

**FELON POPULATION TRENDS
FISCAL YEARS 1973 THROUGH 1978**

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Introduction

The felon population increase over the last six fiscal years will be documented and then broken out in specific sentence groupings which correspond roughly to lengths of incarceration. The data which will be presented indicate that factors beyond the gross number of commitments are profoundly affecting the population growth. The analysis of sentencing trends will demonstrate that less than 7% of the population increase is due to felons committed with sentences of five years or less. The greatest impact on the population has come from felons committed with sentences of 15 years or more. Over half of the observed population increase can be traced to this group of felons. This finding is significant because the felons with sentences of 15 years or more will affect the bedspace in the Department for periods of five years or longer.

The total increase in the felon population over the last six fiscal years is greater than the total number of felons committed in any fiscal year prior to 1976, and the population will continue to increase for years into the future even if the commitment rate is reduced to pre-1976 levels assuming there is no change in the current sentencing trends.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the trends within the population increase to better acquaint the reader with the scope of the problem.

The Population Increase

The first task is to document the population increase which has occurred over the last six fiscal years. The figures in the following table for the Confined Population and the Commitments are from Annual Statistical Report of Felons and Misdemeanants published by the Department of Corrections. The data for Releases are derived totals.

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Commitments	Releases	Difference
1973	5078	2230	2289	-59
1974	5447	2061	1692	369
1975	5385	2331	2393	-60
1976	5701	2673	2357	316
1977	6721	3385	2365	1020
1978	7459	2967	2229	738

The observed increases in the felon population have been cause for concern both within and outside the Department. The Department is concerned that it is able to provide adequate services for the felons entrusted to its care and the general assembly has been concerned about the capital outlay for the construction of bedspace.

The figures found in the difference column represent the net number of felon beds which had to be found (or were released) during each fiscal year. Over the period from the beginning of Fiscal 1973 to the end of Fiscal 1978, a net total of 2381 new felon beds have been filled.

There are two main sources of new felon bedspace. Either the space is newly created within the corrections system, or what was formerly misdemeanor bedspace has become felon bedspace. It should be noted that when a misdemeanor is released and a felon takes his place, the bed will be occupied longer than it would have been if a misdemeanor had been assigned to the bed.

The felon population in the Department of Corrections would be in a state of equilibrium if the number of commitments was equal to the net number of felons released in any given year. The population would grow if either the number of commitments went up or the number of releases decreased, and conversely, the population would fall if either of the opposite conditions existed.

Two things are not quite as obvious. Under the proper conditions the number of commitments could fall and the population would still increase if the releases dropped off at a greater rate. By the same token the number of releases could increase and the population would still increase if the rate of commitment increased enough. Population decreases

could also occur with increases in commitments and decreases in the number of releases if the respective rates of release and commitment were increased enough.

This is a rather complex way of saying that the net population is a function of both the rate of commitment and the rate of release. It is noted that the controls on both the rate of commitment and the rate of release rest outside the Department of Corrections. The former is controlled by the actions of the courts and the latter by the parole board.

The sections of the report which follow will evaluate the population increase in terms of felon groups with specific committing sentences.

Sentences of 5 Years or Less

Felons with sentences of 5 years or less will affect the correctional system for 1 year or less when jail credit is taken into account. The following table illustrates the rate of commitment and the number of years it would take the Department to acquire the confined population with sentences of five years or less for the last six fiscal years.

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Committed Felons	Rate of Commitment	Years to Acquire the Confined Pop.
1973	1780	1468	.825	1.21
1974	1907	1341	.703	1.42
1975	1721	1481	.861	1.16
1976	1576	1596	1.013	.99
1977	1824	1957	1.073	.93
1978	1945	1786	.918	1.09

The next table illustrates the rate of release and the number of years it would take the Department to release the confined population with sentences of five years or less for the last six fiscal years.

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Released Felons	Rate of Release	Years to Release the Confined Pop.
1973	1780	1631	.916	1.09
1974	1907	1214	.637	1.57
1975	1721	1667	.969	1.03
1976	1576	1741	1.105	.91
1977	1824	1709	.937	1.07
1978	1945	1665	.856	1.17

The difference between the length of time it would take to confine the population and the time it would take to release the same population constitutes a rough measure of the degree to which the Department is "ahead" of itself or falling "behind". In the following table positive figures in the difference column represent the proportion of a year the Department is "ahead" and negative figures how far they are "behind". The figures are again for felons with sentences of five years or under.

Fiscal Year	Years Required to Confine the Population	Years Required to Release the Population	Difference in Years
1973	1.21	1.09	.12
1974	1.42	1.57	-.15
1975	1.16	1.03	.13
1976	.99	.91	.08
1977	.93	1.07	-.14
1978	1.09	1.17	-.08

As can be seen from the table, the Department has never been very far out of equilibrium concerning felons with sentences of 5 years or less. The releases lagged the commitments by .15 year (1.8 months) in 1974 and were ahead .13 years (1.6 months) at the end of Fiscal 1975. The increase in bedspace required for this class of felon has averaged 27.5 per year for the last six fiscal years for a total increase of 165 beds. The increase represents 7% of the new felon bedspace and is not considered critical since each new felon in this class will require the bedspace for a period of one year or less.

Sentences from 6 to 9 Years

The next three tables are the same statistics for felons with sentences ranging from 6 to 9 years. Felons in this category are going to affect the system for 2 to 3 years.

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Committed Felons	Rate of Commitment	Years to Acquire the Confined Pop.
1973	892	286	.32	3.12
1974	938	245	.26	3.83
1975	876	279	.32	3.14
1976	955	355	.37	2.69
1977	1131	500	.44	2.26
1978	1312	475	.36	2.76

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Released Felons	Rate of Release	Years to Release the Confined Pop.
1973	892	276	.31	3.23
1974	938	199	.21	4.71
1975	876	341	.39	2.56
1976	955	276	.29	3.46
1977	1131	324	.29	3.49
1978	1312	294	.22	4.46

Fiscal Year	Years to Confine the Population	Years to Release the Population	Difference in Years
1973	3.12	3.23	-.11
1974	3.83	4.71	-.88
1975	3.14	2.56	.58
1976	2.69	3.46	-.77
1977	2.26	3.49	-1.23
1978	2.76	4.46	-1.70

In the 6 to 9 year data the trend is decidedly stronger. The differential between felons committed and felons released is increasing. By the end of Fiscal 1978 the Department was 1.70 years (20.4 months) behind.

The average increase in the required bedspace for this class of felon has been 70 per year for the last six fiscal years for a total increase of 420 beds. The increase represents 18% of the new felon bedspace and is somewhat more significant because each new felon in this class will require the bedspace for 2 to 3 years.

Sentences from 10 to 14 Years

The next three tables are the statistics for felons with sentences ranging from 10 to 14 years. Felons in this category are expected to affect the system for 4 to 5 years.

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Committed Felons	Rate of Commitment	Years to Acquire the Confined Pop.
1973	712	193	.27	3.69
1974	755	183	.24	4.13
1975	801	243	.30	3.30
1976	929	303	.33	3.06
1977	1126	378	.34	2.98
1978	1228	300	.24	4.09

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Released Felons	Rate of Release	Years to Release the Confined Pop.
1973	712	148	.21	4.81
1974	755	140	.19	5.39
1975	801	197	.25	4.07
1976	929	175	.19	5.31
1977	1126	181	.16	6.22
1978	1228	198	.16	6.20

Fiscal Year	Years to Confine the Population	Years to Release the Population	Difference in Years
1973	3.69	4.81	-1.12
1974	4.13	5.39	-1.26
1975	3.30	4.07	.77
1976	3.06	5.31	-2.25
1977	2.98	6.22	-3.24
1978	4.09	6.20	-2.14

The release rate was lagging the commitment rate for the felons with 10 to 14 year sentences by 1.12 years by the end of Fiscal 1973. In general the lag has increased to the present. It would have taken 3.24 years longer to release the confined population at the end of Fiscal 1977 than to confine it. The differential decreased in Fiscal 1978. The average increase in the required bedspace for this class of felon has been 86 per year for the last six fiscal years for a total increase of 516 beds. The increase represents 22% of the new felon bedspace and is significant because the beds will be required from 4 to 5 years.

Sentences of 15 Years or Greater

The following three tables are on felons with sentences of 15 years or greater. Felons in this category will affect the correction system for 5 years or longer.

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Committed Felons	Rate of Commitment	Years to Acquire the Confined Pop.
1973	1694	283	.17	5.99
1974	1847	292	.16	6.32
1975	1987	328	.17	6.05
1976	2241	419	.19	5.35
1977	2640	550	.21	4.80
1978	2974	406	.14	7.33

Fiscal Year	Confined Population	Released Felons	Rate of Release	Years to Release the Population
1973	1694	234	.14	7.24
1974	1847	139	.08	13.28
1975	1987	188	.09	10.57
1976	2241	165	.07	13.58
1977	2640	151	.06	17.48
1978	2974	72	.02	41.30

Fiscal Year	Years to Confine the Population	Years to Release the Population	Difference in Years
1973	5.99	7.24	-1.25
1974	6.32	13.28	-6.96
1975	6.05	10.57	-4.52
1976	5.35	13.58	-8.23
1977	4.80	17.48	-12.68
1978	7.33	41.30	-33.97

The release rate lagged the commitment rate by 1.25 years during fiscal 1973 for felons with sentences of 15 years or greater. The lag has steadily increased until in 1978 the Department fell behind by 33.97 years. The bed-space required to house this class of felon has increased on the average by 213 in each of the last six fiscal years for a total increase of 1280 beds. The increase represents 54% of the new felon bedspace and is most significant because the bedspace will be required for periods exceeding five years.

Summary

The felon population in the Department is rising not only because the number of commitments is increasing but also because the inmates with longer sentences who are eligible for release is a much smaller number than those committed with the same sentences. Although it is not possible from the present analysis to determine the proportion of the population increase which is due to an "increase" in commitments or to a "decrease" in releases, it is safe to say the population will continue to increase even if the number of new commitments is substantially reduced. It is noted that factors such as crime-prone-age-group and police arrest rates affect commitments but do not affect the number of confined felons eligible for release.

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