

Oregon issues forecast on prison populations

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. — Oregon's prison population was 13,405 on Jan. 1, having grown by 0.7 percent (98 beds) during 2007, according to the state corrections population forecast. The prison population is expected to grow at a slightly faster rate during 2008. The state expects the corrections population to be 13,722 on Jan. 1, 2009, which is 2.4 percent (317 beds) higher than on Jan. 1 of this year. The rate of growth in the prison population has gradually slowed. A comparison of biennial growth rates shows that the population grew by 15.7 percent in the 1999-01 biennium, 12.2 percent in 2001-03, 7.3 percent in 2003-05, and 4.9 percent in 2005-07. Growth in the current biennium is expected to be 2.2 percent (296 beds), while 4.3 percent growth (596 beds) is expected for the following biennium (2009-11). The population is expected to reach 14,400 by July 1, 2011. Mandatory minimum sentences for certain violent offenders have driven growth in prison populations (Measure 11, ORS 137.700). Higher intakes of inmates for repeat property offenses (RPO) have also been a factor (ORS 137.717). The felony probation caseload was 20,294 on Oct. 1, 2007, having declined by 0.9 percent (185 cases) since April 2007. The probation caseload is expected to grow by 6.3 percent (1,272 cases) to 21,566 by July 2009, the end of the current biennium. It is expected to grow another 3.9 percent (846 cases) during the 2009-11 biennium, reaching 22,412 by July 2011. The parole and post prison supervision caseload was 13,752 on Oct. 1, 2007, having grown by 0.5 percent (62 cases) since April 2007. It is expected to increase by 0.4 percent (58 cases) by July 2009, reaching 13,810 at the end of the biennium. The Local Control population was 1,131 on Oct. 1, 2007. It is expected to grow by a further 11.0 percent (128 beds) during the 2007-09 biennium, reaching 1,259 by July 1, 2009.

Key Assumptions This forecast is based on current law, policy, and practice. The most critical assumptions underlying the forecast are:

- Prison intakes will grow slightly in FY 2008 and 2009. An increase in repeat property offenses and other non-Measure 11 intakes will account for most of this growth.
- Although arrest rates will fluctuate during the forecast period, the average will be close to the 2005 arrest rate.
- Sentencing practices typical of 2006 and 2007 will continue over the forecast period.
- Institutional and community corrections policies typical of FY 2006 and 2007 will continue over the forecast period. These include the Alternative Incarceration Program and policies regarding earned time credit awards, revocation and sanctions.

Forecast risk Changes to Oregon's sentencing laws—whether through the legislative process, ballot measures, or judicial rulings—pose major risk to the forecast. Statutory changes affecting prison sentence length or disposition (i.e., prison vs. probation) can have immediate and substantial effects on correctional populations. Initiative Petition 40, which will appear on the November 2008 ballot, would substantially increase penalties for certain property crimes. No official estimate of the initiative's impact is available, but the measure would likely cause a significant increase in the prison population. The initiative would lengthen some prison sentences and send more offenders to prison rather than probation. Similarly, Initiative Petition 131 would lengthen sentences for specified repeat sex crimes and for driving under the influence of intoxicants. Initiative Petition 132 would restrict the early release of felons, and would pose a potential risk to this forecast. Senate Bill 1087 may also exert an impact on this forecast, if it receives voters' approval with more votes than Initiative Petition 40. It would increase terms of imprisonment for certain drug-trafficking crimes, as well as specified repeat property and identity theft crimes committed on or after Jan. 2, 2009. State and local government budgets may also affect handling of felony offenders. As an example, community corrections caseloads were significantly affected by budgetary constraints to the court system in 2003. Budgetary changes and constraints are an ongoing risk to forecasting. Crime trends change over time. As law enforcement and prosecution adapt to changing crime trends, a different mix of felony offenders may result. Such changes could affect the corrections population in unforeseeable ways. This forecast is based on current law, policy, and practice.

Background The Corrections Population Forecast is produced semi-annually by the Office of Economic Analysis (OEA) and the Corrections Population Forecast Advisory Committee. The forecast covers state-funded correctional populations: prison, felony probation, parole and post-prison supervision, and felons serving local sentences of 12 or fewer months (Local Control). The forecast is used to develop the budget for the Oregon Department of Corrections. OEA uses a flow model to forecast correctional populations. The model simulates the flow of offenders through the criminal justice system from arrest through prosecution, sentencing, release, and revocation. The correctional population forecasts are inter-related. The forecast is

based on offender data from the Corrections Information System (CIS). The annual methodology review provides detailed information on how these forecasts are produced. It is available at our website, www.oea.das.state.or.us. Of special note, this April 2008 forecast is an extension of the October 2007 forecast. The Office of Economic Analysis is in the process of filling the vacant position of Correction Forecast Analyst. Actual caseload has been added and then forecasted, using the underlying trends from the October 2007 forecast. Given the close tracking of the past forecasts, this method was chosen for this transition period. The October 2008 forecast will return to the methodology used in the previous forecasts.

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