



News Release

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CRIME AND JUSTICE SYSTEMS IN CHICAGO REGION: HIGH COSTS AND MIXED RESULTS

Drug arrests skyrocketed across region, increasing prison costs and the likelihood of even more inmates and higher cost in the future

CHICAGO, IL – Illinois taxpayers provide nearly \$7 billion annually to criminal justice systems that succeed at keeping many neighborhoods safe and a growing number of people behind bars but often fail to rehabilitate and encourage ex-prisoners to become law-abiding, productive citizens.

The 2006 Crime and Justice Index, which was released today by the business-based Chicago Metropolis 2020, reports on a wide variety of data, including the crimes and arrests in the Chicago region, changing prison populations, recidivism rates, and challenges facing men and women released from prison.

“Thanks to a two decade-long decline in violent crime rates, this is a good time for a dispassionate, thoughtful discussion of how we deal with crime in this region and this state,” said George A. Ranney, Jr., President and CEO of Chicago Metropolis 2020. “This annual index is an overview of how public resources are used to control crime and administer justice. It gives solid information to a public that obviously values safe communities but has limited knowledge of the functioning of the police, courts, correctional officers and others we count on to keep us safe.”

The 2006 Crime and Justice Index also spotlights several promising trends in community crime prevention, reducing repeat criminal conduct by children, incentives to reduce state prison costs, prison drug rehabilitation and other approaches that could be models for expansion in the Chicago region. It was prepared in consultation with experts in the field and is based on a wide variety of data gathered from government reports, university research, the Census Bureau and other sources.

“There is no unanimity of opinion on the reason crime rates have fallen here and nationally, but experts usually point to the aging population, longer prison sentences, improved economic conditions or a combination of all three,” said Paula Wolff, Senior Executive at Chicago Metropolis 2020. “However, there is no debate about the fact that corrections has become a budget nightmare for state and local governments. Spending on housing prisoners in Illinois climbed from \$65 million in 1970 to \$1.3 billion today.

“Now that the crime rate is down, we need to keep it down and try to get it even lower,” Wolff said. “We should find a way to do that while spending less public money on prisons.

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“A greater emphasis on prevention in the first place is part of the answer,” Wolff added. “Unemployable drug addicts, for instance, increasingly wind up in our prison system, and many come back again and again. If we could reach them early with treatment and job skills, we’ll spend less on housing inmates; have more good workers in our labor force; and have fewer crime victims in our neighborhoods.”

People convicted of drug offenses now make up 40 percent of all prison admissions in Illinois, and the number of Chicago-area residents headed to prison for drug crimes has increased nearly 2,000 percent in the past 20 years, from 469 in 1985 to 8,755 drug crime prisoners in 2005, according to the *2006 Crime and Justice Index*.

“Just about all of those sent to prison for drug crimes will be back on the street within a year, and half of them will be in trouble with the law a short time later,” said Wolff. “Too few receive drug treatment or hands-on guidance once they leave prison, and even fewer were ‘scared straight’ by their time behind bars.

“This revolving door is expensive to taxpayers,” she added. “It diverts money that could go to education and other services needed by those who don’t break the law. It is damaging to the region’s economy that relies on a skilled, productive labor force. It threatens communities and destroys families, since the children of ex-prisoners are six times more likely than others to enter the same system and get stuck in that revolving door.”

Chicago Metropolitan 2020 has made the complete text of the *2006 Crime and Justice Index* available at its web site (www.chicagometropolis2020.org).

Other key findings from the report include:

Crime trends in the region

- Drug arrests have been on the rise in every county of the Chicago region. Arrests in Kendall, Lake, McHenry and Will counties more than tripled between 1985 and 2005.
- Almost 85 percent of reported crime in the region is property crime, which includes burglary, shoplifting, purse-snatching, car thefts, and other crimes that involve the taking of money or property without force or threat of force.
- Violent crime has decreased by 52 percent in the region since its peak in 1991. Property crime dropped 37 percent in the same period.
- Crime trends have not been uniformly on the decline. From 1983 to 2003, there was an 84 percent increase in the number of reported elder abuse cases.

The criminal justice systems

- Technology advances have benefited crime control, and the number of officers per 1,000 residents has not changed in the last decade. Nearly 38,000 officers are employed by the 252 municipal police departments and seven county sheriffs' departments in the region.
- Drug use is widespread across races, but the enforcement and prosecution of drug laws have affected minorities disproportionately. About 80 percent of those admitted to prison for drug crimes are non-whites.
- County jail populations have tripled over the past 20 years, straining capacity in some jails and requiring building expansions in others. Designed for temporary confinement and offering few services for inmates, county jails increasingly house inmates with an array of mental and physical health challenges.
- Two-thirds of Illinois prison inmates are from the Chicago region, but nearly all state prisons are located Downstate, far away from inmates' families.
- The demographics of Illinois prisons are much different from the state's population. Latinos are twice as likely as whites to go to prison, and African Americans are 10 times more likely than whites to be incarcerated.
- In 2005, 42 percent of adult inmates tested below sixth grade level, making them eligible for 90-day Adult Basic Education classes, but only 5 percent received ABE certificates.

The juvenile justice system

- Annually, the state spends \$70,827 per juvenile incarcerated in juvenile facilities, more than seven times the amount (\$9,841) budgeted per pupil in K-12 education in FY 2005.
- Nearly one of every two youths released from a juvenile facility is rearrested and returned to the system within three years.
- In recent years, Illinois has begun to emphasize rehabilitation of juvenile offenders, underscored earlier this year by the creation of a new Department of Juvenile Justice with an administration distinct and separate from the adult Department of Corrections.

Reentry after prison

- Two-thirds of the men and women released from prison will reside in the Chicago region. They arrive in the region at a rate of 500 per week.
- More than 80 percent of released prisoners face a period of mandatory supervision, or parole, and the number returned to prison because of technical parole violations has jumped from 3,715 in 2000 to 10,528 in 2005.
- Successful prisoner reentry can depend in part on family and community resources to assist the former prisoner finding a job, food and shelter. However, many former prisoners return to a handful of communities already struggling with high poverty and unemployment.
- The recidivism rate for Illinois prisoners hit an all-time high of 54.6 percent in 2004 and dropped to 51.8 percent in 2005.
- The Sheridan prison, which reopened in 2004 as the nation's first comprehensive drug treatment prison and reentry program, is showing great promise. A second year evaluation, Sheridan graduates were 44 percent less likely to return to prison than those in a comparison group.

“Approximately two-thirds of those released from state prisons are rearrested within three years, and over half are returned to prison,” the report states. “Most people who recidivate are rearrested within the first year of release.

“The high costs associated with this ‘revolving prison door’ phenomenon have prompted exploration into the reasons why people commit crimes in the first place and continue to break the law even after serving a prison sentence,” the report concludes. “Such exploration is essential to breaking this cycle of increasing incarceration and recidivism.”

About the *2006 Crime and Justice Index*

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About Chicago Metropolis 2020

Chicago Metropolis 2020 is a nonprofit civic organization created in 1999 by The Commercial Club of Chicago to promote long-term planning, better regional cooperation, and smart investments in the Chicago region and its people.

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