

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/jri-takes-a-bite>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

\$3.3 billion. That's the total projected savings to be generated by the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) across 17 states, according to a [new report](#) from the Urban Institute. As a [technical assistance provider under JRI](#), the Vera Institute of Justice works with states to analyze their criminal justice systems to develop policies that target their correctional population and cost drivers with the ultimate aim of achieving better public safety outcomes. We also help states implement the reforms and track the results.

While the projected savings of \$3.3 billion is a pretty impressive sum, it is not the dollars alone that have brought so many right-leaning states (such as Georgia, South Carolina, and Arkansas) and individuals to champion JRI. Cost savings is not the holy grail of this project. Rather, what brings all three branches of government from both sides of the aisle together is the potential to make communities safer, families stronger, government more efficient, and individuals more productive.

How does JRI hope to achieve this? First, through legislative mandate and skills-based training, it emphasizes the implementation of evidence-based practices shown to be effective at reducing the recidivism rate. Second, through sentencing changes and improved treatment services in the community, it tries to shift the primary use of incarceration from low-level offenders to serious, violent offenders. Third, through accountability and measurement requirements, it asks agencies to measure their performance because what gets counted gets done. Finally, as more than the sum of its parts, it pushes corrections agencies to achieve success, not just compliance.

JRI seems to be taking the first bite out of the mass incarceration apple. As the initial public safety results get reported and demonstrate that the reforms send fewer people to prison while at the same time making communities safer, more states are likely to join the effort to get to the core.

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