



**Report on the Rhode Island Correctional  
Population  
FY 1976 - FY 2011**

Prepared by the Planning & Research Unit

November 2011

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## ***Introduction***

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This report was created to summarize all of the existing data describing the Rhode Island correctional population. The Planning & Research Unit has maintained offender data since 1976; therefore, this report contains data from 1976 to 2011. Prior to 1992, data are not available in electronic form. As a result, information in this report is constrained by what data elements were manually collected.

### ***The RI Prison System:***

The Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI) at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) is comprised of 8 inmate facilities (6 male, 2 female), which are all located within 1 square mile of each other in Cranston, RI. The state of Rhode Island operates a unified correctional system, meaning that all offenders (i.e., those awaiting trial, sentenced, and under community supervision) in the state are under the jurisdiction of RIDOC. In this report, “Total Population” refers to total custodial population, which excludes offenders living in the community with electronic monitoring devices.

### ***Data Caveats:***

As noted above, there are limitations to what data are included in this report based on what information was manually collected. In some cases, data were not available at standard intervals. Please pay special attention to the text, as it will identify the specific time period covered.

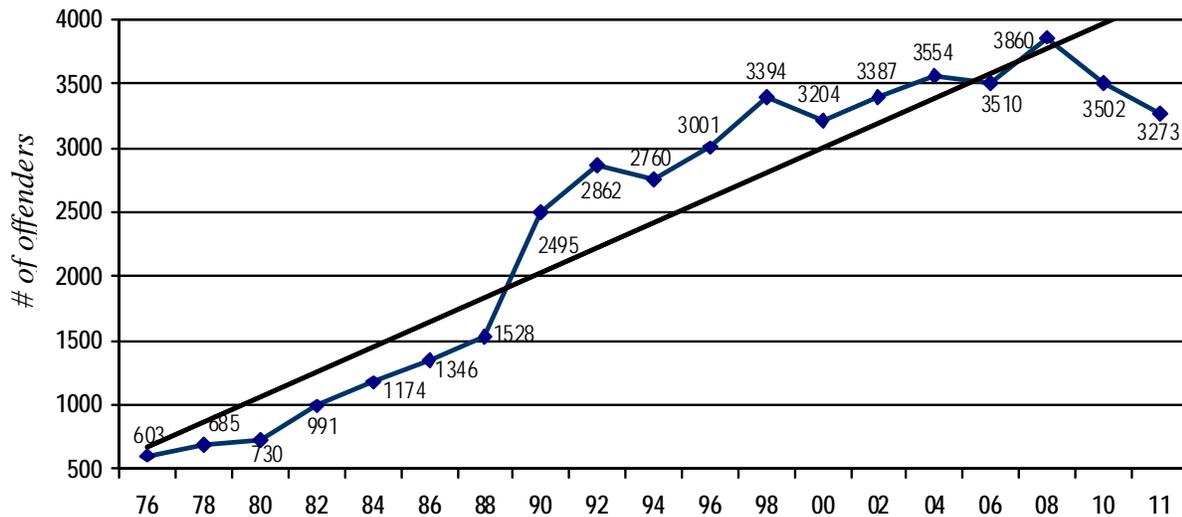
Another limitation of the data is that by and large, only the most serious offense for an offender is recorded. While it is possible to analyze current data for additional charges/sentences, it is not the case for data that was previously collected.

### ***More Information:***

For more information on this report, please contact Danielle Barron, Senior Planner of the Planning & Research Unit at the RIDOC (401-462-2394).



## RI's Population at a Glance (FY1976-FY2011)



The total inmate population (i.e., all awaiting trial and sentenced offenders, both male and female) experienced nearly a 4 1/2-fold increase from FY1976 to FY2011. This represents a 443% growth in the population over the past 35 years, or an average of 12.7% annually.

The majority of the growth in the population occurred during the 1980's. From 80 to 89, the total prison population grew by an average of 17% annually, for a total increase of 172% (from 730 to 1987 offenders). During the 90's, the population continued to grow by an average of 3.6% each year. In the new millennium, the population is growing at a rate of about 0.2% per year.

### **Was the increase in the RI inmate population due solely to an increase in the State's population?**

No. While the number of offenders incarcerated in RI rose dramatically (a 156% increase), according to US Census data, RI's population only grew about 6% from 1980 to 2000.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, in 1980, RI's incarceration rate was 77 offenders per 100,000 state residents. In 2000, the rate rose to 197 offenders per 100,000 residents,<sup>2</sup> while in 2009 the rate increased to 211 per 100,000,<sup>3</sup> representing growth by 174% between 1980 and 2011.

### **Was there significantly more growth in one segment of the prison population?**

No. There was significant growth in both the number of awaiting trial and sentenced inmates (*for more detail see page 12*). Similarly, there has been exponential growth in the male and female offender populations (*for more detail see page 13*).

### **How does Rhode Island compare nationally?**

As was the trend nationally, Rhode Island experienced marked growth in its total prison population, with the sharpest recent increase occurring between 2005 and 2008. RI, however, experienced the largest percent decrease in the prison population in the US (down 9.2%) by yearend 2009.<sup>4</sup> There was also a slight decline in the US incarceration rate, decreasing from 504 in 2008 to 502 per 100,000 residents in 2009.<sup>4</sup>



## *What factors lead to changes in the prison population?*

Prison populations are indirectly affected by many factors, with four factors having an immediate impact: (1) the number new offenders admitted, (2) the length of sentence imposed, (3) the amount of time offenders can earn off their sentence (i.e. time off for good behavior or program participation), and (4) the percentage of offenders leaving prison prior to the expiration of their sentence (e.g., via parole).

Nationally, the “War on Drugs” has been the chief factor in driving up prison populations across the country during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Federal legislative changes that occurred during the 1980’s increased sentences for drug offenders and decreased the possibility of early release. As a result, prison populations began to contain more minor drug offenders and these offenders were required to serve longer sentences. This produced a “stacking effect,” where this segment of the prison population remained incarcerated and new offenders continued to pile in. Nationally, the number of incarcerated persons grew to over 2.1 million by 2004.<sup>5</sup>

In response to the growing population and forecasted projections developed in 2007, Rhode Island Legislature passed initiatives in May 2008 to modify statutory good time by standardizing calculated earned time for all inmates who demonstrate good behavior. All offenders, with the exclusion of sex offenders, those serving 30 days or less or those serving a life sentence, are eligible to receive 10 days a month off their sentence if they remain discipline free. In addition, program earned time was established to allow inmates who participate in particular programs to receive up to 5 days a month, while offenders who successfully complete programs have the ability to earn up to another 30 days off their sentence for each program completed.

Below is a timeline demarcating major policy changes on a national level and the impact on Rhode Island’s prison system:

Late 1960s	Recreational drug use among young, white, middle class Americans rises.
1971	President Nixon names drug abuse as “public enemy number one in the US.” Nixon allots a majority of anti-drug money to treatment rather than law enforcement. <sup>6</sup>
1972 (RI)	The Rhode Island Department of Corrections is created by statute and has formal jurisdiction over the Adult Correctional Institutions and Probation and Parole. <sup>7</sup>
1974	Nixon resigns. The new Ford administration recommends that “priority in Federal efforts in both supply and demand reduction be directed toward those drugs which inherently pose a greater risk to the individual and to society.” Drugs named as high priority include heroin, amphetamines and mixed barbiturates. <sup>6</sup>
Late 1970s	Cocaine use is on the rise and is glamorized by the media.



- 1980s (RI) The DOC embarks on long-term building /constructions campaign to increase the number of beds to meet the needs of the increasing prisoner population.<sup>7</sup>
- The RI population starts to see steady increases in population from year to year.
- 1981 (RI) High Security Center opens, with a capacity of 96 cells.<sup>7</sup>
- 1982 (RI) Intake Service Center opens, with a capacity of 168 cells.<sup>7</sup>
- 1984 (RI) The Gloria McDonald building opens as a women’s prison.<sup>7</sup>
- 1984 Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” campaign becomes the centerpiece of the Reagan administration’s anti-drug policy. The movement focuses on white, middle class children and is funded by corporate and private donations.<sup>6</sup>
- 1985 Crack cocaine begins to flourish in the northeast. Crack is cheap and powerfully addictive and devastates inner city neighborhoods.
- 1986 Reagan signs the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. This bill provides \$1.7 billion to fight the drug crisis. \$97 million is allocated to build new prisons, \$200 million for drug education and \$241 million for treatment. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act also created mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenders. It also created a great sentencing disparity between powder cocaine and crack (5 kilograms of cocaine is punishable by at least 10 years in prison while 5 grams of crack leads to a mandatory 5-year sentence).<sup>6</sup>
- 1986 (RI) The War on Drugs intensifies in RI with the introduction of crack. There is an increase in penalties for minor drug violations. RI Parole Guidelines are modified to increase the amount of time served until parole eligibility for drug offenders.<sup>8</sup>
- 1988 (RI) The General Assembly passes legislation making possession of as little as 1 oz of heroin or cocaine subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years. Voters amend the State constitution to permit denial of bail in cases of drug offenses carrying a sentence of 10 years or more.<sup>9</sup>
- As a result, the RI population begins a sharp climb, growing 85% from 1986 to 1990.



- 1989 President Bush (41) creates the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the drug ‘czar’ to lead it. Federal spending on law enforcement increases; treatment receives less than 1/3 of the total budget.
- 1990 (RI) The Price Medium Security facility opens as a special needs unit.<sup>7</sup>
- 1992 (RI) The Intake Service Center (North side) opens, with a capacity for 900 offenders.<sup>7</sup>
- The Moran Medium Security facility opens, with a capacity for 870 male inmates.<sup>7</sup>
- 1993 (RI) The Price Medium Security, special needs facility, closes due to budget cuts.<sup>7</sup>
- 1995 US Sentencing Commission recommends modifying mandatory sentencing guidelines to reduce the disparity between crack and powder cocaine. For the first time in history, Congress overrides this recommendation. Clinton agrees with Congress and signs the rejection into law.<sup>6</sup>
- 1996 The federal government creates the Violent Offender Incarceration/Truth-in-Sentencing Initiative. Monies are doled out to increase time served for violent offenders and increase construction of prisons for violent offenders. RI is awarded a grant and expands Medium Price by 88 beds and Women’s Division awaiting trial beds by 45. Also, RIDOC begins renovating the Reintegration Unit, which was intended to house about 200 male inmates who would otherwise expire sentences from a medium or maximum-security facility.<sup>8</sup>
- 1997 (RI) The Price Medium Security facility reopens.
- 1998 Human Rights Watch reports that 30% of all new sentenced admissions to state prisons and 58% of those to Federal prisons are for drug charges.<sup>10</sup>
- 2002 The federal government responds to the growing number of offenders being released to the streets after long terms of incarceration. Under the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, RI is awarded \$1.9 million dollars to address reentry needs.<sup>8</sup>
- 2003 (RI) Governor Carcieri issues an executive order that establishes a Governor’s Steering Committee on corrections reform and prisoner reentry. This committee was established to create a comprehensive plan and systematic approach to promoting reentry strategies for all offenders prior to release from incarceration with continued support from probation and parole, community-based agencies and all other State agencies after release.<sup>8</sup>

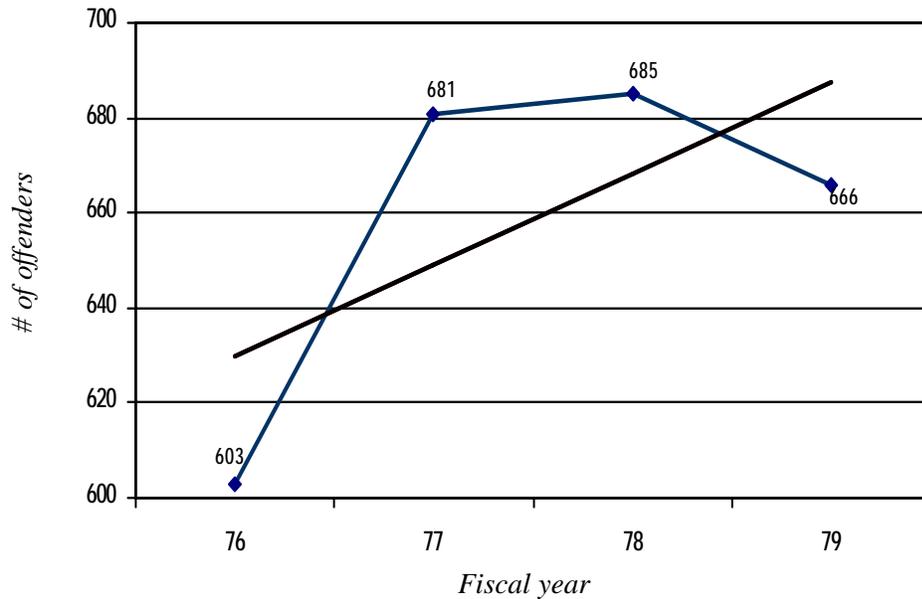


- 2008 (RI) The General Assembly enacts legislation to moderate the growth of the inmate census by equalizing the rate of earned time among all inmates other than sex offenders and by providing incentives for inmates to participate in treatment and programs that can reduce their risk to re-offend upon release.<sup>11</sup>
- 2010 (RI) Women's Facility I opens as a medium security facility for women, with a capacity for 213 offenders.
- 2010 (RI) The DIX building (Women's Minimum/Work Release) closes. Minimum/Work Release women are transferred to the GM building, while another building is renovated for the permanent relocation of these women.



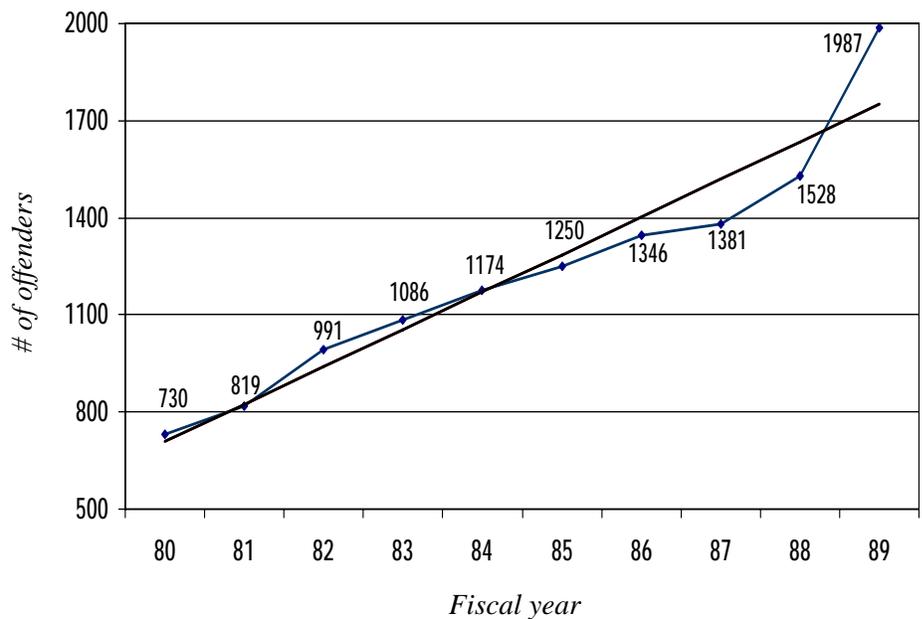
## Total Population by Decade

### Total Population FY 1976 – FY 1979



From FY1976 to FY 1979, the average total population increased by 10%.

### Total Population FY 1980 – FY 1989

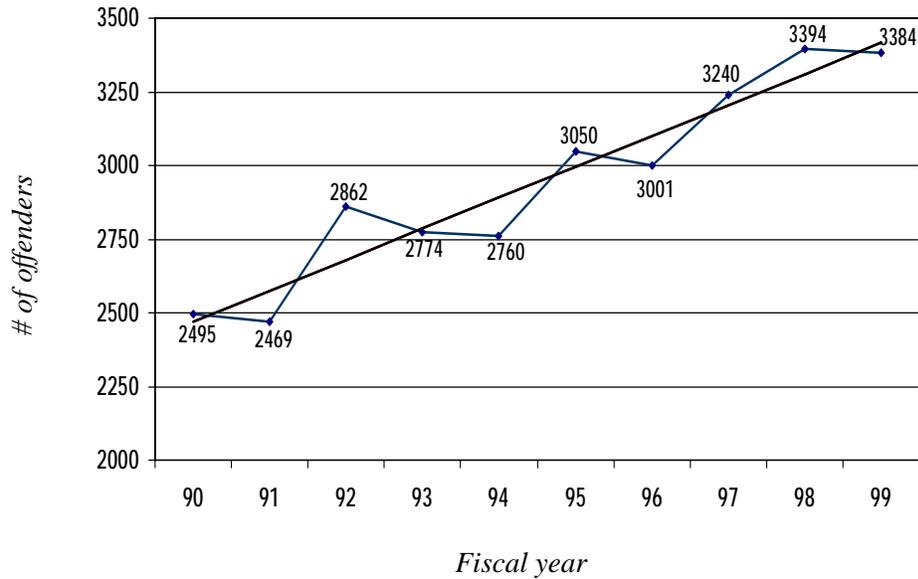


From FY 1980 to FY 1989, the average total population increased 172%.

In comparison to the latter part of the 70's, the average total population increased 48% from FY86 to FY89.



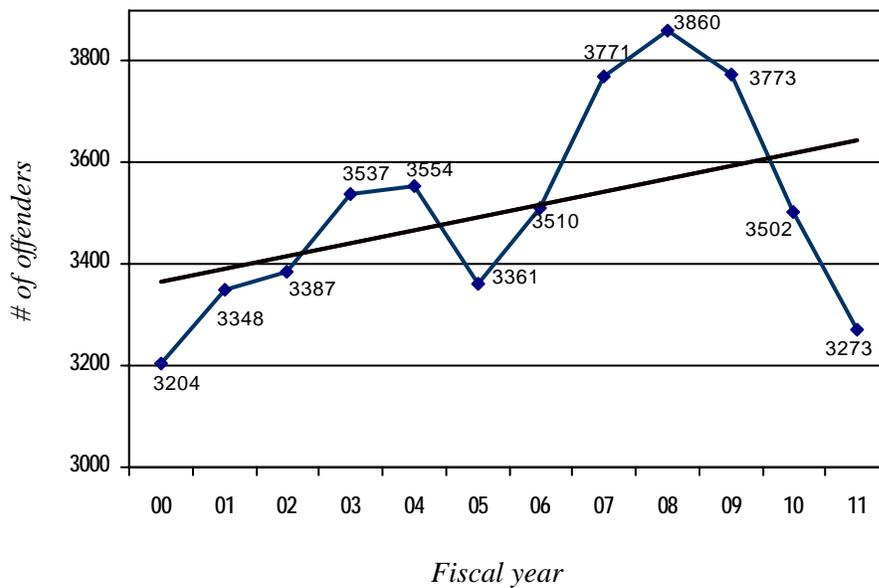
## Total Population FY 1990 – FY 1999



From FY 1990 to FY 1999, the average total population increased 36%.

From FY 1996 to FY 1999, the average total population increased 13%.

## Total Population FY 2000 – FY 2011



From FY 2000 to FY 2011, the average total population increased 2%.

The population reached an all time high in 2008, increasing 20% from 2000. Since 2008, the population has declined by 15%.

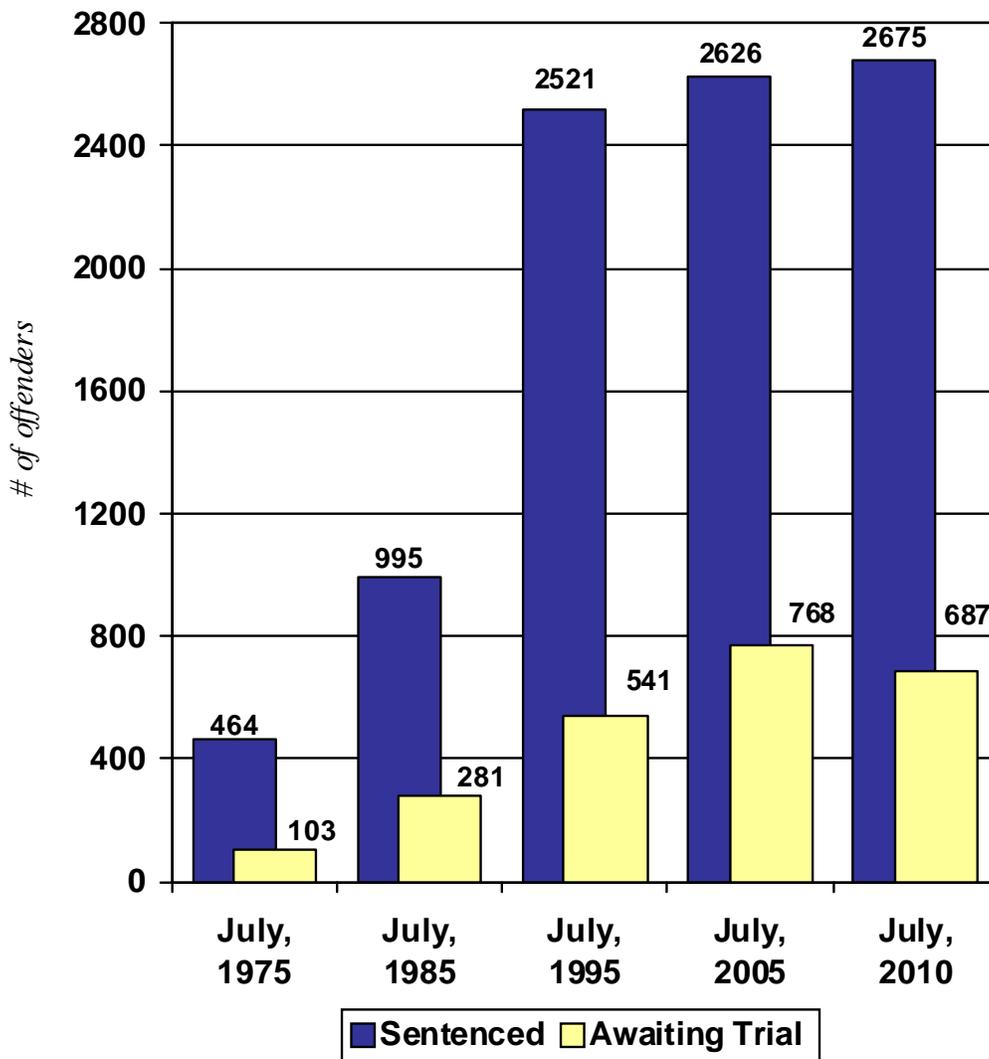


## Population by Inmate Status

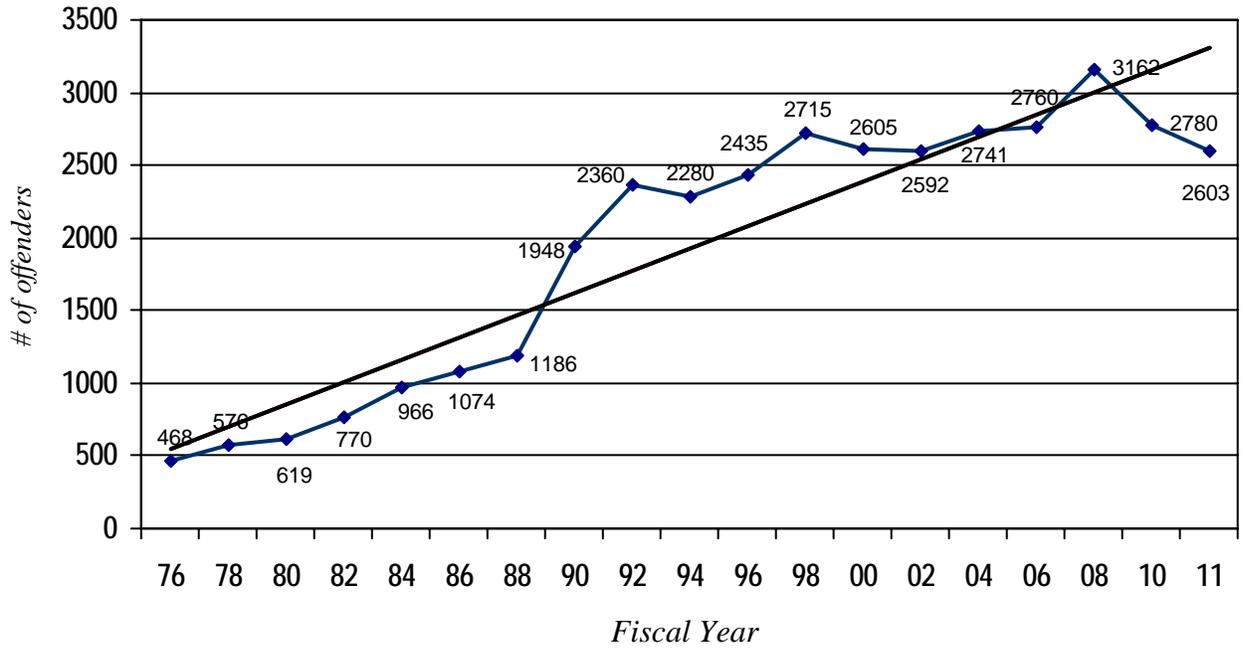
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### Was there more growth in either the awaiting trial or sentenced offender populations?

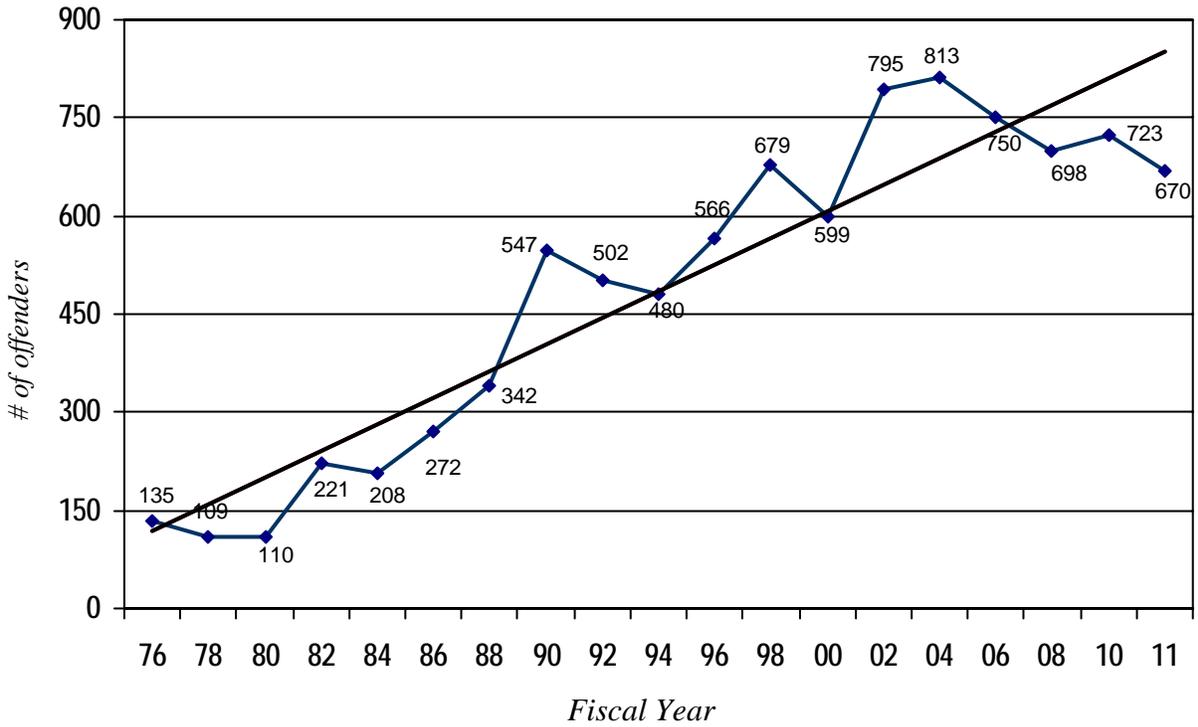
The sentenced population increased 476% during the past 35 years, while the awaiting trial population increased more rapidly (567%) during the same period. In 1975, the awaiting trial population represented 18% of the total prison population, while in 2010, it made up 20% of the total population.



**Sentenced Inmates**



**Awaiting Trial Inmates**

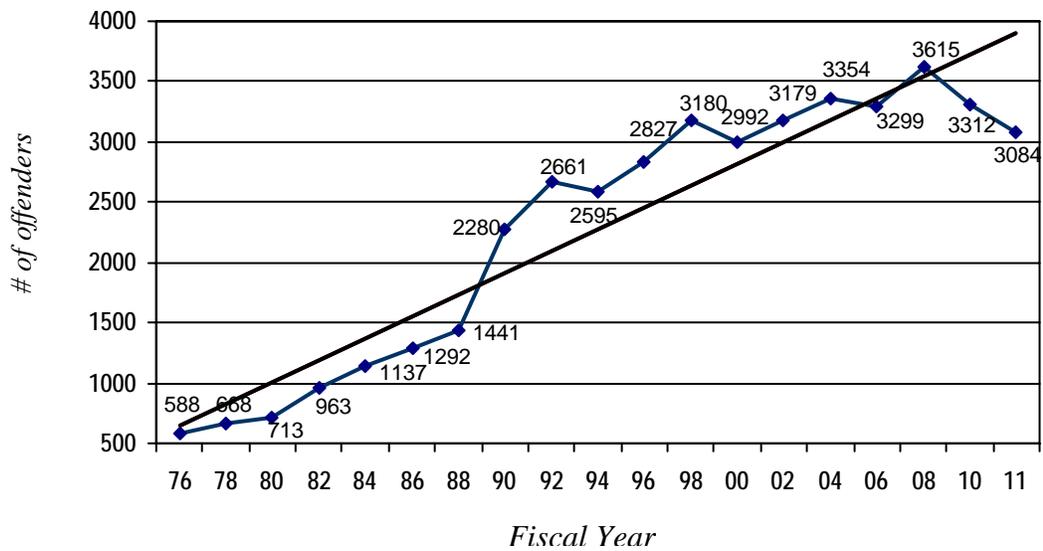


# Population by Inmate Sex

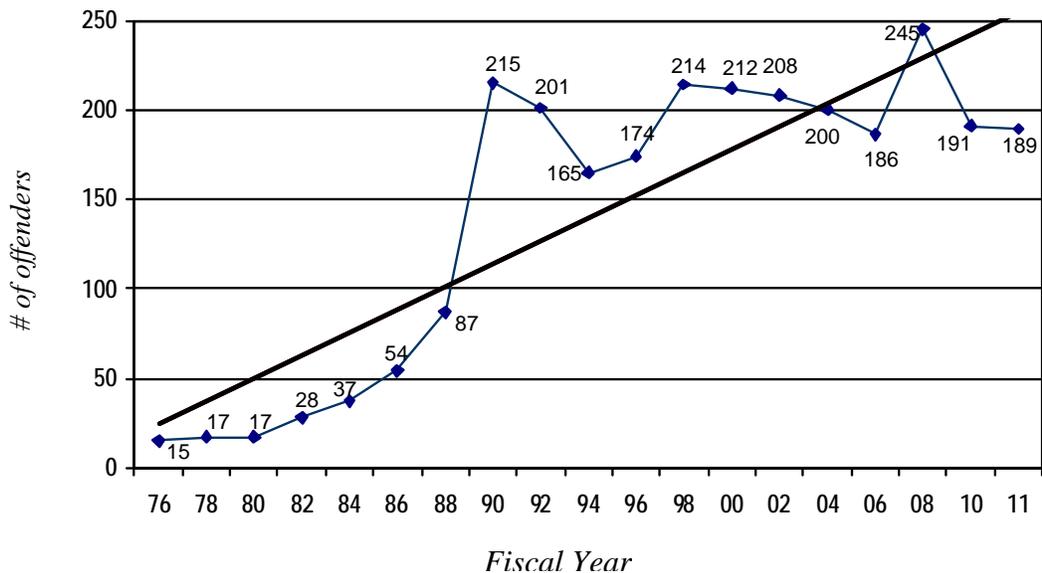
## Did the number of female and male offenders grow equally?

While the male inmate population increased 424% over the past 35 years, the female population grew by over 1160%. Despite this steep rise in female inmates, female offenders constitute only 6% of the total RIDOC population. Interestingly, this is only twice the proportion that females represented in 1976 (2.5%). The increase in both the male and female populations from the mid to late 80's through the early 90's can be primarily attributed to the "War on Drugs" movement that was taking place during the same time period.<sup>9</sup> Changes to the Parole Board guidelines<sup>9</sup> and increased attention to female prostitution offenders also contributed to the population rise.<sup>12</sup>

### Male Inmates



### Female Inmates



## ***Can other trends be teased out of the total population changes?***

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### *Offense Category Information*

Given the legislative changes that took place during the 80's and the population increases that followed, it is reasonable to assume that one led to the other. However, since manually-collected data by the Planning & Research Unit captured only the most serious crime for which an offender was incarcerated, this cannot be fully demonstrated with the data. Specifically, the data reflect only the most serious offense in instances when an offender committed a drug crime in conjunction with a more serious crime (e.g., robbery). Therefore, while the percentage of the prison population incarcerated for drug-related offenses has nearly tripled from 7% in 1977 to 20% for all commitments 2011, it is believed that this may underestimate the role that drugs have played in increasing RI's prison population.

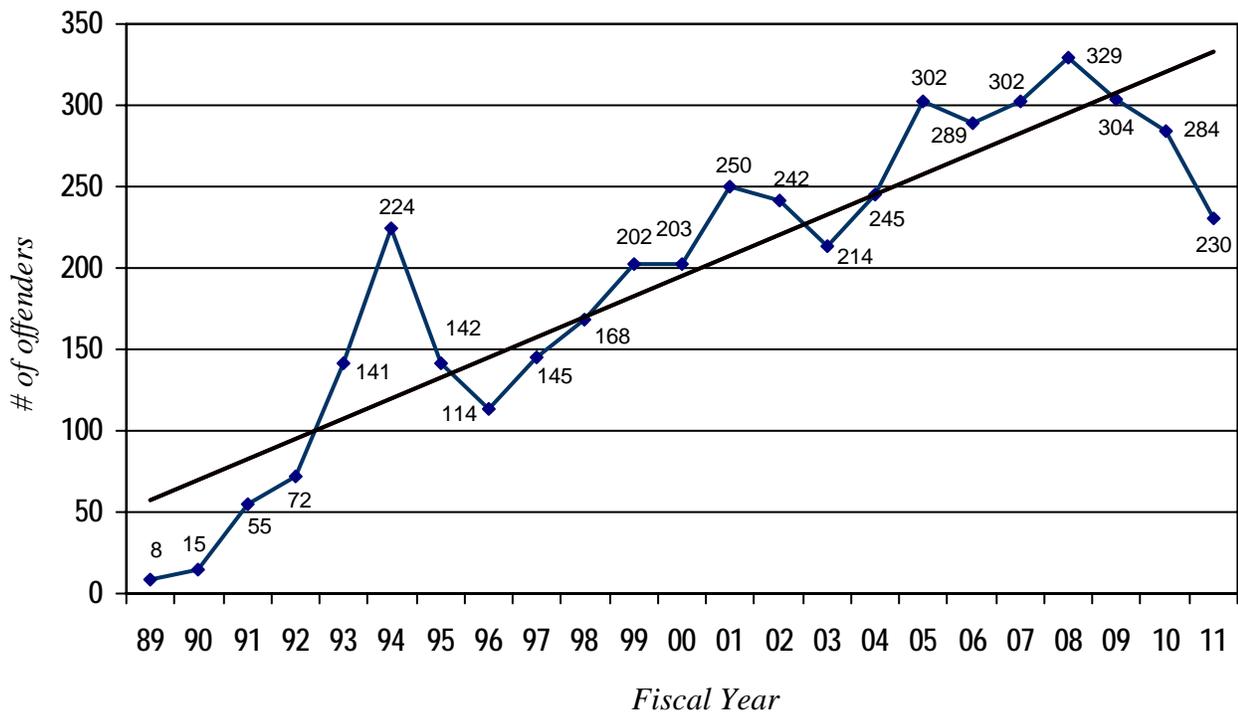
### *Racial Category Information*

We are able to observe changes in the racial composition of the offender population. In 1974, 76% of the population was White and 23% was Black. During the 80's, the percentage of White offenders decreased (66% in 1986), while the percentage of Black offenders remained stable. It was not until 1986 that there was a significant Hispanic population (8.5%). At present, the percentage of Hispanic offenders continues to rise (19% of all new commitments in 2011), while the percentages of White offenders decreased slightly (55%) and the percentage of Black offenders remained relatively stable (24%).



## Community Confinement Population

As expected, the community confinement program has grown significantly since it began in 1989. In 1992, legislation was passed which expanded the community confinement program to include offenders who had been convicted of sale/delivery or possession of any schedule I or II controlled substance. In addition, the new law gave the Director of the DOC the authority to administratively classify offenders to community confinement. The inclusion of the drug crimes led to a dramatic increase in the community confinement population from 1992 to 1994. Interestingly, the community confinement population reached a high of 329 offenders in 2008, yet dropped to 230 in 2011, representing a 30% decrease from 2008.



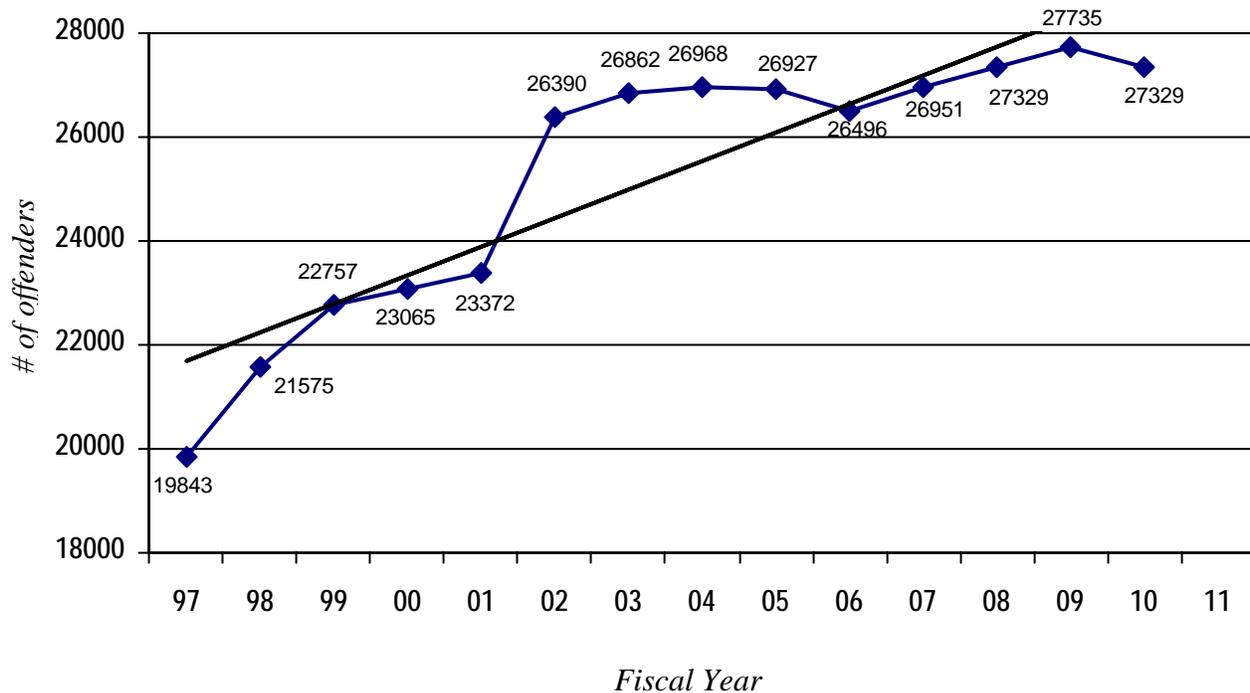
## ***Probation & Parole Population (1997-present)***

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Data for probation & parole are only available from 1997 to present. The probation and parole population includes all active, low and banked supervision cases.

### **How does RI compare in terms of community supervision?**

As of December 2009, RI ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation in rate of probation supervision (3,129 per 100,000 residents). This 2009 rate is 74% higher than the national average of 1,799 per 100,000. In terms of the Northeast, RI ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, while Massachusetts ranked 1<sup>st</sup> with 3,481 probationers per 100,000 adult residents.<sup>13</sup>



## *Where is the population headed?*

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RI continues to have one of the lowest incarceration rates in the country, ranking 4<sup>th</sup> in 2009.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the institutional population in the state has slowed to an average growth of 0.2% per year since 2000. Most recently, the RI prison population experienced a notable decrease from a peak of 3860 in FY 2008 to 3273 in FY 2011.

Projections show the population remaining steady through 2022, assuming current legislation and good time policy initiatives remain unchanged. Although the awaiting trial population is expected to rise, the length of stay for sentenced inmates is decreasing, causing the population to remain stable with less than a 1% growth over the next decade.<sup>14</sup>

It is also hopeful that the current national and state Prisoner Reentry initiatives will be successful in guiding released offenders to becoming productive, law-abiding citizens. The involvement of ALL state and local agencies in this initiative and the acknowledgement that released offenders are more than just the responsibility of the corrections agency is a major cultural change. It is this change that should provide for long standing commitment and successful outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau. (2000). Available online: <http://www.census.gov>. 5/21/2005.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2001). *Prisoners in 2000 Bulletin*. Available online: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov>. 8/2001.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics (2009). *Prisoners Series*. Available online: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbse&sid=40>. 9/6/11.

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics (2009). *Prisoners in 2009 Bulletin*. Available online: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/p09.pdf>. 9/12/11.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2003). *Key Facts at a Glance*. Available online: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/tables/incrttab.htm>. 5/10/2005.

<sup>6</sup> Frontline. *Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology*. Available online: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/cron>. 5/10/2005.

<sup>7</sup> Rhode Island Department of Corrections. *A Brief History*. RI Department of Corrections Employee Handbook.

<sup>8</sup> Boyar, Erin, Associate Director, Rhode Island Department of Corrections (2005). In Personal communication. 5/17/2005 and 7/15/2005.

<sup>9</sup> Carroll, Leo, Professor, University of Rhode Island (2005). E-mail communication 7/20/2005.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2000). *World Report*. Available online: <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k/us.html>. 5/10/2005.



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<sup>11</sup> Rhode Island Department of Corrections. (2011). *RIDOC at a Glance*. Available online: <http://www.doc.ri.gov/documents/media/RIDOCBrochures/RIDOCAtaGlance/2006-11.pdf>. 8/23/2011.

<sup>12</sup> Wall, A.T, Director, Rhode Island Department of Corrections (2005). E-mail communication 7/21/2005.

<sup>13</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2003). *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2003 Bulletin*. Available online: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov>. July, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> The JFA Institute. (2011). *Rhode Island Department of Corrections Ten-Year Prison Population Projections Brief 2012-2022*.

