

The Sentencing Project

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/dollars-and-detainees-the-growth-of-for-profit-detention/>

Campaign and Advocacy

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Nonetheless, these companies could count on predictable growth in the number of state and federal prisoners until 2008, when budget crises and policy changes led some states to reduce their prison populations and private prison contracts. The resulting losses for private prison companies were more than offset by expansion of their management of federal detainees under the jurisdiction of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Marshals Service. Between 2008 and 2010, the number of privately-held inmates decreased by 1,281, while the number of privately-held detainees increased by 3,327. This growth was part of a larger trend that saw the total private detainee population increase by 259 percent between 2002 and 2010; a change largely due to stepped up efforts to find, incarcerate, and deport people who violate immigration laws. There are indications that federal detention will remain a major market for private companies.

There are two key concerns about the expansion of private federal detention that need to be addressed. First, many of the problems associated with private corrections appear equally valid in the area of private detention. These include unsubstantiated claims of cost savings, problems with oversight, and high staff turnover. Second, there are considerable concerns regarding transparency in the use of private detention. The way federal agencies report data on privately-held detainees, along with the complex contractual arrangements and tiered layers of bureaucracy that result from privatization, make it difficult to ascertain the full scope of detention privatization at any given time. Without such transparency, policymakers and citizens are inherently limited in their ability to assess the full effects of privatization.

This report details how harsher immigration enforcement and legislation led to a 59% increase in the number of detainees being held by the federal government between 2002 and 2011. It specifically examines how Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) have increasingly relied on private companies to detain these individuals, as well as the complex network of facilities that house federal detainees, and the failings of private detention.

To read the report, download the PDF below.

Increase in U.S. jail & prison population in the last 40 years

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