

Repurposing: New Beginnings for Closed Prisons

Since 2011, at least 22 states have closed or announced closures for 94 state prisons and juvenile facilities, resulting in the elimination of over 48,000 state prison beds¹ and an estimated cost savings of over \$345 million.² The opportunity to downsize prison bed space has been brought about by declines in state prison populations as well as increasing challenges of managing older facilities. Reduced capacity has created the opportunity to repurpose closed prisons for a range of uses outside of the correctional system, including a movie studio, a distillery, and urban redevelopment.

The U.S. prison population numbered 1,508,636 at yearend 2014 – a reduction of approximately 1% since 2013. Thirty-nine states have experienced a decline since reaching their peak prison populations within the past 15 years; in most states this reduction has been relatively modest. Four states – New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and California – have reduced their prison populations by over 20%. Southern states like Mississippi and South Carolina have reduced their prison populations by 18% and 11% respectively.³ The political environment shaping criminal justice policy has been moving in a direction emphasizing evidence-based approaches to public safety for more than a decade. This has involved efforts to address the unprecedented growth and correctional costs resulting from several decades of policy initiatives.

In recent years, 29 states adopted reforms that scaled back the scope and severity of their mandatory sentencing policies.⁴ Voters in California approved ballot initiatives in 2012 and 2016; the former curbed the state’s notoriously broad “three strikes and you’re out” law and the latter expanded parole eligibility and limits the process governing juveniles tried as adults. California and Oklahoma voters also authorized reclassifying certain felonies as misdemeanors. In other states, policymakers have become increasingly supportive of initiatives that reduce parole revocations, establish treatment courts, and divert prison bound defendants through alternatives to incarceration.

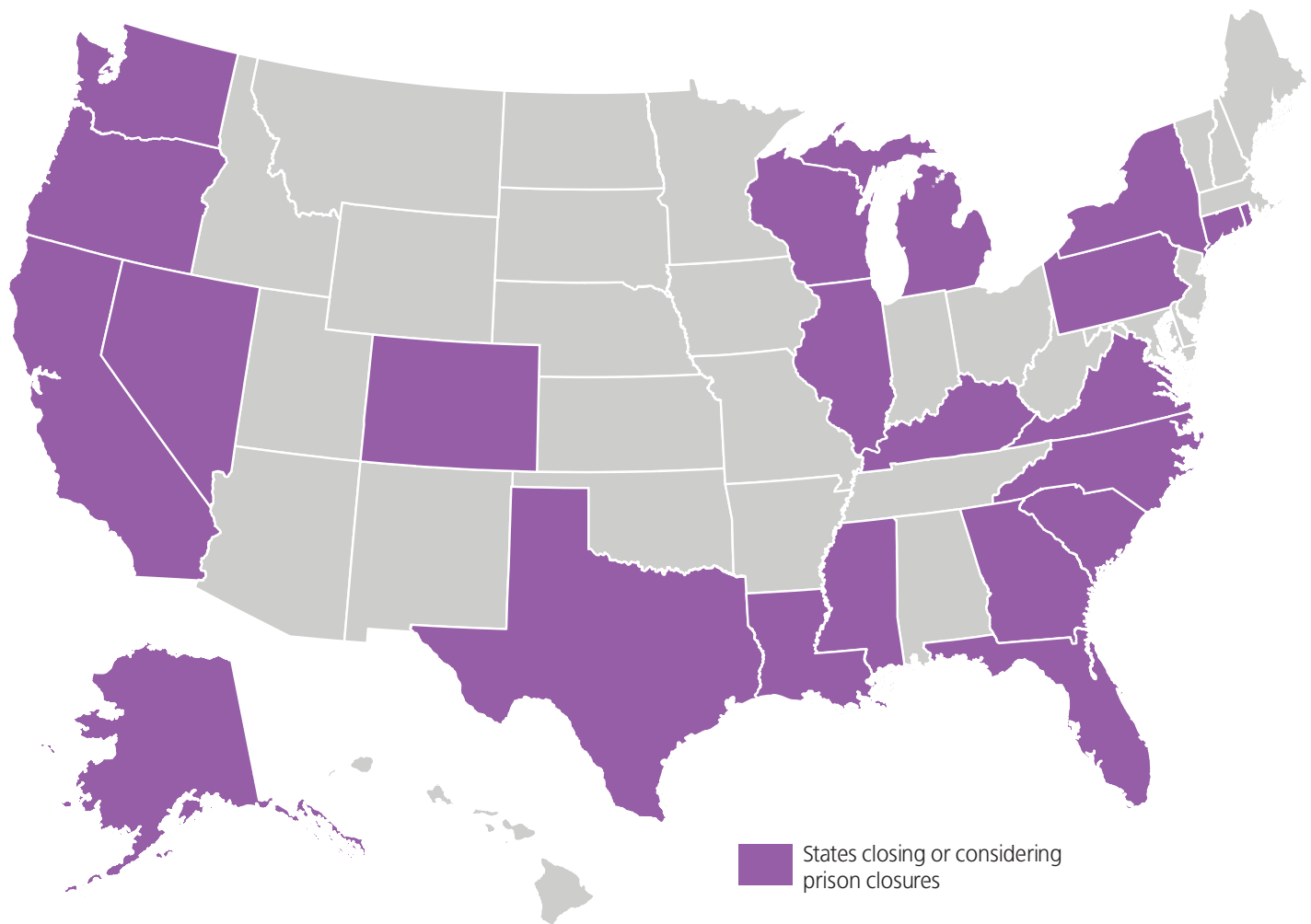
OPPORTUNITY FOR CLOSURE

Declines in state prison populations and the shifting politics underlying incarceration have created an opportunity to downsize prison bed space for a range of reasons, including excess capacity and the challenge of managing older facilities.

UNDERLYING CAUSES OF STATE RATES OF IMPRISONMENT

The previous 40 years of growth of the penal system increased rates of incarceration have resulted from changes in policy and practice intent upon increasing the severity of sanctions for criminal offending. The punitive nature of these criminal justice policies was influenced by social, political, economic and institutional forces that helped to explain why elected officials and prosecutors successfully pursued such initiatives.

Several factors made the United States vulnerable to the politicization of criminal justice policies. These included social and political unrest in the 1960s; a major electoral realignment as the Democratic Party divided over civil rights and other issues and as the Republican Party became competitive in the South for the first time since Reconstruction; rising crime rates beginning in the mid-1960s; and major transformations in urban economies that included the disappearance of many well-paid jobs

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for low skilled workers. Distinct characteristics of U.S. society deepened the politicization of criminal justice policy. These included the election and partisan political appointment of judges and prosecutors, a winner-take-all two-party electoral system, and the use of state ballot initiatives and referenda as a mechanism for policy change.⁵

While rising crime rates in the early years of prison building contributed in part to increasing rates of imprisonment, it is only by understanding those trends in their social, political, institutional and historical context that it is clear the nation's prison population increase was not primarily due to rising crime. While most other Western democracies also experienced rising crime rates beginning in the 1960s, none embarked on a prison expansion program remotely like that of the U.S.

PRISON REPURPOSING PROJECTS

Prison closures offer a challenge to officials and the communities that are impacted, particularly in rural areas with limited employment opportunities. In recent years, entrepreneurs, elected officials and community leaders in a handful of states have reimagined sites that once incarcerated prisoners for new uses. In Manhattan, the Osborne Association, a non-profit organization, is working to convert a closed women's prison into a space that provides services to women leaving incarceration. An entrepreneur in California purchased a closed correctional facility and plans to repurpose it as a medical marijuana cultivation center. At least four states – Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia – have converted closed prisons into tourist destinations open to visitors and host Halloween events.⁶

Other new purposes for closed prisons include a small farm incubator, homeless shelter, museum and special events venue, and a distillery.

ARTHUR KILL CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (NEW YORK, MEDIUM SECURITY PRISON): MOVIE STUDIO

Opened in 1976, the prison housed 931 male inmates and closed in 2011. The former prison sits on 69 acres of waterfront property along Staten Island's West Shore and is surrounded by commercial, recreational, and industrial properties. The site was previously operated by the state's Office of Drug Abuse Services as a drug rehabilitation center prior to its transfer to the New York Department of Correctional Services.⁷

The Empire State Development agency announced in early 2014 that Brooklyn's Broadway Stages planned to buy the facility for use as a movie studio. The studio purchased the prison for \$7 million and plans to invest at least \$20 million. Expectations for the project include the creation of 800 jobs over a two-year period with as many as 1,500 over the next five years.

BAYVIEW CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (NEW YORK, MEDIUM SECURITY PRISON): REENTRY CENTER

First established in Manhattan in 1931 as the Seaman's House Y.M.C.A., a place for merchant sailors to stay while their ships were docked at the nearby Chelsea Piers it later became a state-run drug treatment center in 1967. The state converted the center to a prison in the early 1970s following an increase in New York's prison population due in part to a change in policy that required lengthy prison terms for prison bound drug defendants.

The NoVo Foundation, a private foundation in collaboration with the women's real-estate development company the Goren Group, will convert the closed prison to an office building known as the Women's Building. Officials plan to contract out with nonprofit organizations that provide services to women. The building's development team is also collaborating with groups like the Coalition for Women Prisoners and the Women and Justice Project to involve formerly incarcerated women in the prison's repurposing. Plans for the prison's redevelopment include landscaped areas and an art gallery that may double as an event space.

BRUSHY MOUNTAIN STATE PENITENTIARY (TENNESSEE, MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON): DISTILLERY AND TOURIST ATTRACTION

Tennessee opened the maximum security prison in 1896 in the remote, southern part of the Appalachian Plateau. The prison had a capacity of 584 and was used as the state's reception/classification and diagnostic center before closing in 2009.

Efforts are underway to repurpose the closed prison into a distillery and tourist attraction. Brushy Mountain Group, a private developer entity, approached the local economic development council and county officials to discuss plans for the prison's reuse. Voters approved the prison's conversion by a 2-1 margin in a referendum during the 2013 local election cycle. The private consortium has moved to transform the site into a tourist attraction, including a "moonshine" distillery, restaurant, horse trails, and campgrounds.

DAWSON STATE JAIL (TEXAS, MEDIUM SECURITY PRISON): URBAN REDEVELOPMENT

Opened in 1997, the Dawson State Jail (DSJ) was a co-gender facility with a capacity of over 2,200 beds located near Dallas. Reports of inadequate medical care, including multiple inmate deaths, and unsafe staffing levels at the facility led a coalition of state and national groups to mobilize in support of the prison's closing. Texas state lawmakers in 2013 decided not to renew the contract for the prison operated by the for-profit CoreCivic (Corrections Corporation for America), but owned by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. DSJ was located in an area targeted for economic development; modest declines in the state's prison population resulted in shuttering the prison rather than a transfer to public control. The prison was a co-gender facility with a capacity of over 2,200 beds. The closure of the DSJ was supported by local officials.

The closed prison opened up an opportunity for the Trinity River Corridor Project a plan for urban development around a 20-mile area that would include houses, waterfront condominiums, office buildings and shops and restaurants. DSJ was long viewed as an impediment to moving the development plan forward. As of 2016, plans to demolish the existing jail or repurpose the shuttered correctional facility have yet to be decided.⁸

FULTON CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (NEW YORK, MEDIUM SECURITY PRISON): REENTRY CENTER

The Fulton Correctional Facility in the Bronx, New York was converted to a medium security prison in 1975. The building opened as an Episcopal Church in 1906 and since its construction at various times had housed a nursing home, drug rehabilitation center, and Jewish community center. The shuttered prison was among 13 state prisons closed in 2011. While used as a prison, the facility housed up to 900 inmates on work release.

During 2015, New York City transferred the facility's deed to the Osborne Association, a criminal justice reform group. Osborne is managing the complete reconfiguration of the building from a prison to a community reentry hub for formerly incarcerated individuals that includes temporary housing and job training. Resources to support the building's conversion include a \$6 million grant from the Empire State Development Corporation, a state fund established to support economic development in communities experiencing prison closures.

GAINESVILLE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (FLORIDA, MEDIUM SECURITY PRISON): HOMELESS CENTER

Opened in 1991 with a capacity of 507 beds, the prison was closed in 2012 due to budget cuts, and the site was acquired by the city of Gainesville. The shuttered prison is surrounded by a wooded area about a mile from the regional airport. City commissioners repurposed the former prison into, Grace Marketplace, a nonprofit one-stop homeless center that provides job training as well as programs for the broader community like organizational meeting space. Stakeholders are working to remodel the facility so that it looks less like a prison; the renovated mess hall has new tiling and there is a raised-bed garden on the grounds. The center is funded by a combination of resources from the city of Gainesville and the surrounding county for its first year of operation.

Plans to convert the closed prison also involve leasing building space to other nonprofit agencies to increase the level of services available on the site.

HANNA CITY WORK CAMP (ILLINOIS, MINIMUM SECURITY PRISON): SMALL FARM INCUBATOR

The site of the Hanna City Work Camp in Peoria, Illinois was not always used for a prison. The United States Air Force once used the former work camp site for radar tracking; that ended in 1968 due to budget cuts, and was soon repurposed as a state correctional facility. The prison closed in 2002 for budgetary reasons, and the state signed over the prison camp to Peoria County in 2008. The property transfer came with conditions including a requirement that its repurposing be for public use.

The Peoria County Board has convened discussions to repurpose the shuttered facility. Community consensus has focused on using the site as a small farm incubator that includes training and marketing; the site will also serve as a distribution center for locally grown food. According to the University of Illinois, transforming the former prison into a re-imagined agricultural development center will produce an estimated \$124 million in new farm income for the region.

HAYWOOD CORRECTIONAL CENTER (NORTH CAROLINA, MINIMUM SECURITY PRISON): HOMELESS SHELTER

The Haywood Correctional Center was opened more than 70 years ago with a capacity of 128 beds. It was closed in 2011 as part of a cost-saving measure. The repurposing of the prison was developed by Sheriff Greg Christopher, who collaborated with area churches, and business and community stakeholders to attract funding to underwrite the project. County Commissioners purchased it from the state and anticipated continuing to use it for correctional purposes as an overflow jail for the area's local justice population. Those plans shifted in recent years, with a focus now on converting the closed prison to a multi-use site that includes a halfway house, homeless shelter and soup kitchen.

Conversion to a homeless shelter was done as a part of television personality Ty Pennington's nationwide contest, the Ultimate Give Back Challenge, and received broad support among fans who were invited to vote on which project the initiative would select.

States with Closures and Pending Closures of Correctional Facilities 2011-2016

State	Correctional Facility	Capacity ⁹	Year ¹⁰
AK	Palmer Correctional Facility	176	2016
CA	California Rehabilitation Center	3,900	2012
CO	Colorado State Penitentiary II	316	2012
CO	Kit Carson Correctional Center	1,400	2016
CO	Fort Lyon Correctional Facility	500	2011
CT	Bergin Correctional Institution	603	2011
CT	Enfield Correctional Institution	724	2011
CT	Fairmont Building at Bridgeport Correctional Center	204	2015
CT	J.B. Gates Correctional Institution	878	2011
CT	Niantic Annex	450	2016
CT	Somers Housing Units	400	2016
FL	Brevard Correctional Facility	929	2011
FL	Broward Correctional Institution	611	2012
FL	Caryville Work Camp	133	2012
FL	Demily Correctional Institution	342	2012
FL	Gainesville Correctional Institution	507	2012
FL	Hendry Work Camp	280	2012
FL	Hillsborough Correctional Institution	431	2011
FL	Indian River Correctional Institution	381	2012
FL	Levy Forestry Camp	292	2012
FL	New River Correctional Institution	1,363	2012
FL	River Junction Work Camp	736	2012
FL	Tallahassee Road prison	82	2011
GA	Blakely Regional Youth Detention Center	30	2011
GA	Griffin Regional Youth Detention Center	30	2011
GA	Metro State Prison	779	2011
GA	Paulding Regional Youth Detention Center	100	2013
IL	Dwight Correctional Center	1,212	2012
IL	Joliet Renaissance Center – Youth Center	344	2012
IL	Murphysboro Youth Prison	156	2012
IL	Tamms Super Maximum Security Correctional Center	700	2012
IL	Statesville F. House ¹¹	386	2016
KY	Marion Adjustment Center	826	2013
KY	Otter Creek Correctional Center	656	2012
LA	C. Paul Phelps Correctional Center	942	2012
LA	Forcht-Wade Correctional Center	498	2012

State	Correctional Facility	Capacity	Year
LA	J. Levy Dabadie Correctional Center	300	2012
LA	Jetson Center for Youth	76	2014
MI	Florence Crane Correctional Facility	1,056	2011
MI	Pugsley Correctional Facility	1,334	2016
MS	Walnut Grove Correctional Facility	1,260	2016
NV	Nevada State Prison	841	2011
NY	Arthur Kill Medium Security Prison	900	2011
NY	Beacon Correctional Facility	201	2013
NY	Bayview Correctional Facility	229	2013
NY	Buffalo Work Release	132	2011
NY	Butler Correctional Facility	240	2013
NY	Camp Georgetown	262	2011
NY	Chateaugay Correctional Facility	240	2013
NY	Fulton Work Release	258	2011
NY	Summit Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility	121	2011
NY	Oneida Medium Correctional Facility	998	2011
NY	Mid-Orange Correctional Facility	736	2011
NY	Monterey Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility	300	2013
NY	Mt. McGregor Correctional Facility	544	2013
NC	Bladen Correctional Center	172	2013
NC	Buncombe Correctional Center (consolidated with Craggy Correctional Center)	104	2014
NC	Cabarrus Correctional Facility	198	2011
NC	Charlotte Correctional Center	256	2011
NC	Duplin Correctional Center	328	2013
NC	Durham Correctional Center	216	2011
NC	Fountain Correctional Center For Women	531	2014
NC	Haywood Correctional Center	128	2011
NC	North Piedmont Correctional Center for Women	144	2014
NC	Raleigh Correctional Center for Women (consolidated with NCCIW)	144	2014
NC	Robeson Correctional Center ¹²	276	2013
NC	Tillery Correctional Center (consolidated with Caledonia Correctional Institution)	208	2014
NC	Wayne Correctional Center	428	2013
NC	Western Youth Institution ¹³	708	2014
OR	Hillcrest Units (Chi and Kappa)	50	2011

States with Closures and Pending Closures of Correctional Facilities 2011-2016 (continued)

State	Correctional Facility	Capacity	Year
OR	MacLaren Units (Dunbard, Kincaid and McBride)	75	2011
OR	Oak Creek Unit (Young Women's Transition Program)	25	2011
OR	Oregon State Penitentiary – Minimum Security	176	2011
PA	Cresson State Correctional Institution	1,400	2013
PA	Greensburg State Correctional Institution	988	2013
RI	Donald Price Medium Security Facility	324	2011
TX	Al Price State Juvenile Correctional Facility	248	2011
TX	Central Unit	1,000	2011
TX	Crockett State School	232	2011
TX	Dawson State Jail	2,216	2013
TX	Mineral Wells Facility ¹⁴	2,100	2011/ 2013
TX	Ron Jackson Juvenile Correctional Complex Unit II	113	2011
TX	TDCJ – Burnett County Jail	240	2011
SC	Watkins Pre-Release Center	224	2012
SC	Campbell Pre-Release Center	246	2015
SC	Coastal Pre-Release Center	187	2015
SC	Lower-Savannah Pre-Release Center	250	2016
VA	Cold Springs Work Center	140	2014
VA	James River Correctional Center	450	2011
VA	Mecklenburg Correctional Center	730	2012
VA	Powhatan Main Correctional Center	850	2014
VA	White Post Diversion Center	107	2014
WA	McNeil Island Corrections Center	1,200	2011
WI	Ethan Allen School	167	2011
WI	Southern Oaks Girls School	18	2011
Total Operational Capacity		48,944	

CONSIDERATIONS IN PRISON CLOSURE

Prison closures provide an opening to reimagine economic challenges in impacted communities. Closures typically animate resistance due to a perceived loss of jobs, tax revenue and other factors. To address this, New York State requires a one-year notice of correctional facilities' closures.¹⁵

But, these developments are not uniform across the country. In contrast to this trend, some states have announced since 2013 that they may open new correctional facilities, add new beds to existing facilities, or reopen facilities that had previously been shuttered.

In other states, closure announcements have faced opposition. In Illinois for example, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the union representing correctional officers, unsuccessfully opposed efforts to close down two state prisons in recent years through legislative strategies, litigation, and a public campaign.¹⁶ In Texas, local political leadership opposed that state's decision to not renew a private prison contract for the Mineral Wells Pre-Parole Transfer Facility owned and operated by CCA.¹⁷

Many local officials embraced prison construction as an economic development strategy. But the research shows that the benefits are not clear.¹⁸ Generally, prison closure proponents counter that prisons are not a source of economic opportunity. Yet, those rejoinders ignore the history of prison development particularly on communities impacted by declines in agriculture.

High-incarceration communities, the neighborhoods that send many individuals to prison, also suffer economic loss. These neighborhoods experience substantial disadvantage due to economic divestment, political disenfranchisement, and downward mobility caused by the cycling of residents to and from prison.¹⁹

Lawmakers and practitioners working to scale back harsh sentencing policies while also downsizing prison capacity will need to engage in intentional discussions of the economic impact of a prison closure. New York officials engaged this conversation directly through efforts anchored by the Empire State Development office as part of the Economic Transformation and Facility Redevelopment Program. Legislators authorized the program to support the economies of communities affected by the

closure of certain correctional and juvenile justice facilities. Program staff convened conversations in the affected communities for the reuse of closed correctional facilities. The program also facilitated an economic development initiative with business firms interested in relocating to affected communities through tax incentives.²⁰

JUVENILE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

There were 1,195 fewer juvenile facilities in 2014 than 2000, a 39 percent decline.²¹ While facilities of all sizes have closed, the greatest declines have been in the number of large juvenile facilities (those holding more than 200 juveniles). There were 100 such facilities in 2000 and 22 as of 2014. The largest facilities are expensive to maintain, but they also provide fewer tailored services than small facilities, increasing the chances of reoffending.

The dual trends of closing large juvenile facilities and declining numbers of juveniles in placement have changed the typical juvenile placement. In 2000, 34,147 juveniles (31 percent of all juveniles in placement) were held in large facilities. By 2014, 5,768 juveniles (11 percent) were held in these large facilities.

In recent years, some states that closed juvenile facilities have transferred them to the adult correctional system. For example, in Illinois a closed juvenile prison in Murphysboro is being repurposed as a reentry center that provides job training and life skills including basic finance to incarcerated persons.²²

PRISON DOWNSIZING AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PHASING OUT FOR-PROFIT PRISONS

Some prisons have closed following the termination of a contract due to prison population declines or other factors. In recent years states like Colorado, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Texas have closed privately owned or managed prisons. During 2016, the Department of Justice announced plans to phase out the use of private for-profit prisons to house persons convicted of federal offenses. The Obama administration cited declines in the federal prison population as one reason for-profit contracts could be phased out. As of 2016, BOP maintained contracts with 13 private prisons.

REINVESTING JUSTICE SAVINGS

Prison closures offer an opportunity for state officials and community leaders to reimagine spending on public safety priorities. In recent decades public safety has been viewed as monies prioritized towards law enforcement, prison construction and maintenance, and other services supporting the criminal justice system. However, growing bipartisan support among elected officials at the federal and state level has contributed to a shifting climate for criminal justice policies and practices to support interventions outside of the criminal justice system.

Prison closures offer an opportunity for state officials and community leaders to **reimagine spending on public safety priorities.**

Justice reinvestment acknowledges the collateral impacts of mass incarceration on many urban neighborhoods. These impacts can perpetuate cycles of crime and incarceration. Billions of dollars are spent each year to imprison large numbers of people from low-income urban neighborhoods. A justice reinvestment approach would redirect some portion of the funds states now spend on prisons to rebuild the social capital and local infrastructure – quality schools, community centers, and healthcare facilities – in high incarceration neighborhoods.²³ A salient provision of the strategy achieves cost savings by reducing prison populations through the rethinking of excessive and costly prison terms and reducing recidivism for individuals who return to high incarceration communities.

Political and public support for prison closures is often dependent on projected savings due to the shuttering of correctional facilities. Justice reinvestment offers the residents of high incarceration communities a framework to reclaim public money that has been used to support unproductive corrections spending. Kansas officials initiated an ambitious justice reinvestment experiment in 2006. Officials implemented a neighborhood revitalization strategy in a high incarceration community to strengthen recidivism reduction efforts. Following a research initiative to determine the jurisdiction with the highest rate of incarceration, correctional officials established a reentry program in Wichita's Council District 1 where persons returned to prison for pro-

bation and parole violations resulted in \$5.5 million in prison costs.²⁴ Reentry specialists were hired to develop affordable housing under collaboration between the Department of Corrections, the Housing Resources Commission, and the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services.²⁵

State officials in Connecticut and Colorado have also initiated justice reinvestment policies. Connecticut lawmakers authorized legislation in 2003 that earmarked \$7.5 million for justice reinvestment in New Haven following sentencing reforms to address prison growth. Colorado lawmakers discussed reprioritizing scarce resources towards other social services during private prison contract discussions. One 2012 budget proposal would have re-appropriated \$5.4 million from private prisons to support childhood literacy, while another would have transferred \$1.5 million from private prisons to support programs that help needy and disabled individuals.²⁶ However, the proposals did not advance through the legislative process.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, criminal justice reform has regularly been raised at the state level. Officials working to rein in budgets have successfully explored incarceration alternatives to reduce state prison populations without compromising public safety. The circumstances surrounding prison closures vary from state to state and create challenges and opportunities. Prison population reductions have created an opening to close prisons; in some communities there have been intentional discussions about repurposing prisons for non-correctional uses. Practical examples of prison reuse projects have taken place in various jurisdictions including Illinois, New York, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas. The areas surrounding these reuse projects are also diverse and include rural, suburban, and urban communities. Planning for prison repurposing has involved the participation of a range of stakeholders including executive, legislative, and local leadership in addition to the participation of practitioners and engaged community members.

Circumstances in New York and North Carolina led officials to downsize prison capacity. Michigan²⁷ and Illinois, which have previously shuttered prisons, have since taken steps to reopen closed facilities. In Illinois, officials are repurposing a closed youth prison as a reentry facility, focused on preparing incarcerated persons to return to their communities.²⁸

Yet efforts to close prisons often face resistance. The closure of correctional facilities has created challenges for communities including job losses, and declines in property tax revenue. Officials have responded in various ways that include selling closed prisons to other agencies for continued correctional purposes and managing empty prisons in anticipation of future population increases. Illinois officials sold the closed Thomson Correctional Center to the overcrowded federal Bureau of Prisons for \$165 million to house persons convicted of federal offenses.²⁹ States like Michigan have continued to manage previously closed prisons. In 2012, Michigan officials reopened the Muskegon Correctional Facility which had closed in 2010; Pennsylvania prisoners were incarcerated there during 2011.³⁰

States have also advanced efforts to add new prison capacity. Despite plans for shuttering the Jetson Center for Youth, Louisiana officials plan to open the Acadiana Center for Youth, with an operational capacity of 72 beds at a cost of more than \$20 million.³¹ Other states that have publicly discussed adding new capacity in recent years include Alabama, Arkansas, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Virginia.

Reimagining the use for a closed prison offers states and local communities opportunities to address the scale of incarceration. The public will benefit from strategic efforts that rethink the use of closed correctional facilities to advance a vision that strengthens resources and communities.

ENDNOTES

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