

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/alabama-has-third-highest-incarceration-rate-in-nation/>

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07.31.13

A new report from the Department of Justice shows that Alabama has the third highest imprisonment rate in the country, in contrast with a downward trend in incarceration nationwide.

The United States imprisonment rate dropped to 480 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 residents in 2012, continuing a decline since 2007.

Three Deep South states lock up more of their residents than the rest of the country. Louisiana incarcerates 893 people per 100,000 state residents, Mississippi imprisonment rate is 717 per 100,000 state residents, and Alabama imprisons 650 people for every 100,000 residents.

Nationwide, the prison population declined 1.7 percent from 2011 to 2012 the third consecutive year of a decline in the number of state prisoners. The Bureau of Justice Statistics says that trend represents a shift in the direction of incarceration practice in the states over the past 30 years.

California accounted for the majority (51 percent) of the decline in state prisoners with 15,035 fewer inmates in 2012 than 2011. On May 23, 2011, the United States Supreme Court in [Brown v. Plata](#) upheld a court order requiring California to release up to 46,000 prisoners to relieve serious overcrowding in the states prisons and remedy grossly inadequate medical and mental health care.

Alabama lawmakers have expressed concern that a similar fate may await Alabama prisons if the state fails to remedy crowding and physical and sexual abuse of incarcerated people. We cant afford a sloppy corrections system and hope somehow federal courts will turn a blind eye to it, said state Sen. Cam Ward, R-Alabaster, chairman of the Joint Legislative Prison Oversight Committee, in response to recent [reports of abuse in three Alabama prisons](#). Its only a matter of time before overcrowding and the allegations of abuse come together and create a perfect storm for a federal takeover of our prison system.

With more than 31,000 inmates in a system designed to house 14,000, Alabamas prisons are severely overcrowded, but the states incarceration rate continues to climb. Alabama has the nations thirteenth highest number of prisoners.

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