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The Rising Cost of Women's Justice System Involvement: Projected Growth in System Size and Costs Through 2035

Published on June 23, 2026

Methodology

This document describes the methodology used to estimate the costs associated with women's involvement in the criminal justice system, the projected size of the population over the next decade, and selected broader economic impacts, including the loss of household production, as presented in *The Rising Cost of Women's Justice System Involvement: Projected Growth in System Size and Costs Through 2035*.

The analysis examines the cost of maintaining current levels of women's criminal justice system involvement—including prison, jail, and community supervision—under existing policies and practices, and projects how both the size of the female justice-involved population and associated expenditures are expected to change over time. In addition to direct system costs, the analysis includes an estimate of the economic value of household production lost as a result of women's incarceration in state and federal prisons.

Because no single national dataset captures these components comprehensively, the estimates draw on multiple data sources and modeling assumptions. The sections below describe how population projections are constructed, how baseline costs are estimated and adjusted to reflect differences across system settings, and how these inputs are combined to estimate total expenditures and related economic impacts.

Data Sources and Approach

This analysis proceeds in three parts. First, it estimates the cost of women's involvement in the justice system across prison, jail, and community supervision. Second, it projects the size of the population in each of these settings over the next decade. Third, it

estimates selected broader economic impacts, including the loss of household production associated with women's incarceration. The sections that follow describe the data sources and methods used for each component, beginning with the estimation of per-person costs across system settings.

There are no comprehensive national estimates of the cost of women's involvement in the justice system. As a result, this analysis draws on a combination of administrative data, policy reports, and prior cost studies to estimate per-person costs across system components.

The analysis establishes a baseline estimate of average imprisonment costs across correctional populations using widely cited national and state-level sources. Then, the analysis estimates the additional costs associated with incarcerating women relative to this per-person baseline and applies these adjustments to develop a range of costs related specifically to women (adjusting all values to 2025 dollars). Finally, per-woman cost estimates are applied across prison, jail, and community supervision to estimate total system costs.

Throughout, the analysis emphasizes transparency in assumptions and treats cost estimates as ranges where appropriate, reflecting variation in how costs are measured and reported.

Estimating Per-Person Costs: Prisons

Establishing a Baseline

There is no single, definitive estimate of the cost of imprisonment in the United States. Widely cited figures vary depending on what costs are included and how they are measured. This analysis draws on three commonly used approaches to establish a range of plausible estimates. The baseline estimates in this section are presented as per-person imprisonment costs because available national sources generally do not report costs separately by sex. These estimates reflect average costs across correctional populations. The next section adjusts this baseline to estimate a per-woman imprisonment cost, reflecting evidence that incarcerating women is more expensive than the average baseline.

The Vera Institute of Justice[1] estimates an average annual imprisonment cost of $33,274 per person in 2015 dollars, based on a survey of 45 states. Adjusted to 2025 dollars using the Consumer Price Index, this is $45,194 per person per year. This approach reflects costs reported within corrections budgets and may understate total costs when other relevant expenditures—such as healthcare, pensions, or capital costs—are funded outside those budgets. In addition, since these are older data, the per-person price may not reflect changes in correctional costs in recent years. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, correctional systems have experienced uneven and often accelerated cost increases related to healthcare, staffing, and facility operations, meaning that simple inflation adjustments may not fully capture current spending levels.

USAFacts provides a more recent estimate by dividing total state correctional expenditures by the number of people in prison, yielding an average of $60,989 per person in 2023 dollars, equaling $64,432 in 2025 dollars.[2] While this approach captures a broader share of correctional spending, it may overstate prison-specific costs by attributing system-wide expenditures—including supervision and administrative costs—to the prison population.

More comprehensive imprisonment cost estimates, such as those produced by the California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), incorporate spending across multiple state agencies, including healthcare, education, and employee benefits.[3] The LAO estimates a per-person cost of $133,110 in California (in 2025 dollars). This estimate reflects a more expansive accounting framework but reflects a single high-cost, high-service provision state, so this figure cannot be treated as a national average.

To facilitate comparison, Table S1 presents each source estimate in the originally reported dollars and in constant 2025 dollars.

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[1] Mai, C. & Subramanian, R. (2017). *The price of prisons: Examining state spending trends, 2010-2015*. Vera Institute of Justice. https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/the-price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends.pdf?dm=1568745781

[2] USAFacts. (2025). *How much do states spend on housing prisoners?* https://usafacts.org/articles/how-much-do-states-spend-on-prisons/

[3] California Legislative Analyst's Office. (2025). *How much does it cost to incarcerate a person?* https://www.lao.ca.gov/PolicyAreas/CJ/6_cj_inmatecost

Table S1. Estimates of Annual Per-Person Imprisonment Costs

Source	Reported Estimate	2025 Dollars (Adjusted)	What it Captures	Key Limitations
Vera Institute of Justice	$33,274 (2015)	$45,194	State prison costs reported through correctional budget surveys.	Survey-based estimates may exclude costs funded outside correctional agency budgets, such as healthcare, pensions, capital costs, or other cross-agency expenses.
USAFacts	$60,989 (2023)	$64,432	Total state correctional expenditures divided by the number of people in prison.	Captures broader correctional spending, but may overstate prison-specific costs because expenditures can include supervision, administration, and other non-prison costs.
California Legislative Analyst's Office	$133,110 (2025)	$133,110	A detailed California prison cost estimate, including costs funded through and outside the corrections agency budget.	Reflects a high-cost, high-service state and should not be treated as nationally representative.

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Taken together, these figures suggest a range rather than a precise value. Estimates based exclusively on corrections budgets, such as those from Vera, likely understate total costs by excluding expenditures funded outside corrections systems, including healthcare, pensions, and capital costs.

To establish a consistent point of comparison, this analysis uses the USAFacts estimate as a baseline because it reflects more recent spending and captures a broader share of correctional expenditures than budget-based estimates, while remaining more representative of national conditions than state-specific analyses. While this approach may overstate prison-specific costs by attributing system-wide spending to the prison population, it provides a more comprehensive measure of total correctional spending.

Adjusting for Costs Not Included in Corrections Budgets

Some incarceration costs are funded outside corrections agency budgets and therefore may not be fully captured in standard per-person estimates. These costs can include healthcare, pensions, capital expenditures, education for incarcerated people, and employee benefits funded through other state agencies.

To account for these expenditures, the analysis compares the baseline estimates described above with the more comprehensive accounting approach used by the California LAO, which incorporates costs borne across multiple state systems. The difference between the inflation-adjusted Vera estimate and the LAO estimate suggests that a meaningful share of incarceration costs may not be reflected in standard corrections budgets.

Because these additional costs are not uniformly excluded across all states, the analysis applies a weighted adjustment rather than the full observed difference between estimates. Specifically, about 25% of the observed gap is applied to the USAFacts per-person baseline, resulting in an upward adjustment of 8.4%.

Applying this adjustment increases the estimated annual per-person cost of imprisonment from $64,432 to $69,844 in 2025 dollars. This revised estimate serves as the baseline for the women-specific cost estimates. Outlined below, these estimates adjust the per-person baseline upward to reflect evidence that incarcerating women is more expensive than the average prison population.

Estimating the Cost of Imprisoning Women

As noted above, there are no directly observable estimates of the cost of imprisoning women relative to men. But existing research identifies several well-established factors that contribute to higher costs for women. These cost drivers are widely recognized and reflect structural and service-related differences in how women are housed and treated within correctional systems.

Three primary factors drive these differences:

+ **Economies of scale (facilities).** Correctional facilities housing women are, on average, substantially smaller than those housing men. Because many facility costs are fixed—including administration, portions of staffing, transportation, and healthcare—smaller populations result in higher per-person costs.

+ **Economies of scale (security).** Facilities housing men are more often separated by security classification (e.g., minimum, medium, close), allowing staffing and operations to be tailored efficiently. In contrast, women's facilities more frequently house people

with varying security classifications within a single facility, limiting these efficiencies and increasing average costs.

+ **Healthcare.** On average, women have higher healthcare costs than men, including reproductive and maternal care, as well as a greater need for preventive and behavioral health services. These costs may be further elevated by the need to transport individuals to external providers for services not available onsite, particularly for care tailored to women's health needs; such transports can require additional staffing, security, and logistical coordination.

These factors, which are well documented in the literature on gender differences in correctional populations and facility operations, consistently point to higher per-person costs for women.[4] To translate these qualitative differences into quantitative estimates, the analysis uses external benchmarks to define a plausible cost range.

The upper bound of per-woman costs is informed by international evidence. In Canadian federal facilities, the reported daily cost of imprisoning women is 88% higher than it is for men.[5] While this gap reflects similar structural and service-related factors seen in the U.S., it may also be influenced by differences in healthcare delivery and program provision. To account for these differences, the upper bound of per-woman costs used in this analysis is set at 1.75, or 75% above the per-person baseline estimate.

The lower bound of per-woman costs reflects variation across U.S. systems. Evidence from the California LAO indicates that more comprehensive and higher-cost service structures—such as expanded healthcare, staffing, and facility expenditures—are not uniformly present across all states. Because these cost structures apply to a subset of jurisdictions, the analysis uses this variation as a proxy for more modest increases in per-person costs. This results in a lower bound of per-woman costs of 1.25, or 25% above the per-person baseline estimate. The LAO estimates are used here to inform the

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[4] Bloom, B. E., Owen, B.,& Covington, S. S. (2003*). Gender-responsive strategies: Research, practice, and guiding principles for women offenders* (NCJ 201301). National Institute of Corrections. https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/018017.pdf; Covington, S. (2022). Creating a trauma-informed justice system for women. In S. L. Brown & L. Gelsthorpe (Eds.), *The Wiley Handbook on What Works with Girls and Women in Conflict with the Law: A Critical Review of Theory, Practice, and Policy*, pp. 172-184. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119874898.ch12; Sufrin, C., Beal, L., Clarke, J., Jones, R., & Mosher, W. D. (2019). Pregnancy outcomes in US prisons, 2016–2017. *American Journal of Public Health, 109*(5), 799-805. https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305006

[5] "In 2014, the daily cost to incarcerate a male inmate in federal facilities was $312 and the cost for a female inmate was $589." See: Government of Canada. (2014). *Costs of crime in Canada, 2014: 3.5.1. Federal custody costs*. https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/ccc2014/system-systeme.html

presence and distribution of higher-cost systems, rather than to directly estimate sex differences in costs.

Baseline per-person and per-woman prison costs are derived from the approach described above and reflect per-person annual expenditures in 2025 dollars for those physically held in prison facilities. Individuals under correctional authority but not housed in a facility—people in home confinement or prerelease custody, for example—are not included in prison cost estimates and are instead treated as part of community supervision for cost purposes.

The estimated annual per-person cost of imprisonment is $69,844, or $191 per day. Applying the lower and upper bound weights of 125% and 175% yields a per-woman daily cost of between $239 and $335. When annualized, this results in a per-woman average of $87,235 to $122,275 per year.

Per-woman prison costs are projected forward using a compounding annual growth rate of 3%. Because detailed, consistent annual cost data are not available, this assumption is used to approximate underlying growth in correctional expenditures over time. The higher growth rate for prisons—relative to the 2% rate used for jails and community supervision below—reflects the greater cost pressures associated with confinement, including rising healthcare expenditures, staffing costs, and facility operations. These costs tend to grow more rapidly and are less flexible than those in community-based settings, where expenditures are more concentrated in personnel and administrative functions. Projected values are presented in Table S2.

Table S2. Projected Annual Costs Per-Woman in Prison

	Estimated Prison Costs (Lower Bound)	Estimated Prison Costs (Upper Bound)
2025	$87,305	$122,227
2026	$89,924	$125,894
2027	$92,622	$129,671
2028	$95,401	$133,561
2029	$98,263	$137,568
2030	$101,210	$141,695
2031	$104,247	$145,945
2032	$107,374	$150,324
2033	$110,595	$154,834
2034	$113,913	$159,479
2035	$117,331	$164,263

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Estimating Per-Person Costs: Jails

Estimates of jail costs are based on analyses from the Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP).[6] Using data from 39 Washington counties over more than a decade, WSIPP estimates jail expenditures as a function of average daily population (ADP) using panel-data regression methods with lagged expectations.

Because comparable national estimates of jail costs are not available and state-level data vary widely in scope, methodology, and completeness, WSIPP estimates are used as a standardized benchmark. This approach prioritizes internal consistency across system components and allows for transparent replication of cost assumptions, even though the underlying data are derived from a single state. Although Washington-specific, WSIPP

[6] See: Local Adult Jail Per-Unit Costs on page 147: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2024). *Benefit-cost technical documentation*. https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/TechnicalDocumentation/WsippBenefitCostTechnicalDocumentation.pdf

estimates are widely used in policy analysis due to their methodological rigor and transparency.

WSIPP estimates an average daily per-person jail cost of $112.60 in 2015 dollars, or $152.93 in 2025 dollars. Annualized, this is $55,819 per person per year in 2025 dollars, although jail stays are typically much shorter than prison stays and costs are driven less by duration than by turnover. Future costs are adjusted using an annual growth rate of 2%, consistent with WSIPP assumptions regarding the long-term growth of correctional expenditures (Table S3).

Because available data are not disaggregated by sex, these estimates reflect average costs across populations. In the absence of evidence that jail costs differ systematically by sex, the analysis assumes equivalent per-person costs for men and women.

Table S3. Projected Annual Costs Per-Woman in Jail

	Estimated Jail Costs
2025	$55,819
2026	$56,936
2027	$58,075
2028	$59,236
2029	$60,421
2030	$61,629
2031	$62,862
2032	$64,119
2033	$65,401
2034	$66,709
2035	$68,044

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Estimating Per-Person Costs: Community Supervision

Estimates of community supervision costs are also drawn from WSIPP and reflect the cost of probation and parole supervision.[7] As with jail costs, WSIPP provides one of the most methodologically transparent and consistently applied estimates available, and is used here as a standardized benchmark in the absence of comparable national data.

WSIPP estimates the average daily cost of community supervision at $21.40 per person in 2015 dollars, or $29.07 in 2025 dollars—equivalent to $10,611 per person per year. These estimates primarily capture the administrative and monitoring costs of supervision, including staffing, case management, and compliance oversight, but do not include the broader set of services—such as treatment, housing support, or healthcare—that may be provided through other systems.

Per-person costs are converted to 2025 dollars and projected forward using an annual growth rate of 2%, consistent with WSIPP assumptions regarding the long-term growth of correctional expenditures (Table S4).

[7] See Community Supervision Operating Costs on page 157: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2024). *Benefit-cost technical documentation*. https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/TechnicalDocumentation/WsippBenefitCostTechnicalDocumentation.pdf

Table S4. Projected Annual Costs Per-Woman Under Community Supervision

	Estimated Community Supervision Costs
2025	$10,611
2026	$10,823
2027	$11,039
2028	$11,260
2029	$11,485
2030	$11,715
2031	$11,949
2032	$12,188
2033	$12,432
2034	$12,681
2035	$12,934

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Projecting the Size of the Female Criminal Justice System-Involved Population

This section describes the methods used to project the number of women in prison and jail, as well as under community supervision, through 2035. These projections rely on observed historical trends and standard population dynamics models that track how the number of people in a system changes over time based on inflows (admissions) and outflows (releases). Separate models are used for prison, jail, and community supervision because the available data and system dynamics differ across these settings.

For prison projections, the analysis relies on data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Prisoner Statistics (NPS) program.[8] Estimates of the population in physical

[8] Bureau of Justice Statistics. (n.d.). *National prisoner statistics* (NPS). https://bjs.ojp.gov/data-collection/national-prisoner-statistics-nps

custody are available through 2022, but are not reported separately in subsequent published tables. As a result, 2022 is used as the baseline year for which consistent estimates of women in physical custody can be developed, and serves as the anchor point for prison population projections.

Projecting the Number of Women in Prison

The prison population can be defined in two related but distinct ways: individuals physically housed in state or federal prison facilities and individuals under state or federal correctional authority. Most people under correctional authority are housed in prison facilities, but some are not. This group may include people in community-based settings, such as home confinement or residential reentry centers, as well as people held in local jails or private facilities under contract. Because available data do not identify where individuals in this group are housed, this analysis treats them separately from those physically held in prison facilities.

Because these groups differ in both location and cost structure, they are modeled separately in this analysis. Using the approach described below, projections first estimate the number of women in physical custody and then estimate the number who are under correctional authority but not housed in prison facilities.

Women in Physical Custody

Let $N(t)$ denote the number of women in custody of the U.S. correctional system at the end of period t. Let $A(t)$ and $R(t)$ be the number of women admitted to and released from custody during period t. The relationship between the population at a given point in time (stock) and the flows into (admissions) and out of (releases) custody can be expressed
as:

$$N(t) = N(t-1) + A(t) - R(t) \quad (1)$$

By definition, the number of women in custody at the end of a given year equals the number at the start of that year plus admissions minus releases. For example, the population at the end of 2022 equals the population at the end of 2021 plus admissions during 2022 minus releases during 2022.

This identity can be converted into a standard differential equation to study custody population dynamics. Reorganizing this identity and expressing admissions and releases as per-capita rates (relative to the prior year's population) yields:

$$\begin{aligned} N(t) - N(t-1) &= A(t) - R(t) \\ &= \left(\frac{A(t)}{N(t-1)} - \frac{R(t)}{N(t-1)}\right) N(t-1) \\ &= (a-r)N(t-1) \\ &= kN(t-1) \end{aligned}$$

where $a = A(t)/N(t-1)$ and $r = R(t)/N(t-1)$ and $k = a - r$. This is a discrete time version of the first order differential equation:

$$\frac{dN}{dt} = kN \tag{2}$$

which has the general exponential solution of the form:

$$N(t) = N(0)e^{kt} \tag{3}$$

where $N(0)$ is the initial condition, k is as derived above, and t is just a measure of the amount of time elapsed since the initial condition. If $k > 0$, the population grows over time; if $k < 0$, the population declines. In practice, such dynamics are rarely sustained indefinitely. Instead, populations tend to stabilize around an equilibrium where $k \approx 0$, reflecting balance between admissions and releases. Sustained periods of growth or decline (decay) may occur, but these are typically driven by external factors (including responses to the COVID-19 pandemic) rather than internal system dynamics.

To model the short-term dynamics, this equation can be applied recursively from one period to the next. In this case $t = 1$, and the initial condition is redefined each period as $N(t-1)$. Allowing both admission rate $a = A(t)/N(t-1)$ and the release rate $r(t)$ to vary over time, yields the following short-term, discrete-time formulation:

$$N(t) = N(t-1)\exp\left(\frac{A(t)}{N(t-1)} - r(t)\right) \tag{4}$$

The release rate $r(t)$ is approximately equal to the inverse of the expected length of stay in custody $l(t)$. In modeling population dynamics, for example, this approximation allows us to estimate the life expectancy at birth by computing the inverse of the death rate in the population. To be sure, this assumption holds only under some simplifying assumptions. But it allows us to link population dynamics to two key policy levers: sentencing policy and correctional policy. Therefore, if we write $r(t) = 1/l(t)$, where l is the expected length of stay in custody, we can derive an equation that captures the short-term population dynamics for women in custody as:

$$N(t) = N(t-1)\exp\left(\frac{A(t)}{N(t-1)} - \frac{1}{l(t)}\right) \quad (5)$$

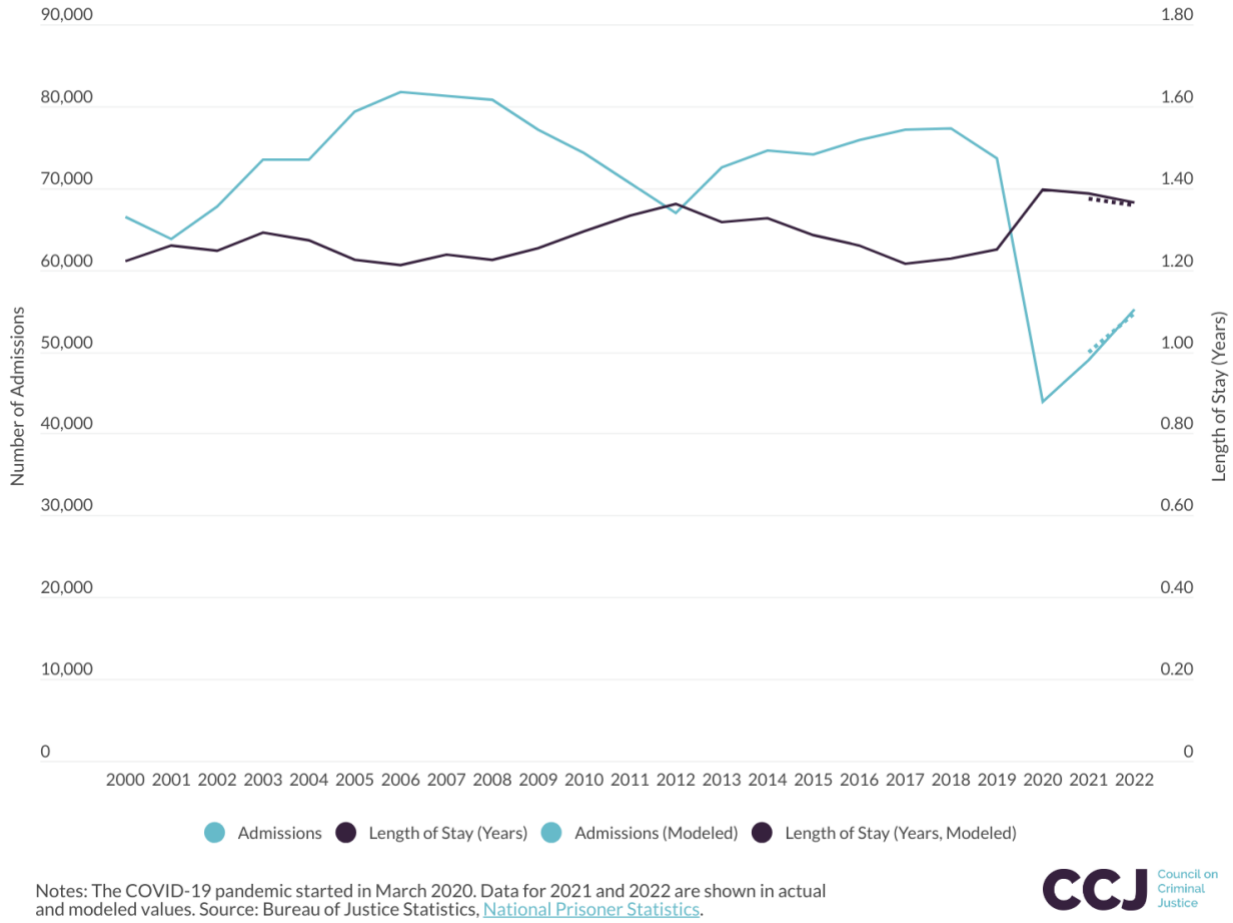
In practical terms, this formulation links population size to two key drivers: the rate at which individuals enter custody and the length of time they remain there. Changes in either factor—admissions or length of stay—directly affect the size of the custody population.

Given a current custody population $N(t-1)$, and policy parameters $A(t)$ and $l(t)$, this equation can be used to predict the population in the next period. This process can be repeated recursively using $N(t+1)$. For any fixed combination of admission and length of stay, the system converges toward a stable population level.

Estimating these dynamics requires assumptions about the equilibrium values of admissions and length of stay. Recent historical data provide a basis for approximating these values.

Figure S1 plots these quantities between 2000 and 2022 using data from the NPS program. The figure shows that, prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, female admissions and length of stay had remained relatively stable since 2000. Female admissions increased in the early 2000s and then declined through 2012, but from 2010 to 2019, both measures were relatively stable. The solid lines represent observed values, while dotted lines represent the modeled values.

Figure S1. Trends in Admissions and Length of Stay and Their Disruption During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Notes: The COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020. Data for 2021 and 2022 are shown in actual and modeled values. Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Statistics.

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View the interactive version of this figure here.

The number of women in prison custody was also relatively stable from 2010 to 2019, consistent with the equilibrium dynamics described above. Together, these patterns suggest that in the decade leading up to the pandemic, the system operated near an equilibrium, with only minor fluctuations in both policy inputs (admissions and releases) and population levels.

Accordingly, the model uses average admissions and the ratio of prior-year custody stock to releases over the 2010 to 2019 period as equilibrium values for the short-term dynamic model. The data indicate that 73,685 women were admitted to custody annually during this period, with an average expected length of stay of 1.286 years. These values imply a stable custody population of about 100,000 women (94,780), consistent with long-term trends.

To project future population levels, the model assumes that, in the absence of policy changes, system dynamics will gradually adjust the custody population to account for disruptions associated with COVID-19. Specifically, unless policymakers alter sentencing policy (affecting admissions, $A(t)$) or correctional policy (affecting length of stay, $l(t)$), the system is expected to return toward its pre-COVID equilibrium.

Available data suggest that COVID-19 temporarily disrupted both admissions and length of stay. Figure S1 (above) shows that admissions declined sharply and length of stay increased during 2020, relative to prior trends. More recent data indicate that admissions are rising and length of stay is declining toward pre-COVID levels, though neither has fully returned to equilibrium. These patterns suggest that recovery from the COVID shock is gradual rather than immediate.

To capture this adjustment process, the model incorporates a simple 4/5 rule that allows admissions and length of stay to move incrementally toward their equilibrium values over time. Let $A^*$and l^*denote the equilibrium levels of admissions and length of stay. Based on pre-COVID data, these values are 73,685 and 1.286, respectively. The model assumes the following adjustment process:

$$\begin{aligned} A(t) &= \frac{A(t-1)*4+A^*}{5} \\ l(t) &= \frac{l(t-1)*4+l^*}{5} \end{aligned}$$

This formulation assumes that, in every period, admissions and length of stay move one-fifth of the way from their prior values toward equilibrium. The speed of convergence depends on the magnitude of the initial disruption but typically occurs over several periods.

Incorporating this adjustment into the population dynamics yields the final projection equation:

$$N(t) = N(t-1)\exp\left(\frac{(A(t-1)*4+A^*)/5}{N(t-1)} - \frac{1}{(l(t-1)*4+l^*)/5}\right) \qquad (6)$$

This equation depends only on lagged values of admissions, length of stay, and population, along with fixed equilibrium parameters. Under the assumption that sentencing and correctional policy remain unchanged, the model projects a gradual increase in the number of women in custody, moving the population toward pre-COVID levels over the next several years. These projected trends are shown as dotted lines in Figure S2, which presents projections for both women in custody and women under correctional jurisdiction; both series follow similar patterns.

Women Under State or Federal Correctional Authority Not In Physical Custody

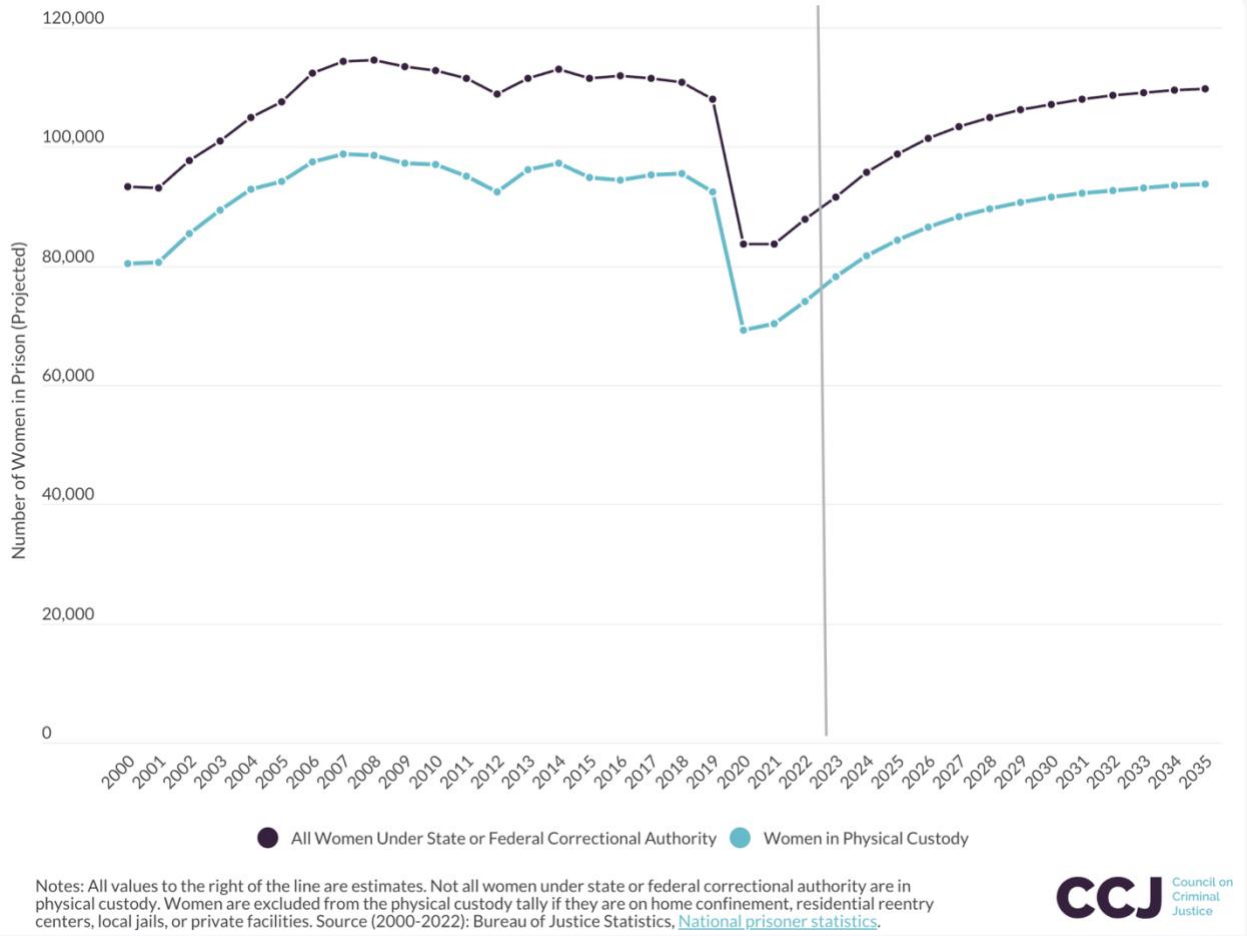
In addition to estimating the population in physical custody, the analysis estimates the number of women under state or federal correctional authority who are not housed in prison facilities. These individuals may be in community-based placements such as home confinement or residential reentry centers (halfway houses), or, in some cases, housed in local jails or private facilities under contract.

Because available data do not consistently distinguish these groups over time, the analysis estimates this population using historical ratios from the NPS program. Specifically, the ratio of individuals under correctional authority but not in physical custody to those in custody was calculated for each year from 2000 to 2022. This ratio ranged from 0.13 to 0.21 over the period, with values near 0.19 in the last two years of the time period.

The average ratio over the full period (0.17) is applied to the projected population in physical custody to estimate the number of women under correctional authority who are not in custody in each year. This approach provides a consistent approximation of this population in the absence of more detailed data, while reflecting both long-term trends and recent increases in non-custodial placements.

Figure S2 presents the observed and projected number of women in physical custody and under correctional authority over time. The figure shows both the historical stability of the system prior to COVID-19 and the gradual return toward equilibrium in the projection period, with similar trends observed for both populations.

Figure S2. Number of Women Under State or Federal Correctional Authority, 2000–2022 (Observed) and 2023–2035 (Projected)



View the interactive version of this figure here.

Projecting the Number of Women in Jail

Data on women in jails are drawn from the Bureau of Justice Statistics Annual Survey of Jails, using published tables from 2013 to 2023.[9] These data report total year-end jail populations and include breakdowns by sex. However, key inputs required for the dynamic model used in the prison analysis—admissions and length of stay—are not available by sex. As a result, the dynamic model used for women's prison population projections cannot be directly applied to jail populations. Instead, a regression-based

[9] Zeng, Z. (2025). *Jail inmates in 2023 – statistical tables* (NCJ 309965). Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/jail-inmates-2023-statistical-tables/web-report

approach is used to estimate the relationship between year-to-year changes in the female jail population.

The model estimates the relationship between changes in the log of the population over time using the following specification:

$$log\ N\ (t) - log\ N\ (t-1) = \alpha + \beta\ log\ N\ (t-1)$$

This specification is estimated using BJS data. Alternative specifications were tested, including models with a linear time trend, but these did not improve model fit and were not retained. A log transformation of the dependent variable provided a better fit than a model specified in levels and was therefore adopted. Due to disruptions associated with COVID-19, observations from 2020 and 2021 are excluded to obtain stable parameter estimates.

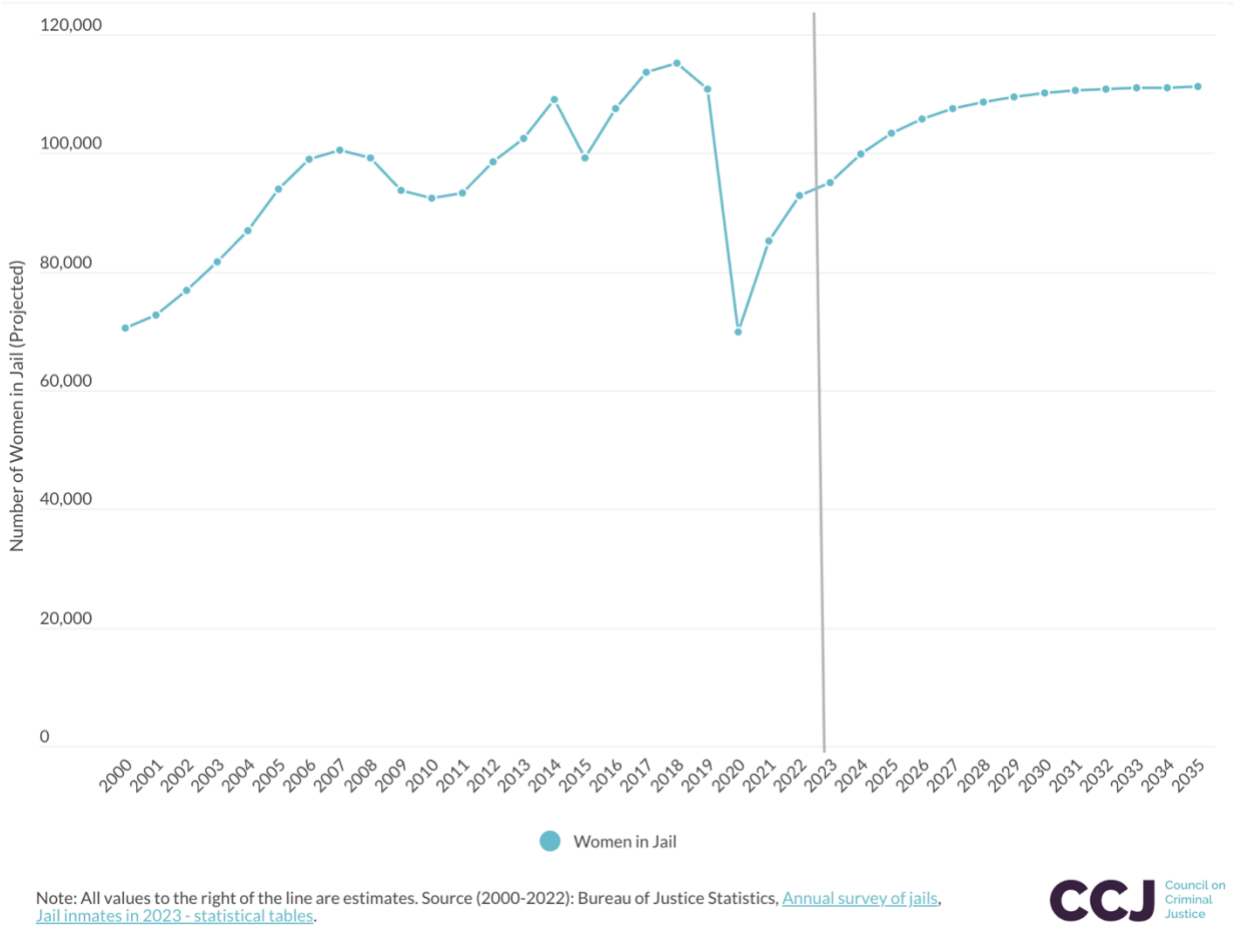
The estimated parameters $\hat{\alpha}$and $\hat{\beta}$, together with the prior year's population, are then used to project future jail populations according to:

$$\widehat{N}(t) = e^{\widehat{\alpha}} N(t-1)^{1+\widehat{\beta}} \qquad (7)$$

Figure S3 presents both the observed data and projected values.

The model suggests that the number of women in jails will continue to increase in the near term before stabilizing at pre-COVID levels, or a population estimated to be between 100,000 and 120,000.

Figure S3. Number of Women in Jail, 2000–2022 (Observed) and 2023–2035 (Projected)



Note: All values to the right of the line are estimates. Source (2000-2022): Bureau of Justice Statistics, Annual survey of jails, Jail inmates in 2023 - statistical tables.

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View the interactive version of this figure here.

Projecting the Number of Women Under Community Supervision

Data on women under community supervision are drawn from the Annual Probation Survey and the Annual Parole Survey.[10] Data from 2000 to 2022 are obtained from online dashboards and combined to produce a single series representing the total number of women under community supervision, including both probation and parole.

[10] Similar dashboards provide comparable annual data, by sex, for U.S. populations under probation and parole.

A key limitation of these data is the missing information on sex. About 25% of individuals under probation supervision and, beginning in 2010, roughly 10% of individuals on parole are recorded with unknown sex. To address this, the analysis first calculates the female share among individuals with known sex within probation and within parole. Those shares are then applied to the total probation and parole populations, including cases with unknown sex, to estimate the number of women in each group. The resulting estimates for probation and parole are then summed to produce the total number of women under community supervision.

Total community supervision in year t is defined as:

$$S(t) = Prob(t) + Parole(t)$$

Where:

$$Prob(t) = Prob(t)_f + Prob(t)_m + Prob(t)_{unk}$$

$$Parole(t) = Parole(t)_f + Parole(t)_m + Parole(t)_{unk}$$

The share of individuals with known sex who are female is calculated as:

$$\pi(t)_f = \frac{Prob(t)_f + Parole(t)_f}{Prob(t)_f + Parole(t)_f + Prob(t)_m + Parole(t)_m}$$

The total number of women under community supervision is then estimated as:

$$N(t) = S(t)\pi(t)_f \tag{8}$$

Using this definition, a variant of the regression-based approach applied in the jail model is used to project future population levels. The final model is specified as:

$$\log N\,(t) - \log N\,(t-1) = \alpha + \beta \log N\,(t-1) + \gamma t^*$$

where $t^* = t - 2000$ represents a linear time trend measured relative to the base year.

As in the jail model, observations affected by COVID-19 are excluded to obtain stable parameter estimates. For the community supervision series, data from 2020 through 2022 are omitted.

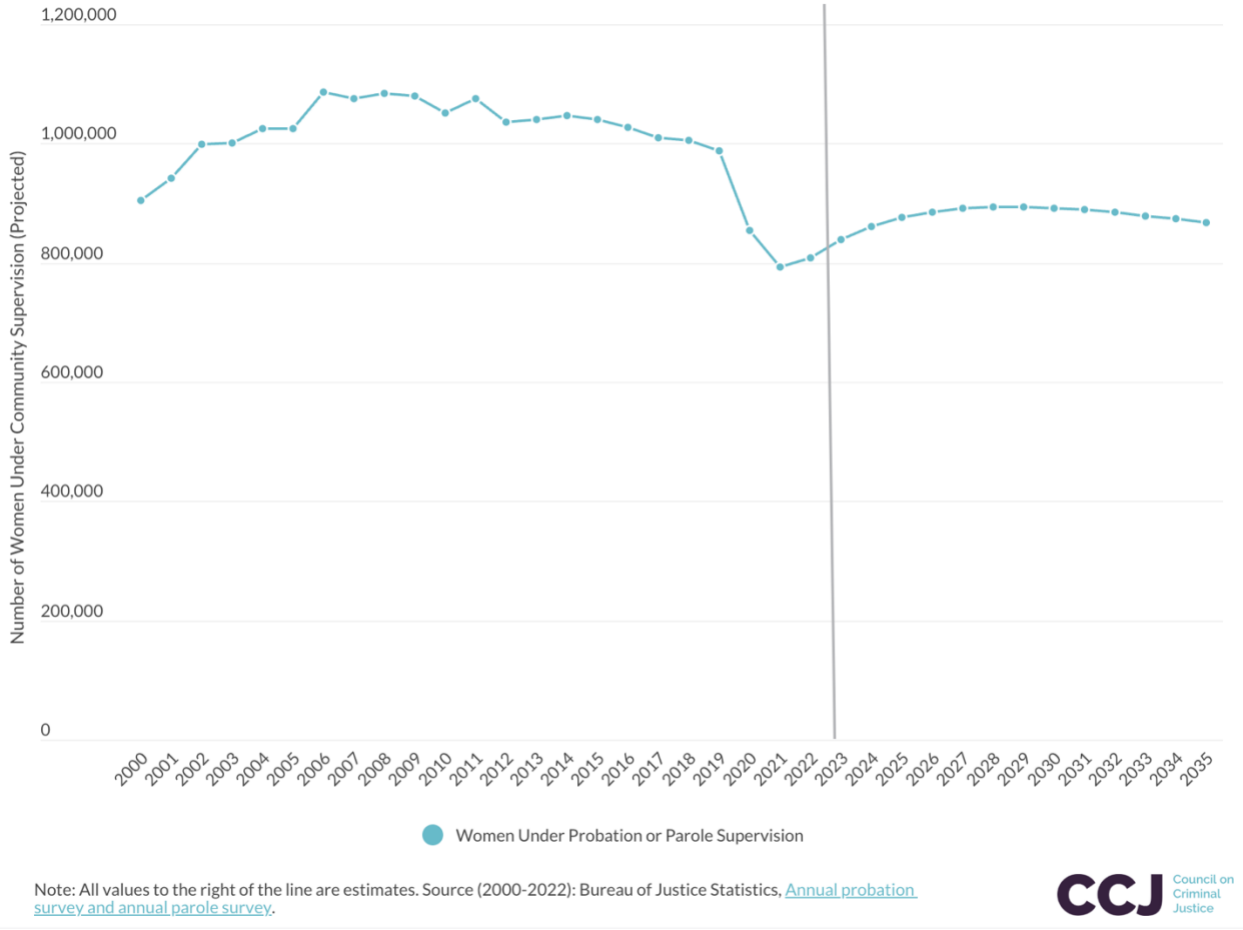
Estimated parameters $\hat{\alpha}$, $\hat{\beta}$, and $\hat{\gamma}$, together with lagged population values and the time trend, are used to generate projections according to:

$$\widehat{N}(t) = e^{\widehat{\alpha}} N(t-1)^{1+\widehat{\beta}} (t^*)^{\widehat{\gamma}} \tag{9}$$

Because the equation includes only fixed estimates, lagged values, and a perfectly predictable time variable (t^*), the model can be applied recursively to project population levels forward each year.

Figure S4 presents both observed and projected values. Gray markers indicate observations excluded from the regression analysis. The data show that the number of women under community supervision declined gradually between 2006 and the onset of COVID-19. Following a sharp drop during the pandemic, the rate of decline appears to have slowed. The model projects a modest increase in the near term, followed by a return to the longer-term downward trend observed prior to COVID.

Figure S4. Number of Women Under Community Supervision, 2000–2022 (Observed) and 2023–2035 (Projected)



View the interactive version of this figure here.

Projecting Trends Under Current Policies and Practices

The preceding sections describe the methods used to project the number of women in prison, jail, and on community supervision through 2035. Table S5 presents the resulting projected population levels for each system component.

Table S5. Number of Women Projected to be Under Correctional Control in the U.S., 2025-2035

	Prison (Physical Custody)	Prison (Not in Physical Custody)	Jail	Community Supervision
2022	73,930	13,854	92,900	808,800
2023	78,135	13,428	95,100	838,964
2024	81,595	14,023	99,907	860,704
2025	84,341	14,495	103,351	875,685
2026	86,505	14,866	105,788	885,342
2027	88,211	15,160	107,497	890,870
2028	89,558	15,391	108,687	893,227
2029	90,624	15,574	109,514	893,173
2030	91,469	15,720	110,085	891,298
2031	92,140	15,835	110,480	888,058
2032	92,674	15,927	110,752	883,803
2033	93,099	16,000	110,940	878,796
2034	93,438	16,058	111,069	873,239
2035	93,708	16,104	111,158	867,283

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To estimate total costs, projected populations are combined with per-person cost estimates for each correctional setting. Specifically, for each year, the projected number of women in prison, jail, and on community supervision is multiplied by the corresponding per-person annual cost estimates described above. All cost estimates are expressed in constant 2025 dollars.

Because prison costs are modeled as a range to reflect uncertainty in the cost of incarcerating women, total costs are also presented as low and high estimates. Jail and community supervision costs are held constant across scenarios, while prison costs vary according to the lower- and upper-bound estimates described above.

The resulting estimates of total annual costs are presented in Table S6. Under current policies and practices, total annual costs associated with women's justice system involvement are estimated to range from $22,577,681,147 to $25,523,037,549 in 2025. If projected population trends persist, these costs are expected to increase to between $29,984,353,356 and $34,382,257,212 by 2035.

Table S6. Projected Annual Costs of Women's Justice System Involvement, 2025–2035

	Total Estimated Costs (Lower Bound)	Total Estimated Costs (Upper Bound)
2025	$22,577,681,147	$25,523,037,549
2026	$23,544,744,478	$26,656,329,328
2027	$24,414,978,339	$27,683,107,678
2028	$25,213,149,597	$28,630,682,877
2029	$25,959,043,646	$29,521,019,966
2030	$26,667,654,304	$30,370,776,769
2031	$27,351,091,329	$31,193,145,049
2032	$28,018,157,832	$31,998,506,132
2033	$28,675,970,016	$32,794,576,677
2034	$29,329,958,243	$33,587,554,151
2035	$29,984,353,356	$34,382,257,212

Estimating the Value of Household Production

In addition to direct correctional system costs, the analysis includes an estimate of the economic value of household production lost as a result of women's incarceration in state and federal prisons. Household production refers to the labor required to maintain a household and care for its members, including activities such as meal preparation, cleaning, transportation, managing schedules and finances, and providing care for children and other dependents.

Estimates of the value of household production are based on data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, which places the annual value of this labor at $12.71 per hour in 2020 dollars, up from $10.93 per hour in 2019.[11] This estimate reflects the value of time and labor associated with household functioning and does not include the cost of items such as food, housing, or utilities. Household production values are used in gross domestic product (GDP) statistics to estimate a more comprehensive measure of economic activity.

To align this estimate with the rest of the analysis, the 2020 hourly value is first adjusted to 2025 dollars using the Consumer Price Index, yielding an estimated value of $15.81 per hour. It is then projected forward using an annual growth rate of 2%. To convert the 2025 hourly value into an annual estimate, the analysis assumes a 40-hour work week over 52 weeks, yielding an annual value of $32,883 per person. This corresponds to $90.09 per day when expressed on a 365-day basis.

The analysis uses this value in two ways. First, to estimate the annual loss of household production, the annual value is applied to the projected number of women in physical custody in each year. Based on these projections, the annual loss of household production is estimated at $2,773,385,103 for 2025, increasing to $3,756,209,606 by 2035 as the number of women in prison grows and the value of household production increases over time. These estimates are presented in Table S7.

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[11] Bridgman, B., Craig, A., & Kanal, D. (2022). *Accounting for household production in the national accounts: An update 1965–2020*. Bureau of Economic Analysis. https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2022/02-february/0222-household-production.htm

Table S7. Estimated Annual Household Production Loss for Women in Prison, 2025–2035

	Annual Household Production Loss for Women in Prison
2025	$2,773,385,103
2026	$2,901,434,793
2027	$3,017,828,262
2028	$3,125,189,339
2029	$3,225,635,921
2030	$3,320,826,778
2031	$3,412,091,516
2032	$3,500,503,718
2033	$3,586,888,054
2034	$3,671,947,915
2035	$3,756,209,606

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Second, the analysis estimates the loss of household production over the average period of women's imprisonment. Based on observed release cohorts in the NPS, the average length of stay for women in prison is 439 days. Applying the daily household production value to this average length of stay yields an estimated per-person loss of $39,549 over a typical prison stay, in 2025 dollars.

This per-stay estimate is then applied to the projected number of women in physical custody in each year. Based on these projections, the estimated loss of household production over the average period of imprisonment is $3,335,615,569 for 2025, increasing to $4,517,681,741 by 2035, assuming average time served remains similar. These estimates are presented in Table S8.

Table S8. Estimated Household Production Loss Over Women's Average Prison Stay, 2025–2035

	Household Production Loss Over Average Prison Stay
2025	$3,335,615,569
2026	$3,489,623,946
2027	$3,629,613,112
2028	$3,758,738,807
2029	$3,879,548,277
2030	$3,994,036,562
2031	$4,103,802,812
2032	$4,210,138,248
2033	$4,314,034,724
2034	$4,416,338,221
2035	$4,517,681,741