

## **New reports find women cost 25% to 75% more to imprison than men, while reducing time served could save states millions with minimal public safety impact**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 23, 2026

Contact: Brian Edsall

[bedsall@counciloncj.org](mailto:bedsall@counciloncj.org)

(202) 793-3373 ext 204

**WASHINGTON** — The number of women under correctional control is projected to rise to 1.1 million by 2035, with total annual costs increasing by about 34%, or roughly \$8 billion, according to a [new report](#) released today by the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ). The analysis also finds that it costs an estimated 25% to 75% more to imprison a woman than a man—a difference driven by smaller facilities, staffing and classification challenges, and higher healthcare needs.

A [companion report](#) examines one way jurisdictions could reduce those anticipated costs: shortening the amount of time women spend in prison. Using data from Illinois and North Carolina, the analysis finds that reducing women’s time served in prison by 50% would produce an estimated 100 additional annual arrests in each state, 90% of which would likely be for nonviolent crimes, while saving each state \$60 million or more per year.

Together, the findings of these reports, prepared for the [Women’s Justice Commission](#), point to a central tension in crime control and prevention policy: States are spending substantially more per person to imprison women, even though women generally pose lower public safety risks than men and their incarceration often creates additional costs for children, families, and communities.

“Prison is one of the most costly responses for women who break the law, yet the public safety returns on that investment are not always clear,” said Women’s Justice Commission Director Stephanie Akhter. “As the number and cost of incarcerating women grow, policymakers have an opportunity to pursue approaches that better enhance accountability, public safety, fiscal responsibility, and the well-being of families and communities.”

### **Women’s Population and Costs Forecasted to Rise**

## Number of Women in the Justice System Projected to Reach 1.1 Million by 2035, Costs to Rise \$8 Billion

Because men make up the vast majority of the nation's correctional population, national cost estimates often reflect systemwide averages that are driven by men. [The Rising Cost of Women's Justice System Involvement](#) provides first-of-their-kind estimates of the projected growth in women's local, state, and federal correctional populations and direct expenditures across prison, jail, probation, and parole.

Key findings:

- **The number of women under correctional control is projected to reach 1.1 million by 2035.** That represents a 10% increase from 2022. Growth is expected to be concentrated in confinement, with the women's prison population projected to rise 27% and the jail population 20%.
- **Annual costs are projected to rise by about 34% by 2035.** The cost of women's justice system involvement is projected to grow from \$23–\$26 billion in 2025 to \$30–\$34 billion by 2035, driven by increases in population and per-person expenditures.
- **Women cost significantly more to imprison than men.** In 2025, imprisonment cost about \$70,000 per person per year on average, while this report estimates annual costs of \$87,000 to \$122,000 per woman—25% to 75% higher. The difference reflects factors such as smaller facilities, mixed security classifications, greater healthcare needs, and heavier use of external medical providers.
- **The full economic impact is likely larger than the estimates show.** Many costs borne by families, caregivers, communities, and public systems cannot be reliably quantified, the report says. One measurable cost is lost household production—the unpaid household and caregiving labor lost when a woman is imprisoned—which is estimated at \$2.8 billion in 2025 and projected to rise to \$3.8 billion by 2035.

### What Happens When Women Serve Less Time in Prison?

While prison population debates often focus on admissions, the amount of time people remain behind bars is also a major driver of incarceration levels and correctional spending. The second report, [What Happens When Women Serve Less Time in Prison?](#), uses release data from Illinois and North Carolina to examine the impact of reducing time served on both costs and public safety.

## Number of Women in the Justice System Projected to Reach 1.1 Million by 2035, Costs to Rise \$8 Billion

Specifically, the report models what would happen if women served 50% less time in prison. This would reduce the average time served from about 14 months to 7 months in Illinois, and about 17 months to 8.5 months in North Carolina.

### Key findings:

- **Reducing time served for all women by 50% would result in modest projected increases in arrests.** The model estimates 105 additional annual female arrests in Illinois and 96 in North Carolina in the first three years after release. This represents a 7% and 9% increase, respectively, above modeled baseline arrest levels in each state, which range from about 1,100 to 1,500 per year.
- **Those additional arrests would represent a tiny share of total statewide female arrests.** Under the 50% reduction scenario, the roughly 100 additional arrests projected to occur in each state would account for about 0.3% of annual female arrests in Illinois and 0.2% in North Carolina.
- **Most additional arrests would likely be for nonviolent crimes.** About 9 in 10 would be for property offenses, drug offenses, and supervision violations.
- **Reducing time served by 50% would cut the average daily prison population by 40-50%.** In the analysis, the average daily population was reduced by roughly 950 women in each state, compared with a baseline of about 1,800 women in Illinois and 2,400 in North Carolina.
- **Cost savings would be substantial.** After accounting for costs that would shift to community supervision and any added arrest- and victimization-related expenses, estimated net annual savings range from \$61.8 million to \$94.1 million in Illinois and \$68.3 million to \$102.7 million in North Carolina.

“The point of this research is not simply that women’s incarceration is expensive,” said John K. Roman, PhD, a senior fellow at NORC at the University of Chicago and co-author of the reports. “It’s that the costs, benefits, and tradeoffs look different for women than they do for men. Policymakers need estimates that reflect those differences if they want to make good decisions.”

The first report was co-authored by Roman, Avinash S. Bhati, PhD, the founder and CEO of the data analytics firm Maxarth LLC, and CCJ Policy Director Stephanie Kennedy. The second

was co-authored by Bhati and Roman.

### **About the Women's Justice Commission**

CCJ launched the Women's Justice Commission in July 2024 to document and raise awareness of the unique challenges facing women in the justice system and build consensus for evidence-based reforms that enhance safety, health, and justice. In October 2025, the Commission released its first set of [findings and recommendations](#) calling for four priority measures to stem the flow of women into the criminal justice system and improve outcomes for women and families. A second set of findings and recommendations, to be released later this year, will focus on the "back end" of the justice system, including conditions of confinement and how to promote success post-conviction and upon reentry.

Support for the Commission comes from Ford Foundation, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the Joan Ganz Cooney & Holly Peterson Fund, The J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation, the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Navigation Fund, the National Football League, The New York Women's Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, the Tow Foundation, and the Council's general operating contributors.

### **About the Council on Criminal Justice**

The Council on Criminal Justice is a nonpartisan think tank and invitational membership organization that advances understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and builds consensus for solutions that enhance safety and justice for all.

The Council does not take policy positions. As part of its array of activities, the Council conducts research and convenes independent commissions composed of Council members who produce reports with findings and policy recommendations on matters of concern. Commission findings and conclusions are not subject to approval of the Council's Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, or funders. See more information on the Council's policy projects [here](#).