

## **"Justice Reinvestment" as a Strategy to Reduce the Problematic Effects of Concentrated Incarceration**

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Incarceration rates have grown 6-fold in the last 35 years, from 200,000 prisoners in 1972 to 1.2 million prisoners today. The incarceration rate has grown by over 500 percent. This has occurred as a consequence of changes in sentencing, rather than changes in crime: the probability of incarceration given a felony conviction has tripled, while time served has doubled. The crime rate today is roughly the same as it was when the incarceration rate started to go up in 1972.

The growth of incarceration has been concentrated in subgroups of American citizens, with the effect that young males of color—especially African-Americans—are much more likely to be incarcerated than any other group. Black men are 6 times more likely to be locked up than white men, and almost one third of all African-American children born today will be incarcerated at some time in their lives.

Incarceration rates vary dramatically by “place.” In some urban areas, as many as one out of five adult males is behind bars on any given day, while almost every family has at least one male members experiencing imprisonment. There is a growing body of research on the effects of high rates of incarceration concentrated in disadvantaged urban areas. Families are more likely to experience divorce, children are more likely to experience a host of problems (including poor school performance and later delinquency), financial support is diminished, and labor markets are more likely to be disrupted. There is evidence that high rates of incarceration erode the sense of legitimacy of the legal order, and there is some evidence that one result of the deterioration of informal social control is increased crime.

The concentration of incarceration in high-problem areas is also very expensive. The funds currently spent on incarceration of residents in these locations constitute a potential source of support for local community development activities that would have the effect of increasing public safety.