

# Equal Justice Initiative

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/alabama-prison-overcrowding-and-homicide-rates-continue-to-climb/>

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A new study by the Equal Justice Initiative on Alabamas prisons concludes:

Between 2000 and 2009, Alabama reported a total of sixhomicides in itsprison system, which houses just over 24,000 people on average. Thats anaverage annual rate of 2.5 homicides per 100,000 incarcerated people.

From 2010 to 2019, prison homicides increasedtenfold to 60 and the average annual rate is nowapproximately 62 homicides per 100,000 incarcerated people. This is nearly ninetimes the national average for state prisons, according to the most recent data available from the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics.

In the first 10 months of 2019 alone there have been 13 homicides in Alabama prisons. Thats more than the total yearly homicides reported in 34 other states combined. Nine of the 13 people killed this year in Alabama prisons were inmedium security facilities.

State officials have argued that Alabamas prisons are more violent becauseas a result of sentencing reforms that have reduced the number of nonviolent offenders in state prisonthey house a higher proportion of violent offenders than other states prisons. But this explanation falls short. Alabama actually has a slightly lower proportion (53%) of people incarcerated for capital murder, murder, sexual assault, robbery, or assault than the national average (55%).

In 2017, EJI reported that Alabamas prisons were the [most overcrowded](#) in the country. Sentencing and parole reforms at first seemed to alleviate overcrowding, but recent policy changes have driven the prison population up further.

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An analysis of data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that Alabamas prisons are the most crowded in the country.

The states prison population declined 3.6% in the 2018 fiscal year, but those improvements were erased whenthe [population rose](#) 3.3% between October 2018 and April 2019.

The prison populationcontinues to climb. In 2019, more people were [admitted](#) to the Alabama Department of Correctionss jurisdictional custody than ever before. The number of revocations of non-prison sentences increasedfrom approximately 1,200 in 2015 to approximately 4,500 in 2018 and the rate of parolehas dropped by 40% from a year ago.

Alabama officials have creditedsentencing reforms with keeping people convicted of nonviolent offenses out of prison. But the [majority of people](#) entering the states prisons are nonviolent offenders. Most of the people admitted to ADOC custody in 2016 and 2017 were convicted of drug related offenses, theft, receiving stolen property, or forgery.

In fact, Alabamas controversial and excessive sentencing policies have created one of the largest permanent prison populations in the world. In 2018, the state incarcerated 946 of 100,000 Alabamians and nearly 1 in 4 of those incarcerated in Alabama was sentenced to death or life in prison. Only Louisiana has more people incarcerated under such punitive sentences, the[Sentencing Project](#) and [Prison Policy Initiative](#) found.

State leaders are debating whether to build privately-owned prisons in response to the overcrowding crisis. Butmounting evidence confirms the underlying problems are cultural, not structural.

Since 2018, at least six officers at the rank of sergeant or above have been arrested on allegations of corruption or violence against incarcerated people, including at least one incident in which an incarcerated person died.

Several senior ADOC officials have resigned in the wake of recent investigations. Three were removed after allegations of misconduct. Associate Commissioner Grantt Culliver, reportedly the subject of ongoing investigations, was dismissed in 2018. St. Clair Warden

Cedric Specks was dismissed in May 2018 after an investigation found he abused his authority by engaging in predatory sexual exploitation of subordinates. And Limestone Correctional Facility Warden Dewayne Estes was placed on mandatory leave due to the nature of the allegations against [him].

ADOC has not improved conditions or public safety despite rising resources. The states prisons remain in crisis while ADOC is budgeted to get more than \$500 million from the state general fund in 2020, up from \$443 million last year and \$372 million in 2009.

On top of its allocation from the general fund, ADOCs revenue from prison canteen sales has risen from \$18,213,000 in 2008 to \$25,725,000 in 2018. And ADOC continues to profit from private contracts for services, including \$3.1 million in kickbacks from private phone carriers.

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Equal Justice Initiative 2022