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How Can Florida Improve its Correction System

Florida has always been a state with a high number of offenders, resulting in either state or federal incarceration. Even with Florida's tough drug laws, 88 percent of those would be released, and the recidivism rate was one in three that would return within three years. In 2009, the state inmate population reached over 100,000 and was predicted to escalate, which would cost taxpayers \$2 billion dollars in increases. In 2013, the average cost of the annual incarceration for one inmate is approximately \$18,000.

The number of inmates across the country reached a total of 1.6 million in 2009, but since 2010 the number has been decreasing at rate of 9 percent per year. Florida Correction Facilities discussed plans to deal with the increase in Florida, but decided against building 19 new prisons, at an estimated cost of \$2 billion to accommodate the growth. Instead, legislature chose to focus on the reformation and restoration of the prisoners who would soon be released and reentering society.

One of the methods for reducing prison populations is offering non-violent, [first-time offenders alternative programs](#) that would keep them from prison, but prepare them for success in life. The Department of Corrections has shifted their focused to improving the prisoner's lives, and the result shows a 5 percent drop in recidivism rates.

There are now three correctional facilities that are completely dedicated to developing inmates for reentry with one structure, the Gadsden Reentry Center, in construction. At \$29 million it will develop 432 prisoners with life skills that will benefit them when they are discharged. Programs include vocational training, GED and other education, substance abuse treatment and developing work skills and resumes. These changes have seen the recidivism rate drop to 27 percent.

During this decade from 1998 to 2008, Wansley Walters, director of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice in Miami-Dade also provided the citation program to juveniles and saved the county \$20 million a year. [Juvenile arrests](#) fell by 51 percent and re-arrests decreased by 80 percent. Wanders, now secretary of DJJ, pioneered this civil citation program, which has been expanded to other cities and continues to save taxpayers millions.

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