

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/new-vera-report-the-price-of-prisons>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

This post originally appeared on the blog of the [Cost-Benefit Knowledge Bank](#) for Criminal Justice (CBKB), a Vera project.

Today Vera released [The Price of Prisons: What Incarceration Costs Taxpayers](#). This report on state prison costs in 2010 is unique in that it captured taxpayer costs paid by state agencies other than departments of corrections and not just those within corrections budgets. (In some states the other costs include employee benefits, capital costs, and inmate health care.) Additionally, we calculated the cost of underfunded contributions to pension and retiree health care programs for corrections employees, figures that must be included in a comprehensive accounting of prison costs.

Among the 40 states that participated in Vera's survey, the cost of prisons was \$39 billion in fiscal year 2010, \$5.4 billion more than what their corrections budgets reflected. The greatest cost drivers outside corrections departments were underfunded contributions to retiree health care for corrections employees (\$1.9 billion); states contributions to retiree health care on behalf of their corrections departments (\$837 million); and employee benefits, such as health insurance (\$613 million).

The full report provides the taxpayer cost of state prisons in 40 states, presents the methodology, and concludes with recommendations about steps policy makers can take to safely rein in these costs. [A series of fact sheets](#) provides details for each of the states that participated in Vera's survey.

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