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PRESS RELEASE

U.S. Correctional Population Continued to Decline in 2021

WASHINGTON – The total correctional population in the United States fell 1% from yearend 2020 to 2021, according to statistics in *Correctional Populations in the United States, 2021 – Statistical Tables* and *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2021*, two reports released today by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The number of persons held in prison or jail or supervised in the community on probation or parole decreased by 61,100, down to an estimated 5,444,900. Overall, an estimated 1 in 48 U.S. residents age 18 or older were under correctional supervision at yearend 2021, down from 1 in 47 in 2020.

“Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant short-term changes in correctional estimates, the overall correctional population continues to decline,” said Dr. Alexis Piquero, Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Over the 10-year period from 2011 to 2021, the U.S. correctional population declined 22%. A drop in the number of persons supervised in the community on probation accounted for 65% of this overall change, while decreases in the number of persons incarcerated in state and federal prison accounted for 26% of the change.

In 2021, the U.S. incarceration rate increased for the first time in 15 years. However, the rate was still lower than the pre-COVID-19 pandemic rate of 810 per 100,000 in 2019. The increase in the incarceration rate was driven by a 16% growth in the number of persons housed in local jails, which held an additional 87,200 persons from 2020 to 2021.

In 2021, the community supervision rate fell to a 21-year low of 1,440 persons on probation or parole per 100,000 adult U.S. residents, after declining each year since it peaked at 2,240 persons per 100,000 in 2007. At yearend 2021, an estimated 3,745,000 adults were under community supervision, down 136,600 persons from January 1, 2021.

During 2021, the probation population decreased in 31 states and in the U.S. federal system and increased in 18 states and the District of Columbia. The rate of adults on probation in 2021 was at its lowest point in 36 years (1,143 per 100,000 adult U.S. residents). From 2011 to 2021, among adults on probation whose most serious offense was known, the percentage that was supervised for a violent offense rose from 18% to 26%.

At yearend 2021, 803,200 adults were on parole supervision, a decrease of 7% from January 1, 2021, the largest annual change since 1992. Also, the parole population in 2021 was at its lowest point since 2006, when 798,200 persons were supervised on parole. The parole population fell in 44 states and the District of Columbia, and the number of persons in the community under a federal term of supervised release also decreased. Six states had an increase in the parole population.

Changes in the demographic characteristics of the U.S. correctional population were small from 2020 to 2021 but were greater than 20% over the decade from 2011 to 2021. The number of males in the total correctional population declined less than 1% (down 28,300) from 2020 to 2021, while the number of females decreased 3% (down 32,800). Compared to 2011, the number of males under correctional supervision in 2021 declined by 21% and females decreased 25%. Over that same decade, the number of black persons under correctional supervision decreased more than 27%, while the number of Hispanic persons declined 21% and whites declined 20%.

“It is important to note that while blacks and Hispanics remain incarcerated at greater rates than whites, we are seeing long-term reductions in those differences,” said Director Piquero.

[*Correctional Populations in the United States, 2021 – Statistical Tables*](#) was written by BJS Statisticians E. Ann Carson, PhD, and Richard Kluckow, DSW. It provides statistics from several BJS data collections on persons living in the community while supervised by probation or parole agencies and those incarcerated under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities or in the custody of local jails.

[*Probation and Parole in the United States, 2021*](#) was written by BJS Statistician Danielle Kaeble. Findings are from BJS's Annual Probation Survey, Annual Parole Survey and Federal Justice Statistics Program, which are the only national data collections that cover community corrections in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. federal system.

The reports, related documents and additional information about BJS's statistical publications and programs are available on the BJS website at bjs.ojp.gov.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics, a division of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, is the principal federal agency responsible for collecting, analyzing and disseminating reliable statistics on crime and criminal justice in the United States. Alexis R. Piquero, PhD, is the director. More information about BJS and criminal justice statistics can be found at bjs.ojp.gov.

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