

# Review of Prison Costs

State Auditor's Office Performance Audit Division

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## What Washington spends on prisons

\$548 million in 2012, or about \$1.1 billion each biennium.

\$33,443 a year for each offender in the 2012 fiscal year.

\$91.38 a day for each offender in the 2012 fiscal year.

## Why we prepared this report

Since 2008, the state has been working to reduce prison costs. We sought better information about how much the state spends on prisons, what drives those costs, and what the state has done to save money on the prison system.

## Five primary drivers affect prison costs

**Custody staff** – Custody staff makes up the largest prison expense: more than 5,100 people oversee offenders. Since 2008, custody staff costs are up 3%, because employees have more years of service and salaries increased in 2009.

**Medical care** – Corrections has more than 700 medical staff to provide health care to offenders. Since 2008, costs have declined 20% due to a new health plan that limits health care coverage and charges offenders' insurance programs.

**Programs** – Prisons provide programs to improve the chances offenders will be successful upon release. Program costs were up \$1 million, or almost 2%, since 2008.

**Maintenance and utilities** – Corrections must power and maintain 12 large facilities. Utility and maintenance costs are down 14% since 2008, partly due to the closure of three prisons, including the oldest state prison dating from 1875.

**Food services** – Providing offenders nutritional meals is the fifth-largest cost driver. Food costs rose 5% since 2008, in part due to higher costs associated with meeting specific diets.

**Other direct costs** included administrative support, housekeeping, records and identification, transportation, and other. Combined, these costs made up about 8% of prison spending.

## Prison costs declined 3% since 2008

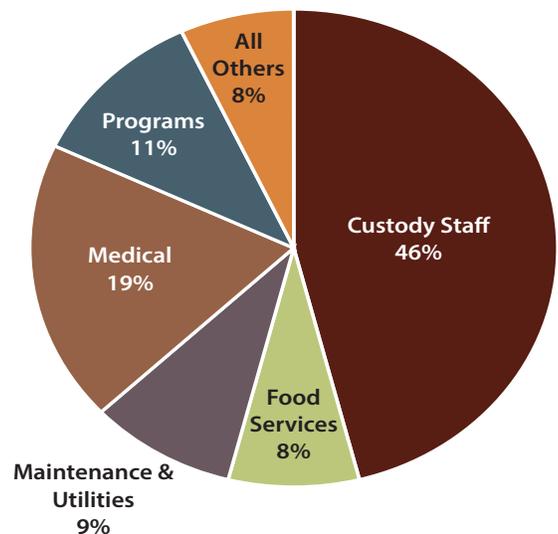
As a result of budget-reduction efforts prompted by the recession, Washington's direct prison costs declined about 3%, or \$17 million, over the past five fiscal years. Since 2009, prison spending is down 8%, and FTEs are also down 8% for medical and custody staff.

The state closed three prisons to reduce costs, while the offender population grew by 4% during that period to 16,341. The prison system is operating at 100% capacity.

## Prison costs by driver

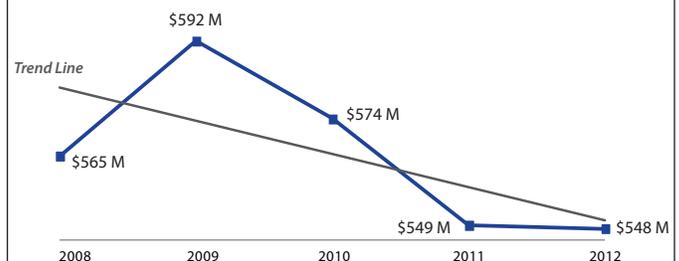
Driver	2012 costs	Change from 2008
Custody staff	\$251 million	↑ 3%
Medical	\$105 million	↓ 20%
Programs	\$58 million	↑ 2%
Maint. and utilities	\$50 million	↓ 14%
Food services	\$42 million	↑ 5%
Other	\$42 million	↓ 2%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>\$548 million</b>	<b>↓ 3%</b>

## Percent of direct prison costs



Note: Numbers do not add to 100% due to rounding.

## Direct prison costs



continued

## Prison system overview

The state houses more than 16,300 offenders in 12 prisons and is responsible for providing their meals, health care, treatment, and programs as they serve their sentences. About 6,000 employees work in the prisons, mostly as custody staff overseeing inmates. The prisons are organized by security level. A higher security level prison can also house lower security offenders. Washington state has:

- 5 maximum security facilities.
- 2 medium security facilities.
- 3 minimum security facilities.
- 2 women-only facilities.

### Washington Prison Facts

- 1 of every 294 Washington adult residents is in prison.
- Prisons cost the average Washington resident \$247 in 2010.
- Two prisons, in Monroe and Walla Walla, are at least 100 years old.



### Costs vary by prison

Costs can vary significantly by prison depending on a number of factors. The main contributing factors to higher costs are the facility's age, its capacity, and the security level of its offenders. Corrections needs more staff to oversee maximum security offenders than lower security offenders because they pose a greater risk. Older facilities require more staff and have higher maintenance costs than newer prisons. Other influential factors include the style of residential housing units and the offenders' dietary requirements.

### Independent report sparked interest in prison costs

In early 2012, the VERA Institute for Justice reported on the costs of prison systems in 40 states and calculated Washington's average cost-per-offender was the seventh-highest in its sample. The Institute, a non-profit policy group, included spending that was not in the Corrections budget, such as employee health insurance and pension contributions. The report generated significant interest in and desire for more clear understanding of prison costs.