

FY2024-25 BUDGET TESTIMONY



PA Department of Corrections
Secretary Dr. Laurel R. Harry

Intro

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections is proud of the work and improvements that have been made, and continue to be made, in this critical time for criminal justice in Pennsylvania. The Shapiro Administration is refocusing on the basics of corrections and working to build safer communities. During the first year of the Shapiro Administration, we made tremendous strides in maintaining safe and secure institutions, implementing robust programming for incarcerated people and reentrants, and ensuring staff are well-trained and return home safely to their families each and every day.

For the incarcerated population, this begins on day one with new and improved diagnostic and classification tools that allow our staff to better assess the risk level and needs of each individual and the history that led them to incarceration. Implementation of the STRONG-R assessment tool is still in its early phases but is already improving our ability to identify the risks and programming needs of each person in our care, while also removing racial, ethnic, or gender bias in the assessment process.

The department increased partnerships with community-based organizations and non-profits to expand programming. By leveraging our network, we are opening doors to new programs and volunteers that give our population and reentrants individualized options that reflect their needs. Vendor engagement is at an all-time high, and we are demonstrating we can provide effective programming and support while also being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars.

As many employers know, recruitment and retention are challenges today, and our department is no exception. To compete in a tight labor market, the department must be strategic, innovative, and comprehensive with its recruitment and retention efforts. A fully staffed complement helps the department maintain safe facilities, reduce reliance on overtime to compensate for vacancies, and helps our staff remain physically and mentally well. With this in mind, the department made a number of critical changes, including creating a dedicated recruitment and retention team and changing the minimum age requirement for corrections officers from 21 to 18. The move aligned the corrections officer classification with other DOC positions that permit employment at the age of 18 and brings Pennsylvania in line with 25 other state systems and many county correctional facilities in the Commonwealth that hire corrections officers under the age of 21.

This Administration firmly believes that supporting staff wellness goes hand-in-hand with maintaining safe institutions and communities. To that end, the Governor's budget has requested \$239,000 to support the physical and mental health of DOC staff and prevent burnout. We believe that this support will help our staff become more resilient and better equipped to handle the stressors of the job, which will positively impact the safety and security of correctional facilities in Pennsylvania.

The department has taken additional steps over the last year to improve staff training. We have expanded on the most critical aspects of training, such as communication and de-escalation techniques. We have also expanded and use of force training and added a number of new modules including a significant course on trauma-informed care. We are proud to say that 93% of state correctional institution (SCI) staff and 100% of community corrections staff have completed trauma-informed training since its implementation.

The vast majority of people who are incarcerated in Pennsylvania's prisons return home to the community. They return to our neighborhoods and are deserving of opportunities for housing and

employment so they can become active participants in what makes this Commonwealth prosperous. It is our job to provide them with the tools to successfully re-enter their communities. We know there is plenty of work to be done and we are facing that challenge head on.

DOC Budget Stewardship

Over the past five fiscal years, the average cost per day for incarcerated individuals increased by an average annual rate of 6.8%. The increase in the most recent year was held to 3.3%.



Over the past five fiscal years, the average cost per day for a parolee increased by an annual rate of 4.9%. However, the most recent over-the-FY increase was 11.9%.

The average cost per day for a parolee increased by an average of 4.9% over the last 5 years



The cost to supervise a parolee is \$11.46 per day versus \$44.12 per day to incarcerate an individual at the marginal rate. The marginal rate reflects the cost savings associated with an individual's release from prison. However, as the number of incarcerated people released increases, so does the potential for cost savings per person that could be achieved through housing unit closures; drawing closer to the average cost per day.

Staffing

Centralized hiring for corrections officers, initiated by the department in 2016, decreased the vacancy rate to 1.1% at its lowest point; however, the department has experienced significant vacancies in recent years, which is exacerbated by the inability to replace and retain employees.

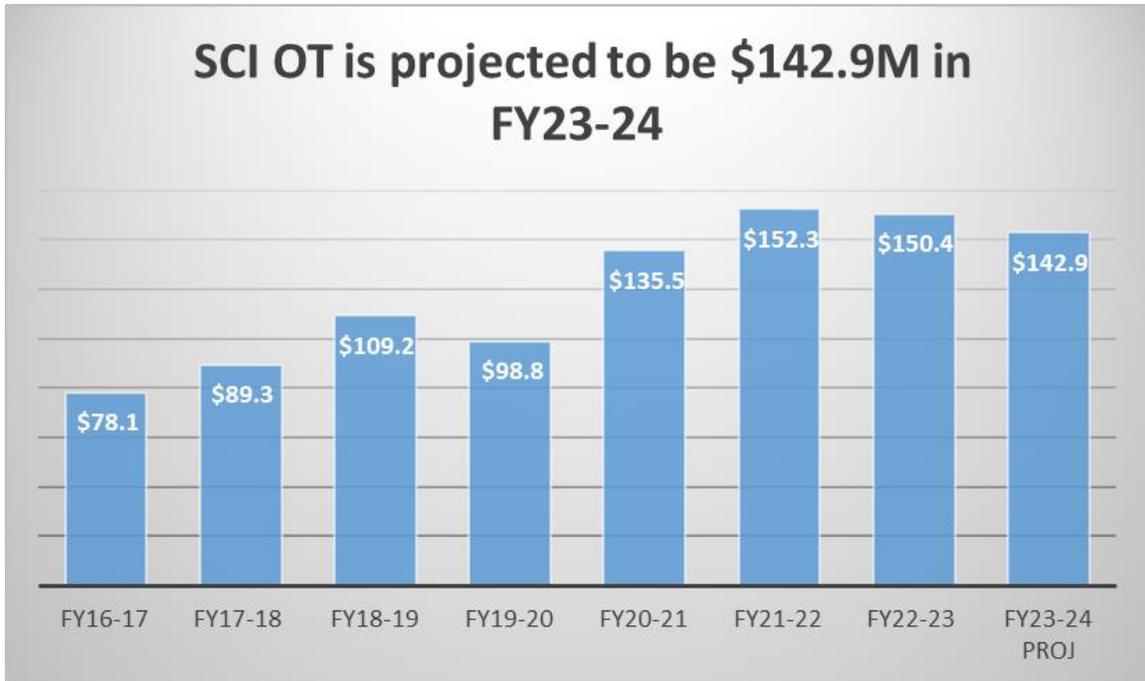
CORRECTIONS OFFICER VACANCY RATE HAS DROPPED 3.1 PERCENTAGE POINTS SINCE THE PEAK IN SEPTEMBER 2022



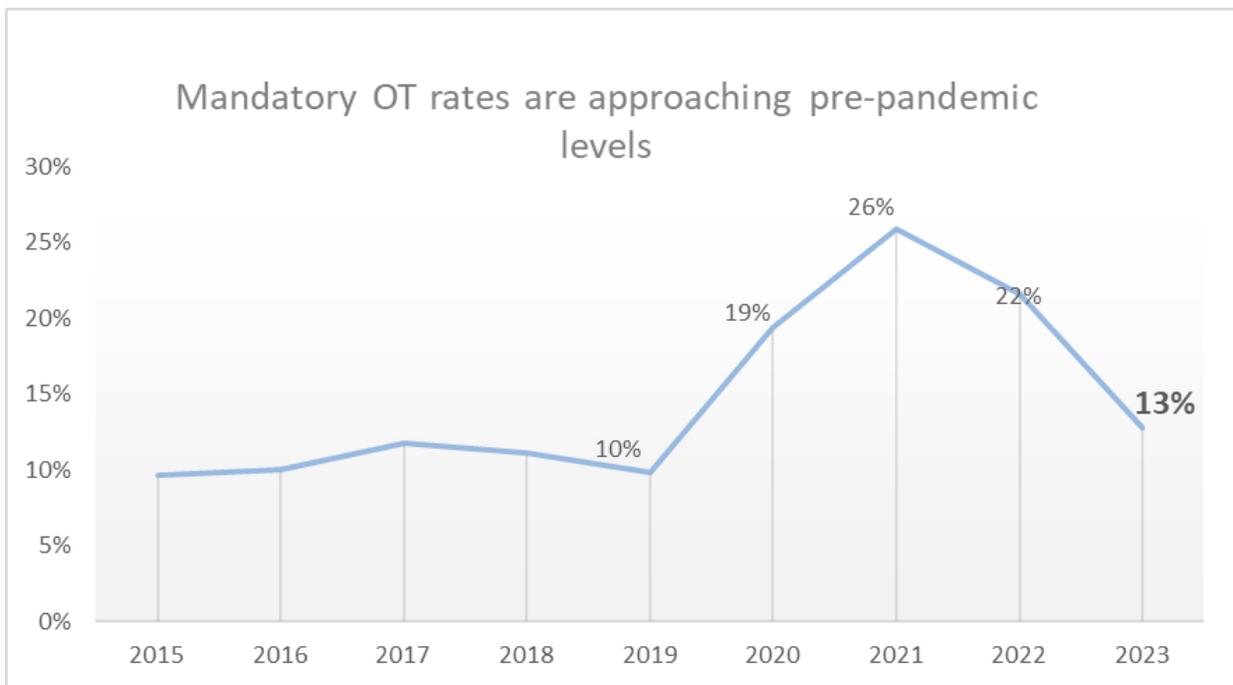
In October 2022, the department created a new Recruitment and Retention team. The group is led by a corrections captain and comprised of 15 active corrections officer lieutenants. This unit focuses on recruiting corrections officer trainees, parole agents and community corrections center monitors, and retaining them as they acclimate to their public safety careers. The unit works with each State Correctional Institution (SCI), Parole District, and the Bureau of Community Corrections to understand their needs. Its members travel the state engaging students and other potential employees at job fairs, universities, and public events. The department attributes much of our recent recruitment success to this new unit. In 2023, the Recruitment and Retention team attended nearly 600 events and the corrections officer vacancy rate has decreased each quarter.

Our current staffing deficits are spread across numerous areas of responsibility, but the main areas of concern include corrections officer positions, nurses, and field agents. As of December 2023, the complement of entry-level corrections officers was 7,553. Nurses comprise 763 positions and field agents 1,002 positions. The corresponding vacancy rates were 8.2% for corrections officers, 13.1% for nurses, and 5.0% for field agents.

Corrections officer and nursing positions require 24/7 coverage, which can be a significant drier of voluntary and mandatory overtime to fulfill essential staffing plans. The projected overtime for the SCI fund is \$143 million, which was budgeted for \$128 million for Fiscal Year 23-24.



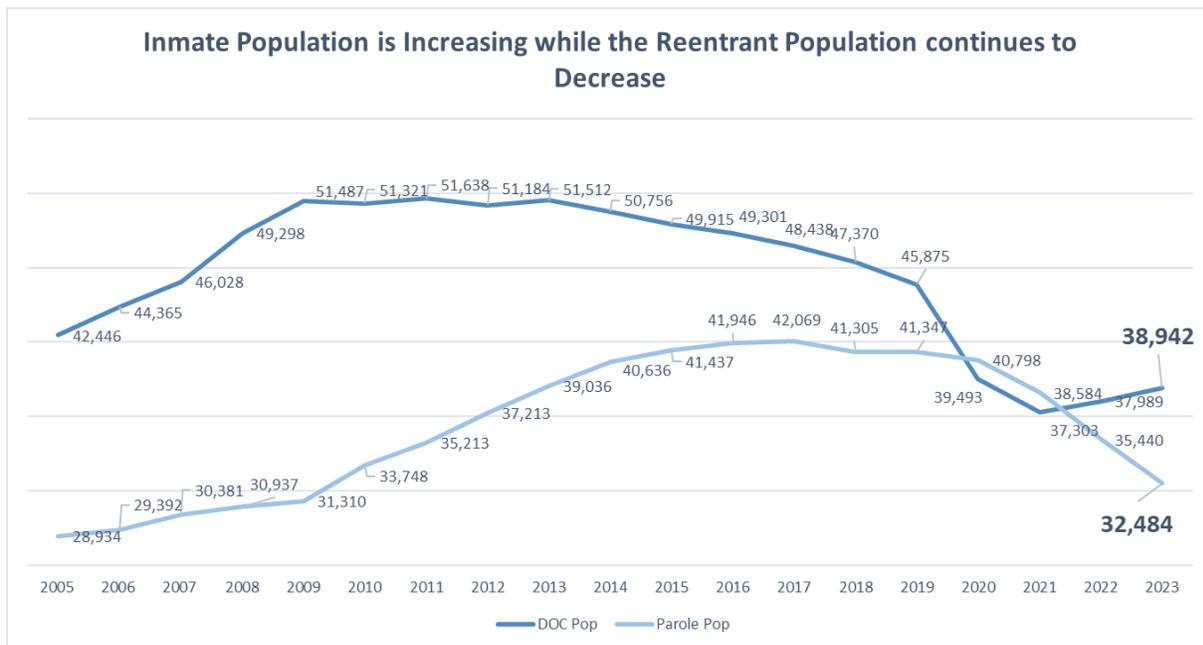
Mandatory overtime decreased from 22% to 13% in the past year. Prior to COVID, the goal was to hold mandatory overtime to 10% or less.



DOC and Parole Population Trends

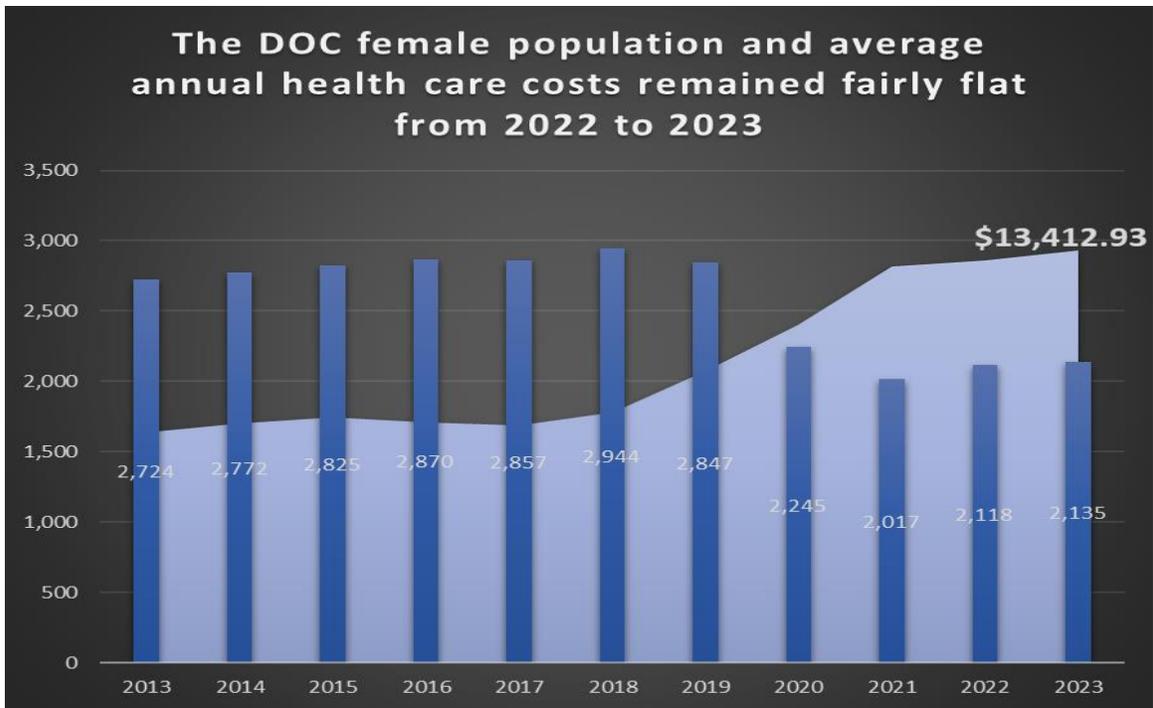
At 38,942, the DOC population is 25% lower than at its peak of nearly 52,000 in 2012 but increased slightly over the last year. This increase is likely a result of the criminal justice system returning to normal operations after COVID. Our projections suggest that the DOC population may continue to increase slightly to 40,645 by February 2025 and then flatten out thereafter. Governor Shapiro's additional investment of \$4 million through Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) for counties to implement changes through recent probation reform will continue to lower the department's population by shortening the lengthy terms of probation, reducing probation revocations that result in incarceration, and ensuring success for probationers.

The parole population decreased significantly last year. This decrease was likely a lag from the decrease in the DOC population during COVID. In other words, with fewer people in prison during COVID, fewer people are now eligible for release to parole supervision.



Female Population

The female population has remained flat from 2022 to 2023. The medical costs have also remained steady.

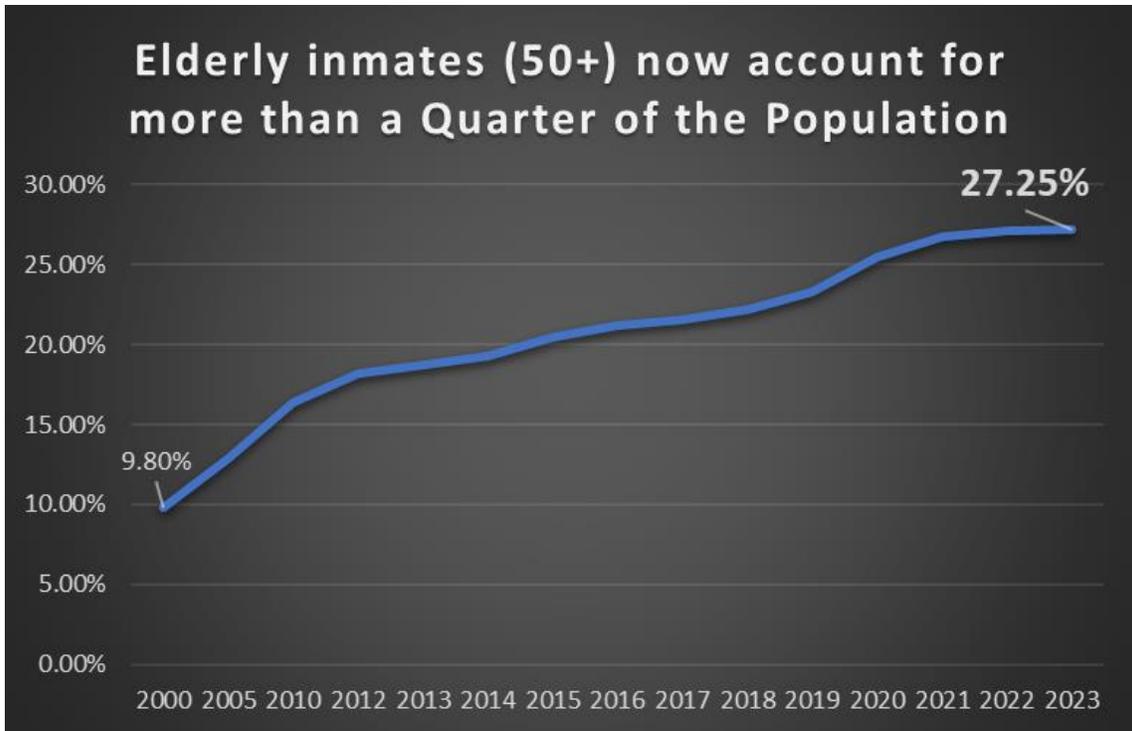


To support women in our custody and provide trauma-informed programming, the department established a Doula Pilot Program at SCI Muncy (2022) in partnership with the Department of Human Services, using grant funding from several external sources. The program has served 37 women since its implementation. Expansion of the program is underway with the addition of a lactation room at SCI Muncy. Although SCI Cambridge Springs does not currently have a need for services, the final details for implementing the program at SCI Cambridge Springs are being settled for when the need arises.

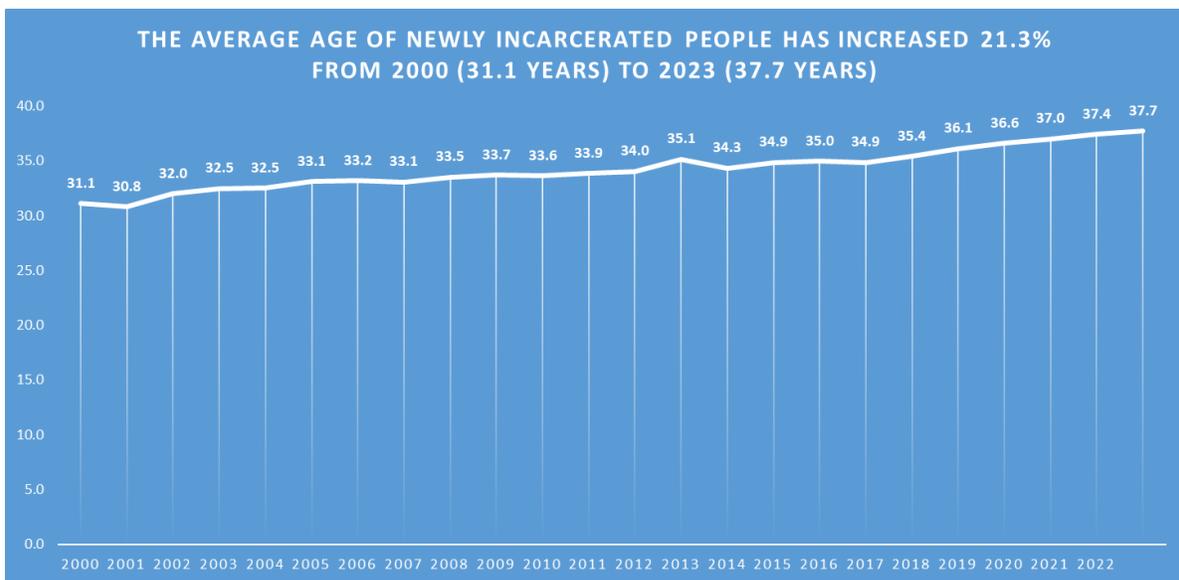
It should be noted that Governor Shapiro signed into law the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act (formerly House Bill 900, now Act 47 of 2023) this past December.

Geriatric Population and Medical Costs

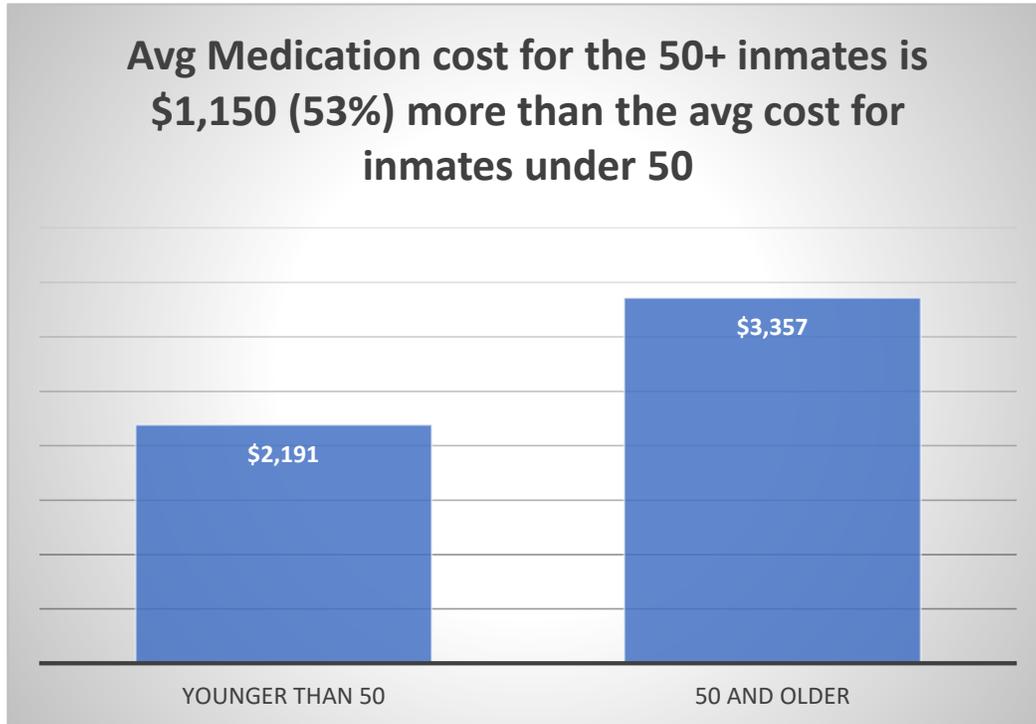
As of December 31, 2023, there were 10,611 incarcerated people over the age of 50, constituting 27.25% of the total population. This percentage has steadily increased since 2000. To address the aging population, the department operates three special long-term care units, combining both skilled and personal care at SCI Laurel Highlands, SCI Waymart, and SCI Muncy.



We have also seen that the average age of an individual at commitment is rising from year to year. The current average age at commitment is 38 years old, up from 31 years old in 2000. From 2000 to 2023, the elderly population increased by 5.8% while the average age of new commitments increased by 21.3%. In recent years, the major driver of the rise in the elderly population has been due to the increase in the average age of newly committed incarcerated people, not sentence length.



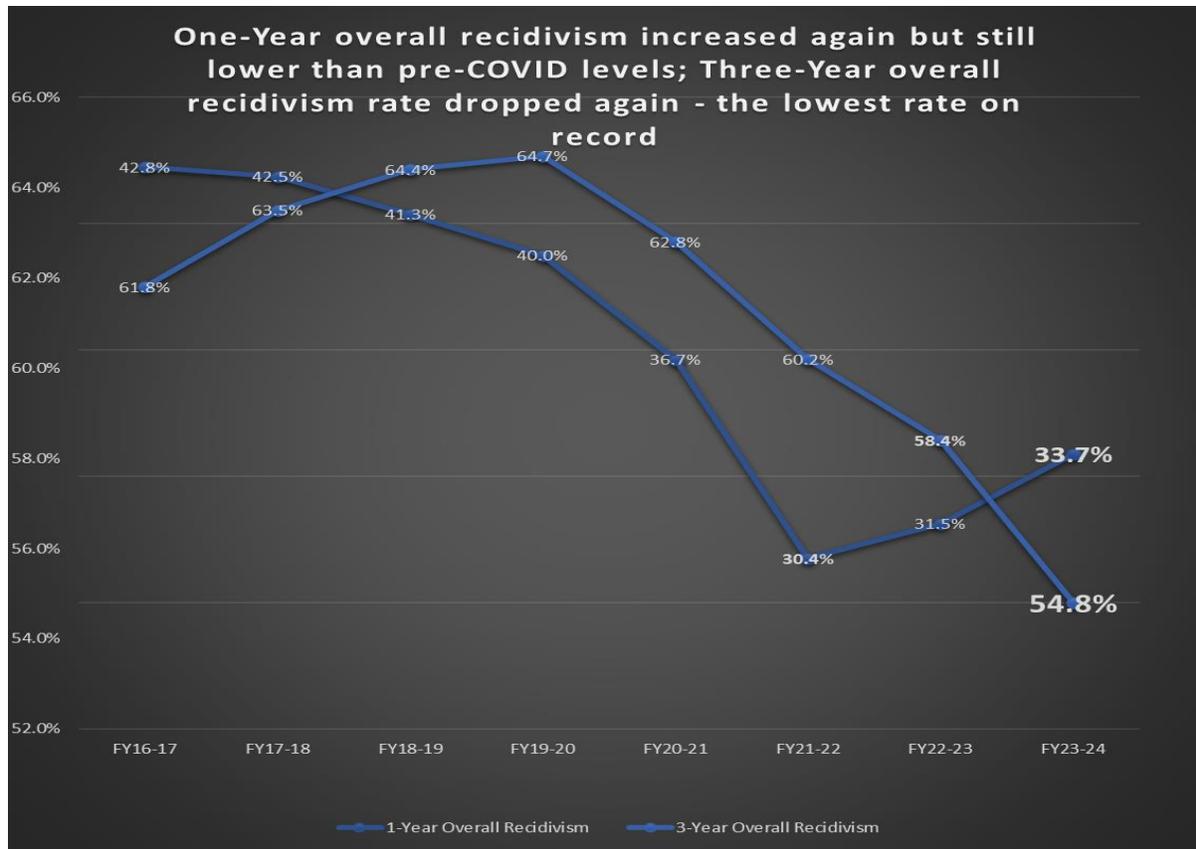
Nearly all of the incarcerated elderly population are on life-sustaining medication, driving costs to \$40.5M annually. The average annual medication costs per person for all who are under the age of 50 is approximately \$2,191, while for those individuals over age 50, it is \$3,357.



Compounding the costs associated with an aging population is an exceptionally high vacancy rate among state nursing staff and contracted physician staff. While the statewide vacancy rate is 13.1%, some facilities are experiencing vacancy rates nearing 40% of its medical complement. At the same time the healthcare needs of our older population are increasing, there are less staff to meet those needs without incurring excessive overtime costs.

Recidivism and Desistance

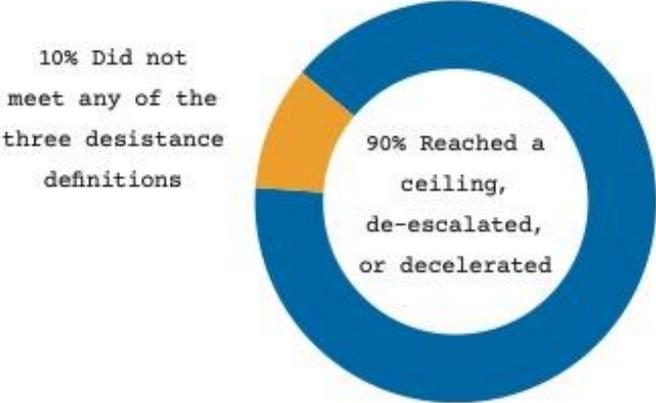
The latest three-year recidivism rate of 54.8% is the lowest it has been in at least 20 years. While the latest one-year and six-month recidivism rates are up slightly, they remain about two-to-four percentage points lower than the previous 20-year average.



“Desistance” is a relatively new concept for measuring correctional success. Desistance is the process by which an individual slows down or stops offending over time. The core idea of desistance is that individuals change over time and that traditional measures of recidivism are too limiting because they focus too much on failure rather than success. Focusing exclusively on recidivism rates in corrections is like focusing exclusively on school drop-out rates in education.

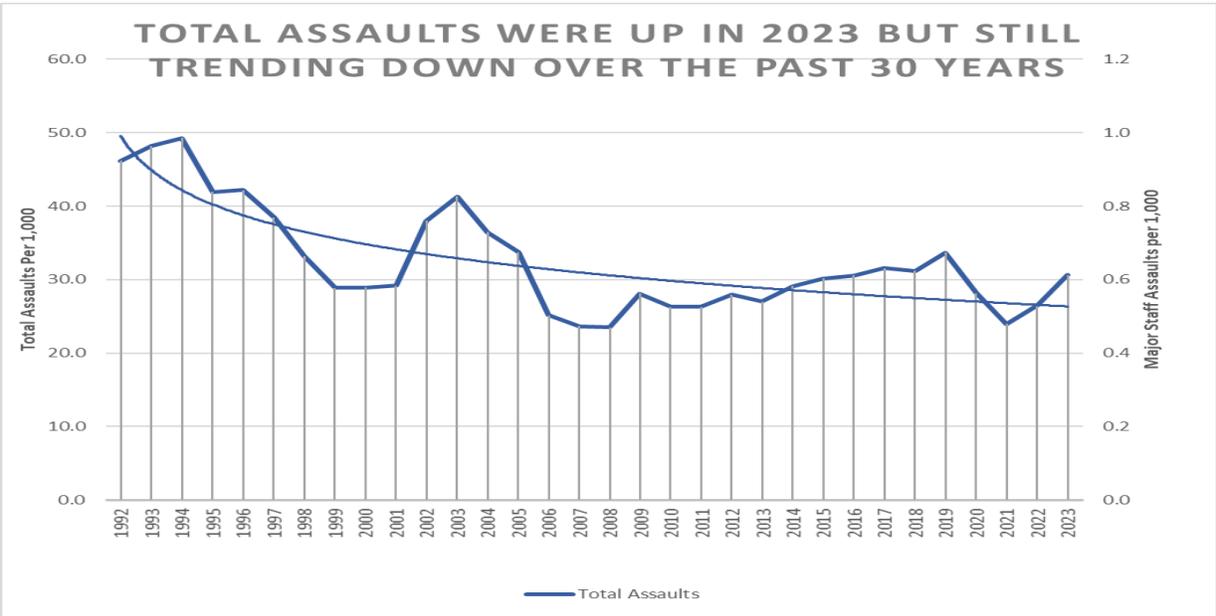
The process of desistance may include a reduction in the seriousness of offending (“de-escalation”), a reduction in the frequency of offending (“deceleration”), or ending the act of offending altogether (“cessation”). According to a recent report conducted by the department, 90% of reentrants either committed less serious crimes, slowed down in their rate of committing new crimes, or stopped offending altogether after release from prison.

90% OF REENTRANTS MEET ONE OR MORE BENCHMARK OF DESISTANCE AFTER RELEASE FROM PRISON



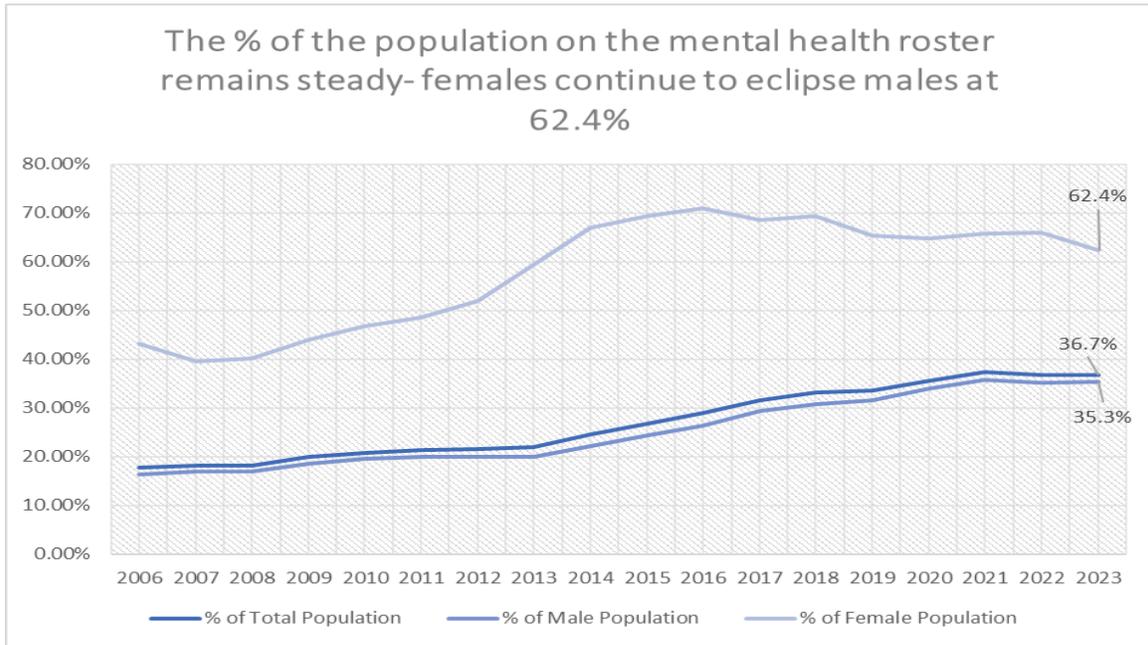
Prison Violence

Total assaults were up slightly in 2023, primarily due to an increase in assaults among incarcerated individuals. Staff assaults by an incarcerated person remained the same as in 2022, even though major assaults increased. Major assaults on staff by an incarcerated person are a sub-set of staff assaults that result in staff receiving outside medical treatment. While total assaults were slightly up in 2023, they remain lower than total assaults in recent years before COVID and also lower than 30 years ago when assault numbers were first gathered.

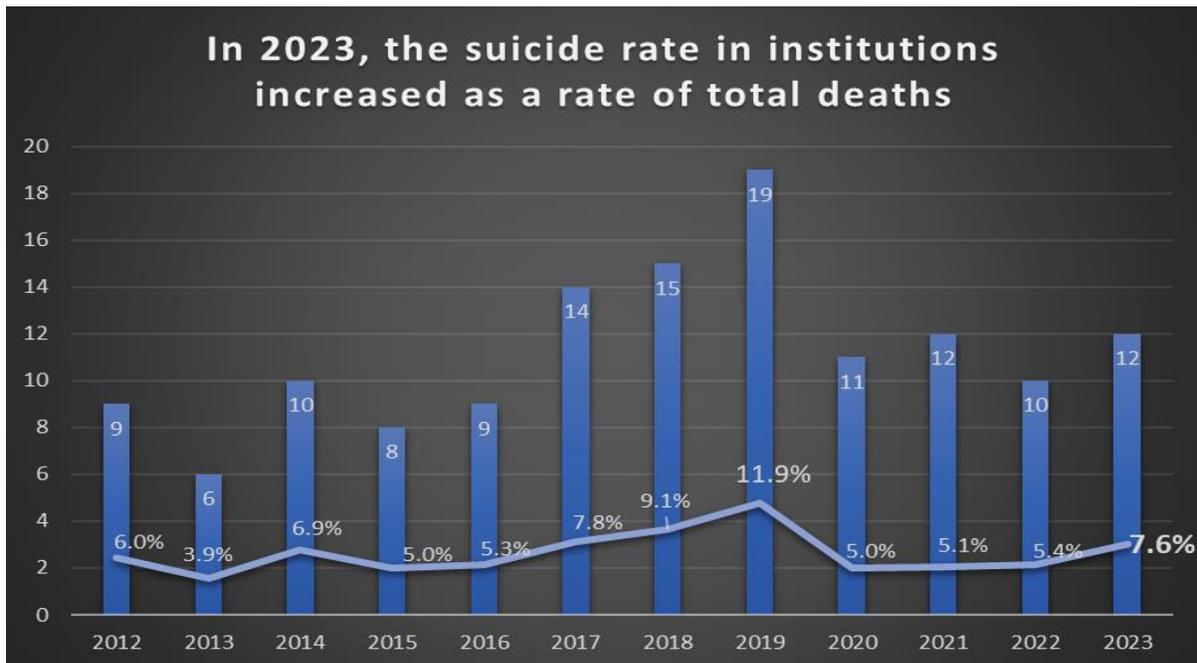


Mental Health

Approximately 36.7% of our population is being treated for a mental illness, with 7.6% diagnosed with a serious mental illness (SMI). Of our male population, 35.3% are actively receiving mental health treatment, with 7.3% (2,598) being diagnosed with a SMI. Among the female population, 62.4% (1,193) are currently receiving treatment and 12.5% are diagnosed with a SMI.



Suicides were up slightly in 2023, but still far lower than the total number of suicides in 2019.



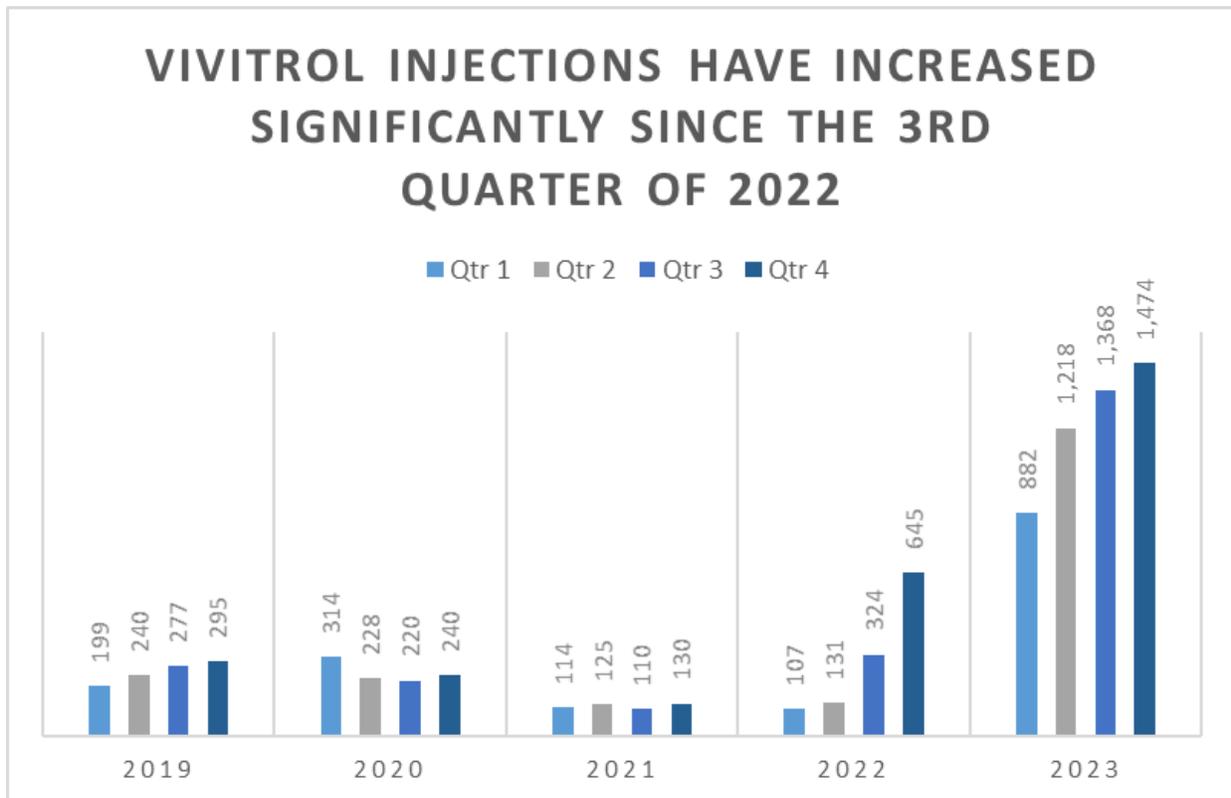
Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)

Since 2010, new admissions with an opioid addiction more than doubled, and a quarter of prison admissions who identify a “drug of choice” indicate heroin or opiate prescription drugs. The department has become a leader in providing MAT to individuals in Pennsylvania and frequently provide expertise to counties and policy makers alike.

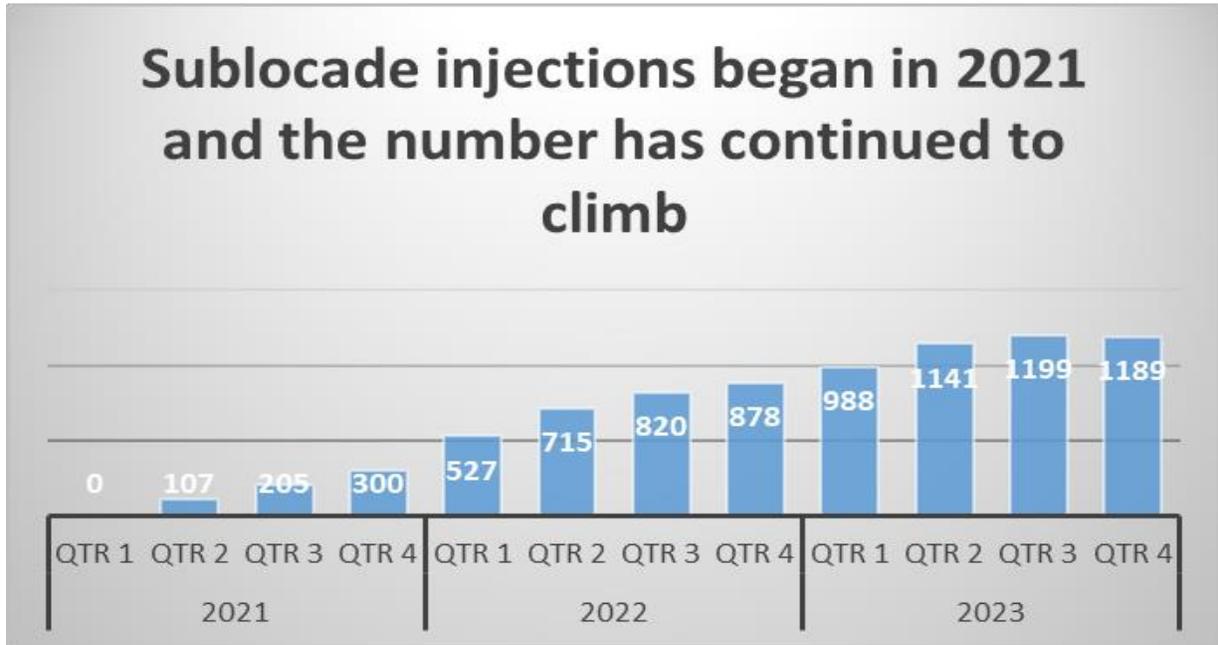
MAT was first piloted in FY13-14 and has since expanded to all 24 SCIs. MAT promotes behavioral, psychological, and emotional stabilization for individuals diagnosed with opioid use disorder.

Until FY23-24, the MAT program had been primarily funded by grants through the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP); however, the pace at which eligible participants have been admitted to the department has eclipsed available grant funds. The largest expense of the program is medication. Sublocade costs approximately \$2,100 per shot and Vivitrol costs approximately \$1,250 per shot. As the use of the injectable MAT medication has increased, so have the costs of the program. The Governor’s budget requests \$29.6 million in order to adequately fund this critical program.

Through December 2023, 4,942 Vivitrol injections have been provided to 4,480 individuals. At the end of the 3rd quarter of 2022, PA DOC expanded the MAT program to allow for all individuals who have a substance use disorder to request evaluation for their suitability to receive Naltrexone. The large increase in both the injectable and oral Naltrexone use is because of the expansion.



In 2023, the DOC expanded the use of Sublocade (injectable buprenorphine), offered through monthly injections to reduce diversion for illicit use. In 2023, 4,517 Sublocade injections were administered.

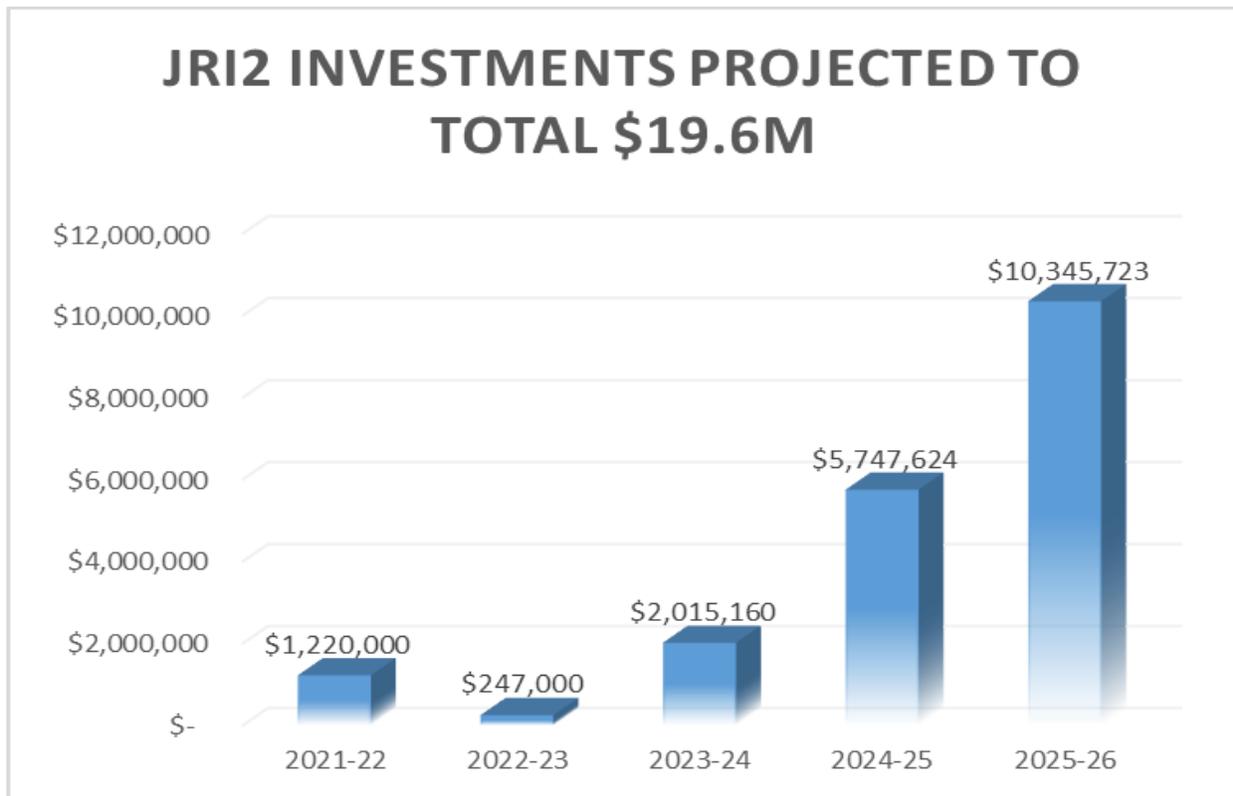


We are focusing resources on continuity of care for MAT participants as they transition to the community. MAT social workers in the Bureau of Community Corrections (BCC) coordinate with institutional staff and Single County Authorities for a smooth transition that sets reentrants up for success. We have also ensured that every parole agent has been provided with Naloxone for use in cases where they arrive on the scene of an overdose.

Justice Reinvestment 2

The legislature made monumental strides in adopting legislation that changes the way we look at sentencing, parole supervision, and diversionary placements. By placing incarcerated people into Short Sentence Parole, State Drug Treatment Program, or the Motivational Bootcamp, the Commonwealth saves money and enhances public safety. Savings are reinvested into our communities. The chart below reviews savings and projections from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

Fiscal Year	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24	FY 2024-25	FY 2025-26
Savings Calculation Year	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24	FY 2024-25
JRI2 Savings	\$1,220,485	\$494,970	\$4,030,320	\$11,495,248	\$11,495,248
JRI2 Distribution Percentage	100%	50%	50%	50%	90%
JRI2 Distribution Amount	\$1,220,485	\$247,485	\$2,015,160	\$5,747,624	\$10,345,723



Risk Assessment

All new commitments to the department are now assessed and assigned prescriptive programming based on the STRONG-R, a tool developed by Vant4gePoint. Vant4gePoint received a multi-year contract in mid-2020, totaling \$5.5 million.

The STRONG-R assessment tool differs from other “off-the-shelf” options in that it is highly customized. This customization results in a level of predictive accuracy higher than industry standards, as well as a number of staff efficiencies gained as they conduct assessments, develop case plans, make referrals, assign programming, and deliver programming that was not possible under the former system limitations.

A team of DOC staff and Vant4gePoint staff has devoted a substantial amount of time customizing the assessment’s inputs and analyzing potential results to ensure that the tool is not only as accurate as possible, but that it also eliminates racial and gender bias.

The department implemented use of the assessment tool and continues to provide training and guidance to the field to increase efficiency.

The total number of assessments completed since the inception of the new risk assessment tool is **71,112**. This includes initial assessments at admission, re-assessments, and parole assessments.

Visitation

The DOC unquestionably supports fostering connections between the incarcerated population and their families, and recognizes the role it plays in reducing recidivism. The department implemented a temporary video visitation solution during the COVID pandemic to protect inmates' health while still providing access to these vital connections. After seeing the success of the program, DOC continued video visitation, and it is now a permanent option for inmates and their families. Video visitation is extremely successful and is being utilized statewide at rates that far-exceed in-person visits. DOC conducted more than 862,000 video visits in 2023.

The department's transition to the scheduled visitation system has improved the overall delivery of visitation to provide a one-stop-shop for all visiting needs, to include: scheduling, management of visitations, notifications, and connectivity. As shown below, the department is committed to providing in-person and virtual connections.

Visit Type	2019	2021	2022	2023	% Change (2019 - 2023)
Video Visits Conducted		476,495	787,493	862,637	
In-Person Visits Conducted	206,758	35,024	64,985	81,949	-60%
Total Visits Conducted	206,758	511,519	852,478	944,586	365%
Avg # of Visits/incarcerated individual	4.5	13.7	22.4	24.3	440%

*2020 was omitted from the chart due to the stoppage of visits during COVID

A recently completed rigorous evaluation conducted by the department revealed that while receiving some type of visit appears to reduce recidivism, the type of visit received (in-person versus virtual) does not make a difference in terms of recidivism. Those who received in-person visits have the same recidivism rates as those who received virtual visits.

Parole Field Services

Our Parole Field Supervision division is constantly adapting to keep up with industry best practices and to ensure we are providing the best services possible. In the interest of safety and justice, the department has changed the mission of its field agents, adding specialized caseloads. Parole Field Supervision has developed a number of non-case-carrying specializations for agents in the areas of K9 searches, training, interagency taskforce collaboration, and more. Simultaneously, case-carrying agents may now receive caseloads focused on parolees who are sex offenders or who may have mental health or drug and alcohol related issues. Our agents can provide supervision with more understanding of the needs of the individuals on their caseload. The specialization of our agents across the board is leading to better quality supervision and safer communities. As shown in the chart below, the parole population continues to decrease, thanks in large part to the parole field services team.

Overall Agent Complement						
Fiscal Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Agents	663	681	678	688	685	684
Non Case Carrying Agents	83	84	74	101	97	91
Case-Carrying Agents	580	597	604	587	588	593
Specialty agents	80	80	106	110	118	137
Regular Case-Carrying Agents	500	517	498	477	470	456
Overall Parole Population						
Fiscal Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Population	41,327	41,347	40,798	38,584	35,440	32,484
Specialty Caseloads	4,328	4,318	5,725	5,638	5,261	5,827
Regular Population	36,999	37,029	35,073	32,946	30,179	26,657
CASELOAD RATIO	71	69	68	66	60	55

Reentry

Over the last decade, the Office of Reentry has been revolutionizing the way we prepare reentrants for their return to the community. The office continues to ensure that individuals who come to us leave better than when they arrived. This is done through education, treatment services, housing coordination, workforce training programs, and other creative programming outlets for incarcerated or reentering individuals to develop skills and acquire support.

This past year, the Division of Correctional Education worked hard to prepare its students and was able to achieve an 84% pass rate for the GED test, which is higher than the national pass rate of 75%. 756 incarcerated people earned their GED or Commonwealth Secondary Diploma in calendar year 2023. The department also provides a robust catalog of vocational offerings for qualified individuals interested in building upon their skills while incarcerated. As we look forward to expanding course offerings through Pell, we continue to support courses through our existing relationships with Bloomsburg University, Eastern University, Lehigh Carbon Community College, University of Scranton and Villanova University. Several Universities are working with the DOC and DOE in order to provide additional post-secondary opportunities within our state correctional institutions. Penn State University has just been approved to begin offering a 4-year program at one of our institutions with the ability to expand to others in future years. DOC has also committed to becoming a part of the PA CHEP (Consortium for Higher Education in Prison). Representatives from various institutions of higher learning will work closely with the DOC to review new programs and assist other colleges/universities/trade schools while navigating the federal approval process.

In the area of housing assistance, the Bureau of Community Corrections provides a temporary housing option for individuals transitioning into the community. They assist reentrants with their job searches, housing placement, and continuity of care needs while the reentrant resides in a center. However, there

are times when an individual is deemed Hard-to-Place (HTP) due to their demographics and criminal history. To help alleviate last-minute placements in less than ideal locations, the Office of Reentry collaborated with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Aging to create and implement a new training program for staff who work with HTP individuals. HTP individuals historically have had a difficult time finding housing post-release because of their complex needs. Our social workers and counselors work diligently to make connections with community providers; however, there is no obligation on the end of the provider to accept individuals, especially those who have a history of violence, sexual offenses, or arson. The new training for DOC staff focuses on the policies related to supporting HTP individuals and the various resources and supports available through our sister agencies involved in the process.

Recently, the DOC received \$1.1 million from the United States Department of Justice to implement performance-based contracts to expand its existing Housing Assistance Program to reentrants without earned income. Beginning late this fiscal year, participating vendors will start to receive federally funded outcome payments for placing eligible individuals in housing and for reduction in recidivism.

RESTRICTIVE HOUSING UNIT (RHU) REFORM

National best practices, proposed legislation, and litigation trends have shifted in favor of reducing the use of Extended Restrictive Housing (ERH) for management of problematic populations. Recognizing this shift, the department is working harder than ever to implement commonsense improvements with the buy-in of our incarcerated population, staff, and the unions and advocacy groups that represent them. We believe changes in our approach to restrictive housing will enhance rehabilitative efforts.

ERH is typically defined as being confined to a cell for 22 hours or more per day, for more than 30 days. While the department has historically provided diversionary programs for subsets of its population, to include those who are seriously mentally ill, those who are pregnant, and those who are participating in specialized reintegration programs; the department proactively extended these increased out-of-cell time opportunities to all individuals who are housed in its Custody Level 5 (CL5) housing units for more than 30 days to avoid ERH conditions of confinement. These reforms were piloted at eight facilities, beginning in October 2023, and expanded to all locations in January 2024. Reforms are estimated to provide additional out-of-cell opportunity for approximately 830 to 850 individuals and remove them from ERH housing conditions.

Additional out-of-cell opportunities include such activities as extra outdoor exercise periods, indoor dayroom periods, movie showings, and congregate meals that are supervised by corrections officers. Because eligible incarcerated individuals continue to be housed in CL5 status for both disciplinary and administrative reasons, it remains necessary for staff to continue to follow CL5 security protocols, including searches prior to each movement and two-to-one escort ratios to and from each activity. To facilitate the additional movement for each offered out-of-cell opportunity, the Governor's budget invests \$5 million so the department can eliminate the use of ERH while continuing to fulfill the security protocols necessary to safely execute this initiative.

FINAL REMARKS

Under the Shapiro Administration and leadership of Secretary Dr. Laurel Harry, the Department of Corrections has continued to make great strides as part of a transformation of criminal justice in the

Commonwealth. We continue our efforts to reduce recidivism by evaluating every aspect of our operations, focusing on evidence-based practices and trauma informed care.

We are extraordinarily proud of the dedicated staff who work night and day, with far too many hours of mandated overtime shifts, all to ensure the safety of our communities. We recognize the need to continue to address staff shortages. The creation of the DOC Recruitment and Retention team has greatly assisted in reducing the vacancy rate; however, it does not stop with recruitment. We need to bolster our efforts to address staff wellness. Corrections professionals experience countless challenges every day. Addressing the wellness needs of staff will improve morale, increase retention, and promote healthier environments both at work and at home.

As we move forward, the department will ensure that the funding allocation for FY 2024-25 will be used to support our mission to improve the wellbeing and safety of staff, continue to address the rehabilitative needs of our incarcerated population, and provide the tools and assistance needed for all Pennsylvanians returning to their communities to thrive.