

Will Ore. laws spur drop in inmates?

Report: Incarceration rate expected to fall 11 percent

WHITNEY M. WOODWORTH STATESMAN JOURNAL

After years of growth, Oregon prisons are expected to see a “dramatically lower” number of inmates over the next 10 years.

The incarceration rate — inmates versus the state’s general population — is expected to fall 11 percent.

The change, according to the authors of the recently released Office of Economic Analysis’ corrections population forecast, stems from the passage of House Bill 3078 in the 2017 Oregon Legislative session.

The current prison population of 14,725 is expected to shrink even as the state’s population is predicted to grow by 12 percent.

The forecast was vindication for supporters of HB 3078, who argued the bill, which aimed to change sentencing guidelines for property and drug convictions and allow more people into treatment and transitional services, would keep people out of Oregon’s crowded prisons.

“I’m very pleased with the numbers,” Rep. Carla Piluso, D-Gresham, said.

Piluso, one of the chief sponsors of the bill, said the forecast underscored the strong, positive impact the bill would have.

Most promising, she said, was that the female inmate population is expected to drop 8 percent by 2027.

“When I arrested women with their children watching, I knew I was altering their lives forever,” said Piluso, a former Gresham police chief, during an April hearing. “Many of these mothers were in domestic violence situations or struggling with addiction or mental illness.”

Simply arresting the offender and locking them up in prison wasn’t working.

“Nothing pains an officer more than to find out that our system isn’t addressing the underlying problem and they’d have to go back and arrest the same woman over and over, or even worse, their children 10 years later,” Piluso said.

The total prison population is expected to fall significantly in the next five years, followed by some nominal growth. The male inmate population is expected to hit 13,510 in 2027 — a “tepid” increase of .7 percent due to the anticipated impact of the bill, according to the report.

In the past, Oregon saw a huge uptick in the female inmate population and was faced with the possibility of having to open a second women’s prison, Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, said.

Now, the state can avoid spending \$17 million to reopen the building and \$20 million in operating costs, she said.

Winters, a longtime proponent using treatment and community services instead of locking up low-level drug and property offenders, was one of five Republican legislatures to vote in favor of HB 3078.

It passed both chambers and was signed into law by Gov. Kate Brown. The bill applies to sentences on or after Jan. 1, 2018.

Supporters said the bill, also known as the Safety and Savings Act, was designed with families and women in mind.

It preserves the Family Sentencing Alternative, a program passed in 2015 in an effort to keep children and parent offenders together by providing them with intensive supervision and services instead of prison.

The bill also expanded the program to include pregnant women and increase the number of counties participating in alternative sentencing. It also increased short-term transitional leave from 30 days to 120 days as well as moving shortening the mandatory sentences for theft and identity theft offenses.

Defendants being sentenced for person felonies, like assault and armed robbery, and sex crimes will not be eligible for alternative sentencing.

Winters said seeing the positive effects of lower sentences for non-violent crimes and early intervention in her hometown spurred her to vote in favor of the bill.

“For me, it just makes sense,” she said.



A corrections officer escorts inmates at Oregon Women’s Correctional Center in 2005. Rep. Carla Piluso, D-Gresham, said the female inmate population is expected to drop 8 percent by 2027 due to the passage of House Bill 3078 in the 2017 Oregon Legislative session. STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE



Clackamas County District Attorney John Foote, with the Oregon District Attorneys Association, spoke in opposition to House Bill 3078, also known as the safety and savings act, in April at the Oregon State Capitol. MOLLY J. SMITH / STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

According to legislative reports, the cost per prison bed in Oregon averages \$34,511 per month. The average per-student spending in Oregon’s schools is \$8,834 a year.

Locking people up won’t make them productive members of society, Winters said.

If they are able to stay out of prison, find employment and stay connected to their families, not only will a massive amount of money be saved, but communities will be safer.

“I think we’re leading the way across the country,” Winters said.

During the debate over HB 3078, Clackamas County District Attorney John Foote spoke on behalf of the Oregon District Attorneys Association, which opposed the bill.

Foote said the growth prison population had been slowing for years. He warned that focusing too much on shrinking the prison population could put justice and community safety in the backseat.

He said his office has seen a substantial increase in criminal offenses, including a 17 percent increase in property crimes and a 9 percent increase in violent crimes from 2015 to 2016.

“If incarceration is reduced too much, crime will increase,” he said. “That only makes sense. Perhaps this is what we are beginning to see here. Only time will tell.”

For questions, comments and news tips, email reporter Whitney Woodworth at wmwoodwort@statesmanjournal.com, call 503-399-6884 or follow on Twitter @wmwoodworth

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Notice of Self Storage Sale

Please take notice Absolute Storage LLC – Salem located at 2605 Hawthorne Ave. NE, Salem, OR 97301 intends to hold an auction of the goods stored in the following units in default for non-payment of rent. The sale will occur as an online auction via www.bid13.com on 10/27/2017 at 12:00PM. Unless stated otherwise the description of the contents are household goods and furnishings. B r e n d a Perez-Gonzalez Unit #332; Beatrice S. Savedra Unit #533. All property is being stored at the above self-storage facility. This sale may be withdrawn at any time without notice. Certain terms and conditions apply. See manager for details.

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Mid-Valley firefighters deployed to help battle raging blazes in California



Firefighter Paige Madrid sprays down an approaching wildfire near Kenwood, Calif., on Oct. 10. Salem firefighters have joined the effort and rushed to Northern California’s aid in battling the fatal fires. TREVOR HUGHES/USA TODAY

JONATHAN BACH STATESMAN JOURNAL

Salem firefighters have rushed to Northern California as part of a broader statewide deployment of crews by Oregon officials in response to wildfires that have claimed at least 31 lives.

Salem Fire Department Engine 11 and a four-man crew were dispatched alongside a Marion County strike team, one of 10 such teams activated across Oregon. They arrived there Wednesday.

Captain Jim Trierweiler, Engineer Luke Barr, Firefighter Bryan Lewis and Firefighter Drew Rivera comprise the Salem crew.

Others in the larger team came from Keizer, Silverton, Marion County and Aumsville.

"Of course we're going to help," said Gabriel Benmoussa, Salem Fire's deputy chief. "They can use all the help they can get."

The Salem crew's exact assignment is unclear at this point. The team traveled there with a fire engine. "Typically with engines that size, they will put them on struc-

ture protection," Benmoussa said.

California had asked for help from two of its neighbor states, Oregon and Arizona, according to the Oregon State Fire Marshal.

"Oregon fire agencies have stepped up to the plate to help our neighbors to the south," Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal Mariana Ruiz-Temple said in a statement.

California helped us with the fires in southern Oregon this year and I am proud that we can return the favor in their time of need."

Other counties that sent crews were Klamath, Deschutes, Multnomah, Yamhill, Lane, Washington, Linn, Benton, Clatsop, Jackson and Josephine.

Two hundred Oregon firefighters should be in California by now, according to spokesman Rich Hoover with the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal.

Reach reporter Jonathan Bach by email at jbach@statesmanjournal.com or by phone at 503-399-6714. Follow him on Twitter @JonathanMBach and Facebook at www.facebook.com/jonathanbachjournalist.

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