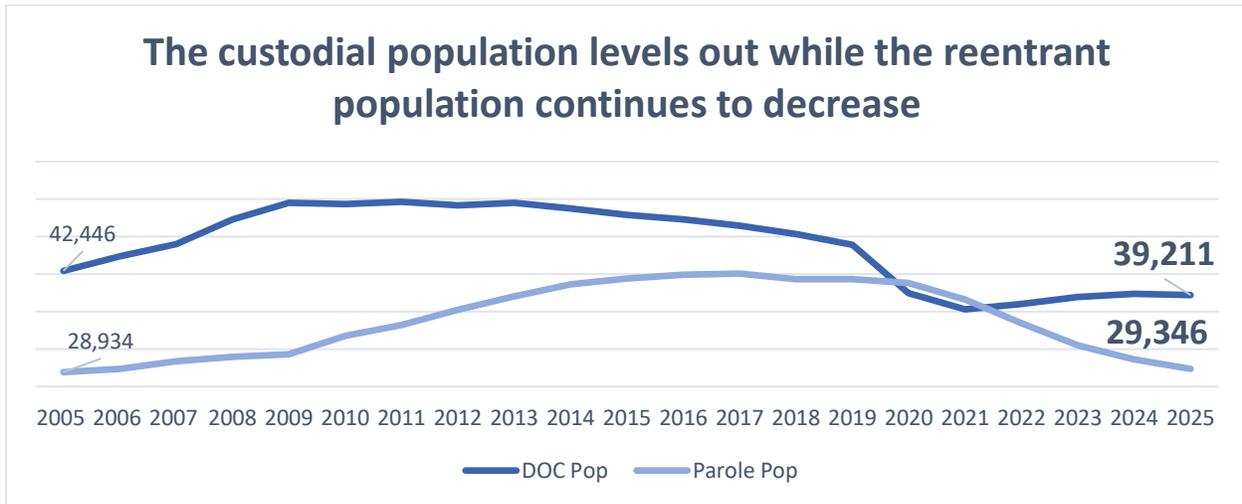
Spending Allocations:



As depicted in the above chart, the department’s operations are complex and appropriations support operations and staff salaries associated with diverse services that lay the foundation for safe incarceration through successful reentry.

² <https://safeinsideproject.org/key-findings>

Population Trends:



Custodial Population:

The custodial population includes individuals housed in a State Correctional Institution (SCI) and a Bureau of Community Corrections (BCC) state or contract center while participating in the State Drug Treatment Program (SDTP).

- The total population declined by 185 from 39,396 on December 31, 2024, to 39,211 on December 31, 2025.
- On December 31, 2025, 38,144 individuals were housed in an SCI, and 1,062 reentrants were participating in the SDTP program.

Stabilization of the department’s population over the past three years enabled the closure of two state-run community corrections centers in 2025 and significant steps towards redistributing the institutional populations of SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp. Final transfer of remaining SCI Rockview inmates was completed during the first quarter of 2026.

While closure decisions are difficult, the closing of these facilities will align the department’s bed space capacity with its population, eliminating fiscal inefficiencies associated with securing underutilized space.

Over the past five fiscal years, the average cost per incarcerated person per day rose by an average annual rate of 3.3% from \$169.71 to \$197.63. This increase aligns with the 16.3% increase in the CPI over the same span – indicating nearly flat spending.

- The four primary influencers of daily cost include: security services; essential health care; food costs; and treatment and educational programming.
 - Contractual raises for personnel to deliver these services and increases in food prices contribute to this annual growth.
- Security costs are the largest contributor to the cost per inmate per day and are shaped by the ratio of corrections officers to the inmate population, the number of facilities in operation and the density of inmate housing.

- *The closures of SCI Rockview and the Quehanna Boot Camp will lead to meaningful avoidances in future operational costs by redistributing staff to fill vacant positions, future reduction in staff complement through attrition and more efficient use of bed space.*

Parole Population:

The parole population decreased for a sixth consecutive year with 1,332 fewer reentrants at year-end 2025.

- *Fewer individuals are available for parole relative to decreases in the incarcerated population, reduction in the parole grant rate, average sentence length for new admissions delaying parole, reduction in admissions and SDTP parole diversions.*
- *The department managed workforce needs by not filling all vacant parole agent positions.*
- *2024 caseload ratios of one agent to 52 reentrants were maintained.*
- *The deliverable trade-off of lower agent-to-reentrant caseloads is improved community safety through manageable caseloads and more effective supervision.*

Over the past five fiscal years, the average cost per day to supervise a parolee increased by an annual rate of 13.1%. Daily costs are shaped by:

- *Specialization of caseloads and agent-to-reentrant ratios.*
- *Contractual raises for personnel.*
- *Transportation/fuel costs to conduct community supervision contacts.*

Female Population Trends:

The female population held steady between year-end 2024 and year-end 2025, increasing by six female inmates for a total of 2,180 female inmates in custody.

- *Incarcerated women are provided with preventative health screenings, including OB/GYN visits and mammograms; free menstrual and incontinence products; pregnancy services, including prenatal, doula and lactation services; and access to parenting and child visitation programs.³*
- *Average annual medical costs for this population dropped for the first time in eight years from \$15,046.14 to \$14,017.61.*

Aging Population Trends:

The number of inmates over the age of 50 increased by 164 in 2025 and as of December 31, 2025, there were 11,090 incarcerated persons over the age of 50, representing 28.3% of the incarcerated population.

- *Since 2021, this population increased by 1,101 inmates with the increasing age at admission and percentage of the population serving life sentences influencing this growth.*
 - *The age at admission increased to 38.5 in 2025, growing by 1.5 years (4.1%) since 2021.*
 - *The under 30 population now represents just 15.1% of the population compared to 28.6% at year-end 2015.*

³ <https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/cor/documents/state-prisons/incarcerated-womens-resource-guide.pdf>

- 13.6% of the population is serving a life sentence and 0.2% are serving a death sentence.
 - Planning to care for transitions to end-of-life for these individuals is a growing priority.
- Because the incarcerated population tends to age at a rate that is five to ten years beyond their chronological age, the demarcation of age 50 is a meaningful indicator of future needs, including: medical costs; specialized institutional housing needs; and advanced-age reentry services.
- Elevated costs associated with this demographic include:
 - 115.5% greater medication costs.
 - Greater necessity for community health care treatment – driving costs associated with both care and security escorts.
 - Increased need for skilled, memory and infirmity unit care, that not only require traditional security staff, but also require intensive medical staffing not applicable to general population.



Adequate funding to prepare for the long-term needs of this population is a strategic priority, including:

- Specialized senior living units and program staffing to provide meaningful opportunities for the elderly inmates to remain physically and mentally active, potentially mitigating age-related declines.
- Skilled care, hospice care, and chronic care units with adequate staffing to support elderly inmates through end-of-life.
- Memory care for inmates with dementia related conditions.
- Reentry services for inmates who are released at an advanced age, with advanced health conditions and who are typically precluded from admission to nursing homes and related services because of their criminal histories.

Mental Health Needs:

Approximately 38.4% of the institutional population is being treated for a mental illness and approximately 7.5% are diagnosed with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI).

- **Males:** 36.9% are receiving mental health treatment and 7.2% have an SMI diagnosis.
- **Females:** 64.6% are receiving mental health treatment and 13.8% have an SMI diagnosis.
- Individuals committed to our care with mental health needs drive costs associated with medication, mental health treatment, and specialized housing.
- Individuals with concurrent age-related and mental health needs are often considered hard-to-place and are typically excluded from traditional community services by their criminal records.

- Strategic development of community resources or incentives to house these individuals are essential.

Staffing:

The largest slice of the budget pie comprises security costs – driven by security personnel, who protect our facilities and the public 24 hours per day, seven days per week, 365 days per year. Maintaining adequate levels of staffing to fill essential security posts and provide proper relief for these brave individuals is a basic requirement of meeting the strategic goals of optimizing safety and security and building and sustaining an engaged, effective workforce. High levels of vacancies not only drive overtime needs but also contribute to workforce fatigue and burnout when staff are mandated to remain on duty regularly.

Corrections Officer Vacancies:



Throughout Secretary Harry’s term, she prioritized filling vacancies to reduce workforce stress and reduce overtime.

- The department’s Recruitment & Retention (R&R) team recruited at 752 events, contributing to the hiring of 1,214 corrections officer trainees in 2025.
- The department’s human resource staff reduced the time-to-fill vacant positions by approximately five additional days in 2025.
- Following the reassignment of staff from SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp, the department anticipates the reduction of the corrections officer vacancy rate to approximately 3% and 17 of 22 facilities should reach a vacancy rate of 5% or less.

The department substantially invests into each corrections officer trainee, with facility orientation, five weeks of basic training, and a one-year on-the-job training program.

- The department continues to find that over 30% of these new hires choose to leave the position within the first nine months.
 - Recently instituted under 21 hiring retention is better, with 14% less attrition within the first nine months.

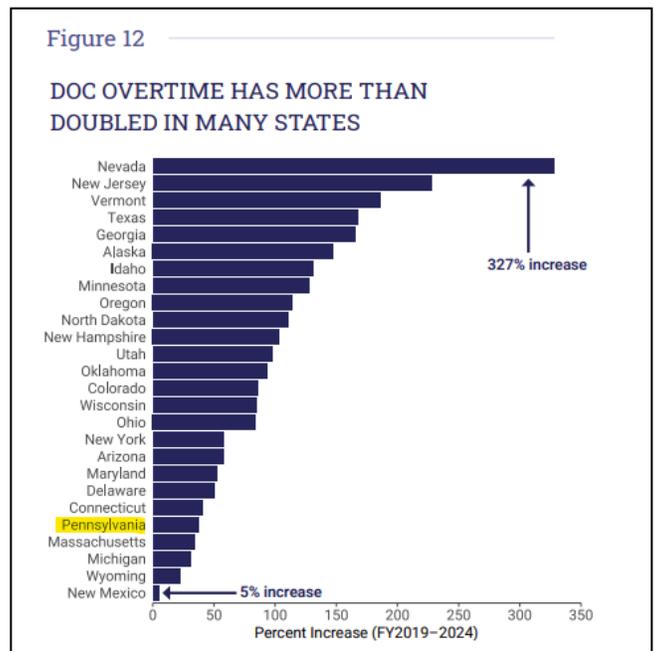
To improve retention of new hires, the department seeks adequate funding to strategically invest in:

- Expansion of wellness programs.
- Expansion of staff mentoring programs.
- Training opportunities that encourage professional growth.

Overtime:

The department reduced overtime spending in FY24-25 by approximately \$2 million, despite the regional hiring freeze associated with pending facility closures. FY25-26 projections suggest that overtime spending will remain under \$150 million.

- FY24-25 overtime spending dropped below \$150 million for the first time since FY20-21.
- Although costs remained elevated since FY19-20, Pennsylvania is faring better than other states who experienced an average increase of 100% or more in overtime costs during the same span⁴.
- Corrections is a 24/7 operation and essential security posts must be staffed at all times.
- Overtime remains a fundamental reality to cover vacancies, hospital trips, community medical visits, routine absences (sick days, FMLA leave), walk time associated with correctional officer egress during change of shift and stress leave awarded through the corrections officer collective bargaining agreement.
- Mandatory overtime remained consistent with the previous fiscal year at 15% of the total overtime hours worked.
- Controlling mandatory overtime remains a priority as it affects staff wellness and likely influences retention of new hires.
- Vacancies are the largest overtime driver, and the department anticipates redeployment of staff from closed facilities may have a positive impact on overtime needs at some facilities.
- Hospital posts and medical trips – to care for our changing demographics - are the next largest inducer of overtime, with at least two staff assigned to supervise each inmate at all times.



⁴ <https://safeinsideproject.org/key-findings#fiscal>

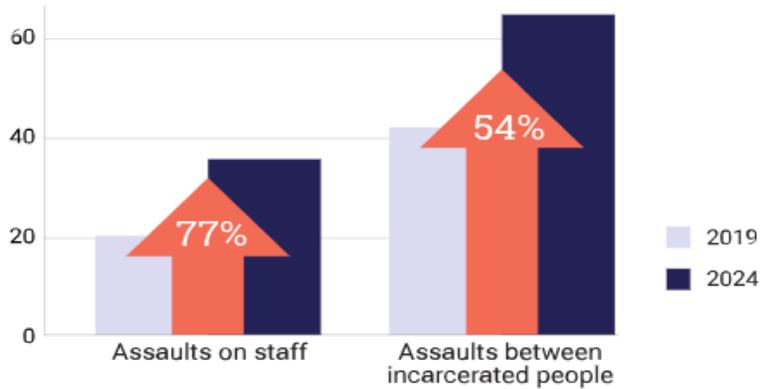
- Strategic investment in greater staffing resources for hospital and medical posts is necessary to optimize safety and security, while reducing reliance on overtime.

Prison Violence:

Total violent incidents increased by approximately 6.1% over 2024 totaling 2,789 violent incidents.

Rates of assaults on both staff and incarcerated people have risen sharply across most state prison systems.

Assaults on Staff and Incarcerated People per 1,000, 2019–2024



Data includes Alabama, Arkansas, California, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin
Source: Safe Inside Report (Appendix C)

- Pennsylvania’s trends are consistent with national trends observed by the Safe Inside Project⁵, where rates of assaults within prison surged following the pandemic.
 - For perspective, Pennsylvania’s rates per 1,000 inmates are lower than those observed in the analysis.
- Although findings of guilt for violence increased in the aggregate, it is noted that total findings of guilt for violent incidents decreased at nine of the 24 SCIs.
 - The increase observed at two SCIs equate to approximately 48% of the total observed increase in violent incidents.
 - Any rise in violence is unacceptable, but contextualizing the increases plays a key role in determining where strategic intervention may be most useful.

Targeting Violence:

The department formed a Violence Reduction Task Force in October 2024, which continued to meet throughout 2025 to formulate strategies to curtail the contributors to violence. While task force recommendations continue to be vetted, the following significant interventions were introduced and will continue to be evaluated:

- Front-end violence prevention programming for inmates assessed at high risk of violence.
- DEESCALATION training began for new corrections officers in 2025 and expands to existing staff in 2026.

⁵ <https://safeinsideproject.org/key-findings#health-and-safety>

- *Policy changes to enable security restrictions from possessing property items used as improvised weapons.*
- *Targeted, intelligence-driven searches to reduce weapons and contraband contributions to violence.*
- *Phased replacement of inmate padlocks to a new, lighter version to deter the padlocks from being weaponized.*

Future Initiatives:

Strategic investment is necessary to further optimize safety and security. Adequate funding is sought to enable the enactment of:

- *An automated cell-assignment pilot program to reduce cellmate incompatibility driven violence.*
- *Expansion of inmate employment opportunities to reduce idleness, like Prison Industry Enhancement (PIE) legislation introduced as House Bill 2154 this session.*
- *Additional targeted searches.*
- *Structured peer mentoring programs focused on problem solving and deescalating violence.*
- *Research-driven positive reinforcements when there are reductions in facility violence.*

Visitation:

Department analysis concluded that visitation, of any type, reduces recidivism and the department remains committed to ensuring inmates are able to maintain family and community ties to the greatest extent possible.

- *Visits topped one-million for the first time in 2025.*
- *In-person visits increased by more than 5,000 and video visits increased by more than 50,000.*
- *Enhancements to the scheduling platform continue to improve the end-user experience.*
- *The department partnered with the Pennsylvania Prison Society (PPS) in 2025 to coordinate quarterly bus trips for in-person visits to four facilities.*
 - *Potential expansion to additional facilities may occur in the later portion of 2026.*

The department's strategic plan and budget priorities include expansion of efforts to reduce recidivism – including visitation.

- *The department anticipates finalizing a contract for next generation of inmate tablets in 2026. The scope of work includes capabilities for video visitation.*
- *Strategic investment for funding to supply a tablet to each inmate is critical to expanding visiting access and achieving other strategic optimizations of safety and security.*

Preparing for Reentry:

The Office of Reentry and its supporting bureaus/offices collectively deliver services to provide each inmate the prospect of becoming a successful reentrant. Reentry is a primary focus upon entry into the SCI system, with 86.9% of the inmate population anticipated to return to the community.

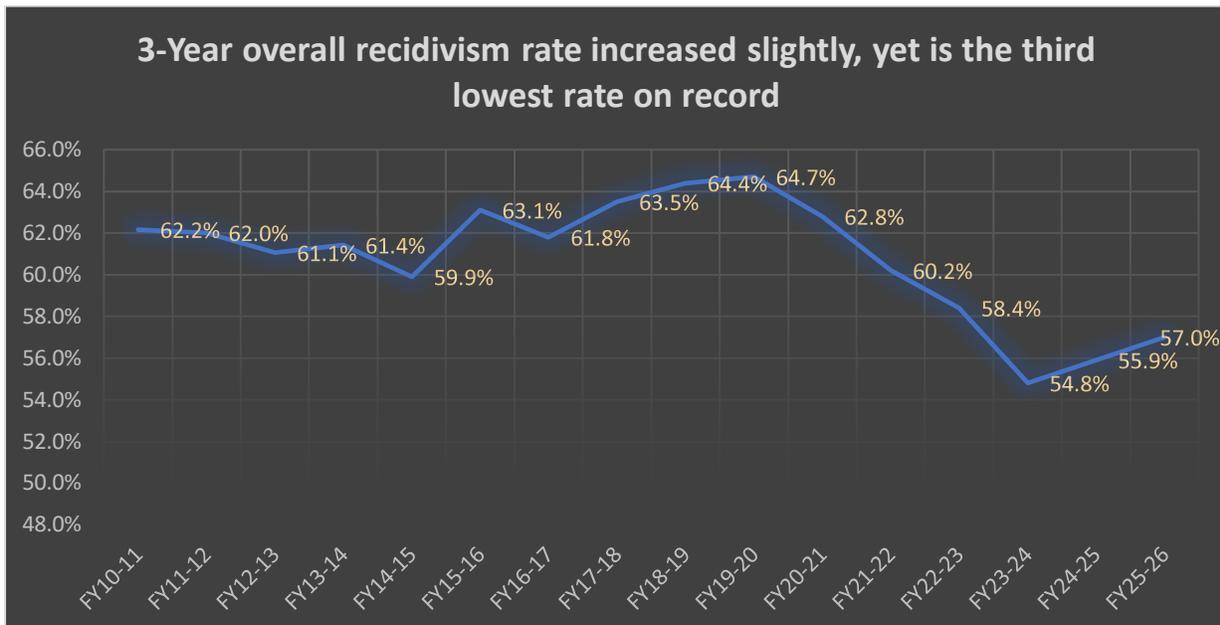
- ***Educational achievements:*** *1,017 inmates earned GEDs and Commonwealth Secondary Diplomas and 5016 completed vocational programs.*

- **Bureau of Community Corrections (BCC):** transitioned over 2,700 paroled reentrants to an approved home plan, including 158 who were designated as hard-to-place.
 - An additional 667 reentrants successfully completed the SDTP program through the BCC.
 - BCC reentrants maintained an employment rate of 79%.
- **Workforce Development:** expanded the partnership with PA CareerLink from Philadelphia community corrections facilities to Pittsburgh facilities.
 - More than 330 reentrants participated in CareerLink services in 2025.
 - HIRE committee participation and the department’s partnership with PennDOT led to the first reentrant hired in September 2025.
 - The department is in negotiations with the Department of Conservations and Natural Resources to possibly expand HIRE partnerships.
- **Community Reentry Parole Agents (CRPAs):** conducted 7,627 new release orientations in 2025 and approximately 3,887 interventions focused on keeping high need reentrants in the community.
- **Veterans Resource Agents (VRAs):** launched in the summer of 2025, these agents assist veteran reentrants in their districts with linkages to service-connected benefits and offer support groups to address the unique challenges veteran reentrants face upon return to the community.

Building future success in reentry (and ultimately a reduction in recidivism) requires strategic investment by the Commonwealth to counter the common barriers faced by reentrants, including:

- Affordable housing, incentives for second chance employers and services for those designated as hard-to-place because of their conjoined criminal histories and medical/mental health complexities.

Recidivism and Desistance:



The latest three-year recidivism rate rose by 1.1% to 57.0% in 2025. The one-year recidivism rate also increased by 0.7% to 34.6%. Although the rate increased slightly over the past year, 2025 marks the

fourth consecutive year where the recidivism rate remains under 60% and the third lowest rate on record.

- *Recidivism is a binary, pass/fail metric that does not fully account for the impacts of the department's programming, supervision and supportive services.*
- *The three elements of desistance: **Deceleration** (slowing the frequency of offense), **De-escalation** (reducing the severity of offenses), and **Cessation** (completely stopping criminal behavior) speak more comprehensively to the department's impacts.*
 - *The department's 2022 recidivism report found that 90% of reentrants met one or more desistance criteria.*
- ***Recidivism and Desistance Initiative (RDI):** launched in January 2025 with the aim to reduce recidivism by 10% by year-end 2030 and to measure the elements of desistance*
 - *Desistance data is expected to be available for analysis at the conclusion of 2026.*
 - *RDI sets monthly recidivism goals for each of the SCIs, CCCs, and Parole District Offices*
 - *Data for RDI impact analysis is anticipated in 2027.*

Final Remarks:

Under the Shapiro Administration, Secretary Harry set a clear strategic direction for the agency in 2025. Secretary Harry's clear vision enabled the corrections team to deliver meaningful results to the residents of this Commonwealth. Although tough decisions were made to close facilities in 2025, the decisions aligned resources with need and fiscal prudence.

The department trusts that the esteemed members of the Appropriations Committees recognize the department's commitment to fiscal responsibility, operational excellence, careful resource management and places confidence in its recommendations for the strategic investments contained herein.

The strength of this agency lies in its dedicated staff who selflessly sacrifice to uphold public safety while remaining committed to the principle that something positive can be done for each inmate and reentrant under our supervision. Investment in the department and its staff inevitably parlay into success for our populations. Success for our populations means gains in public safety for all residents of the Commonwealth.

We hope that as we progress into FY26-27, members of the Appropriations Committees find it practical to invest in the department's efforts to optimize safety and security; reduce recidivism; demonstrate operational excellence; and build and sustain an engaged, effective workforce to continue delivering results to the Commonwealth through 2030 and beyond.