Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

https://www.vera.org/publications/the-cost-of-incarceration-in-new-york-state

Policy Isssue Resources

Publication

Jail populations have fallen significantly across New York State, and crime has dropped as well. But spending on jails continues to climb. In 2019, the 57 counties outside New York City collectively spent more than $1.3 billion to staff and run their jails. Counties must cut jail spending and reinvest those savings in communities most impacted by mass incarceration. In this report, Vera shows how if counties keep their incarceration rates as low as they were in June 2020 and reduce their spending on staffing accordingly, they could save up to $638 million annually. By diverting these savings to programming and social services, counties could build safer, more stable communities. To do so, the State first has to amend rules that require each county to maintain its own jail and mandate minimum staffing obligations. The State also should incentivize counties to invest in programs and services that build healthier, safer communities that do not rely on jails.

If New York counties keep their incarceration rates at June 2020 levels and reduce their spending on staffing accordingly, they could save up to $638 million annually. But to do so, the State must first amend rules that require each county to maintain a jail and mandate minimum staffing.

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New York has a growing need for behavioral health and social services and has consistently defunded mental health, public health, and human services.

For decades, New York has invested heavily in one response to mental health issues, drug use, poverty, and other social challenges: jails.

SPECIAL REPORT (SINGLE)

SPECIAL REPORT (SLIDESHOW)

PUBLICATION

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