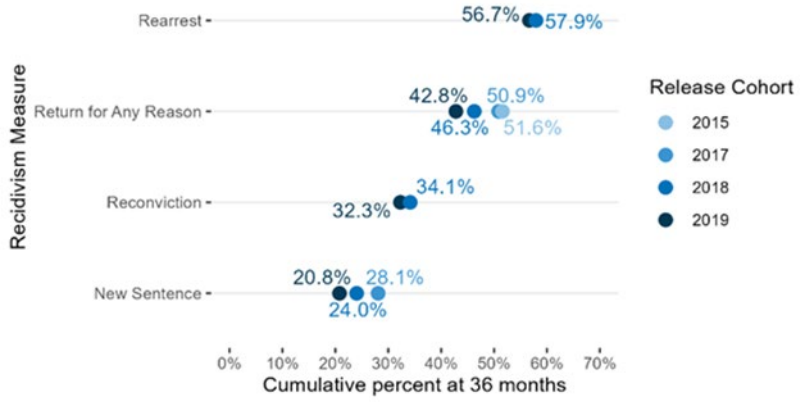
2023 Recidivism Study

2019 Release Cohort

Per statute, the OPM Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division (OPM CJPPD) produces annual reports on recidivism, i.e., a relapse into criminal behavior, among individuals released or discharged from Connecticut's correctional facilities.

Figure 1: Comparison of Three-Year Recidivism Measures
2015, 2017, 2018, & 2019 release cohorts



For 2023, OPM CJPPD studied sentenced individuals released or discharged from Connecticut Department of Correction (DOC) facilities during calendar year 2019 for a period of three years (36 months) following their release or discharge. We then compared the 2019 cohort to the 2015, 2017, & 2018 cohort years across a variety of common recidivism measures. Recidivism is frequently expressed as at least one of four measures: 1) new arrests 2) returns-to-prison for any reason, 3) new convictions, and 4) returns-to-prison to begin a new prison sentence. For our 2023 study, OPM CJPPD presents each of these four recidivism measures for the 2019 cohort.

Figure 1 above presents the cumulative percentage of individuals rearrested, returned for any reason, reconvicted, or beginning a new incarceration sentence within 36 months following release or discharge from DOC facilities. 2019 cohort rates are compared across measures by color to the 2015, 2017, and 2018 cohorts.[1]

Figure 1 highlights a noteworthy shift across all recidivism measures for the 2019 cohort. It is important to note that, among all cohorts compared in our 2023 analysis, the **2019 cohort has been most impacted by the onset and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic** during their three years following DOC release. In contrast, the 2015 cohort's three-year follow-up period precluded the pandemic entirely. As such, for the remainder of this report, we will utilize available 2015 cohort metrics as a pre-pandemic benchmark to consider changes observed among the other, pandemic impacted cohorts.

2023 Study Changes

Methodological improvements for 2023 have enabled the inclusion for study of individuals on Special Parole released/discharged from DOC facilities. Previously, these individuals had been omitted from study cohorts. Using additional movement and jurisdiction information at the time of release, we have improved our ability to distinguish Special Parole releases from releases on federal or other interstate agreements that share a key status field.

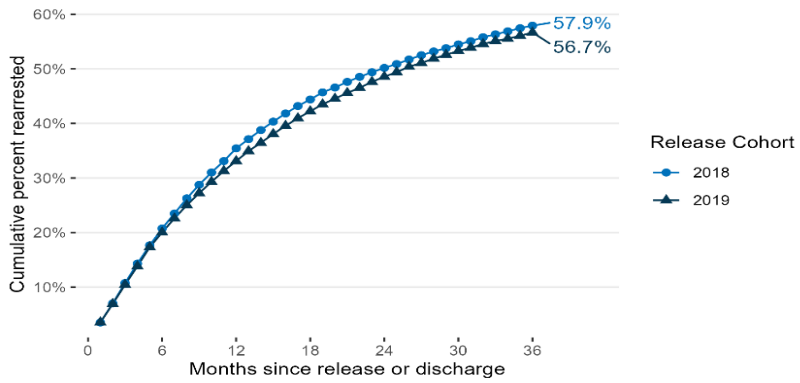
We have applied this change to the 2019 cohort and prior cohorts shown in this report. We then recalculated all rates for prior cohort years. As a result, return-to-prison rates for these cohorts will differ compared to OPM CJPPD's previously published statistics. Despite these changes, the comparative trends highlighted in last year's report remain consistent.

[1]Note: at the time of publication, only 2018 cohort year rearrest and reconviction rates were analyzed. This figure will be updated when prior cohorts rearrest rates have been studied.

Rates of Rearrest

For 2023, we analyzed the number of individuals rearrested within Connecticut following their release or discharge from a DOC facility, as well as the time between release or discharge (i.e., when an individual entered the community) and their first rearrest. **Figure 2** below shows the 2019 cohort's cumulative rearrest percentage by month following release or discharge. **Figure 3** compares with the 2018 cohort's cumulative rearrest percentage at six, twelve, eighteen, 24 and 36 months following release or discharge.

Figure 2: Cumulative Percentage Rearrested by Month



Most frequent highest charge at Rearrest: 2019 Cohort

- Illegal Operation of a Motor Vehicle Under Suspension
- Failure to Appear, 2nd Degree
- Assault, 3rd Degree
- Possession of a controlled substance, 1st Offense
- Larceny, 6th Degree

Figure 3: Comparison of Rearrest Rates: at 6, 12, 18, 24, & 36 Months Since Release or Discharge

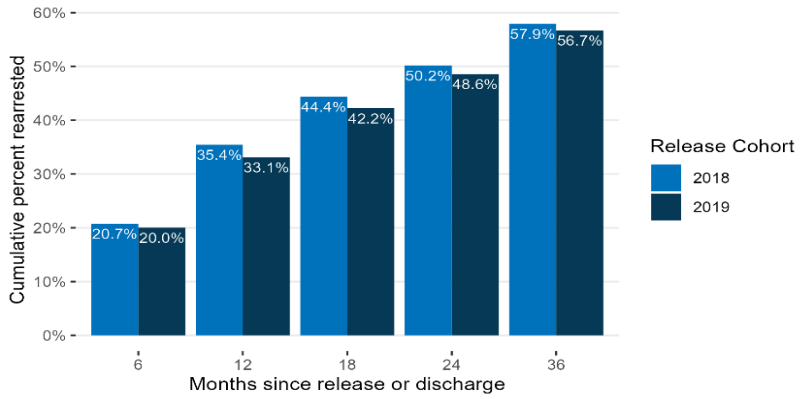
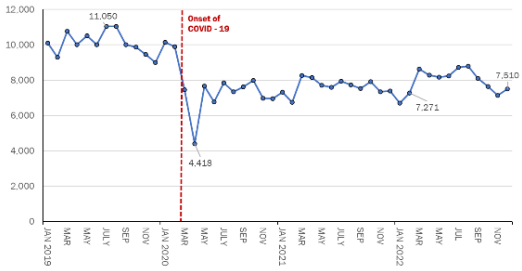


Figure 4: Arrest rates during the pandemic



As **Figure 3** highlights, the 2019 cohort's rearrest rates are notably lower across each selected interval than the prior cohort's. The COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in March 2020, has likely had a pronounced effect on these rearrest rates, as well as other recidivism measures, observed during the study period. **Figure 4** below presents statewide arrest volumes by month during the study period, January 2019 through December 2022. As shown, arrest activity statewide declined precipitously as communities instituted pandemic-related restrictions, considerably limiting public activity and mobility. Following this initial stage of the pandemic, statewide arrest volumes rose gradually, but as of December 2022, had yet to reach pre-pandemic levels.[2]

[2]Much of the remaining variance between pre- and post-pandemic arrests can be attributable to differences in motor vehicle related arrest rates. See *Trends in Connecticut's Criminal Justice System: 2022 Report* for more information.

Returns to Connecticut DOC for any Reason

As Connecticut has a unified correctional system, a return to a DOC facility can be either an admission for pretrial detention while a case is pending prior to the posting of bail; a remand for violations of parole, probation or other forms of community supervision; or a readmission to begin a new incarceration sentence. This measure is therefore useful as a proxy for identifying an individual's involvement with suspected significant criminal activity. As in previous reports, we analyzed the number of individuals returned to Connecticut DOC facilities within three years following their release or discharge from the DOC. We also examine the time between release or discharge (i.e., when an individual entered the community) and their first return to the DOC. **Figure 5** below shows the 2019 cohort's cumulative return for any reason percentage by month following release or discharge compared to the 2015 rate. **Figure 6** compares the 2019 cohorts cumulative return percentage to the other cohorts at six, twelve, eighteen, 24 and 36 months following release or discharge.

Figure 5: Cumulative Returns-for-Any-Reason by Month
2015, 2017, 2018 & 2019 Cohorts

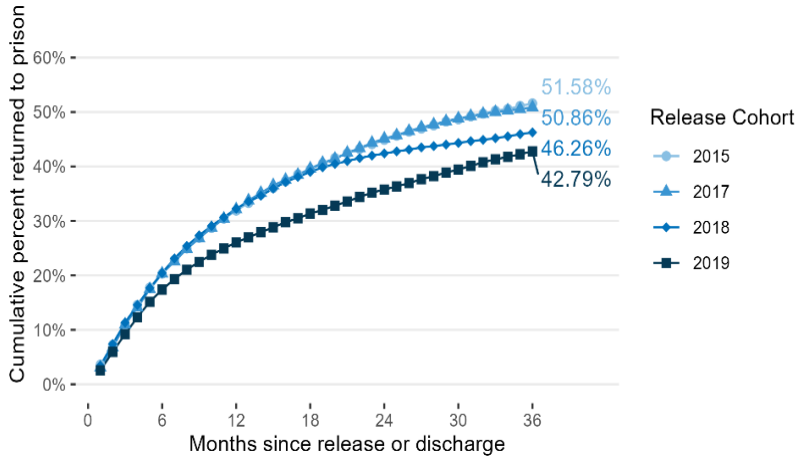
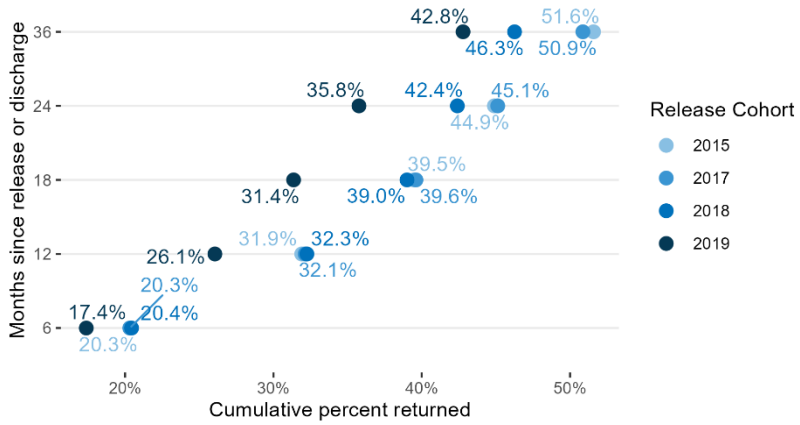


Figure 6: Comparison of Return-for-Any-Reason rates
at 6, 12, 18, 24, & 36 Months Since Release or Discharge



As both **Figures 5 and 6** demonstrate, returns for any reason have declined across cohorts compared to the 2015 rate, and are lowest amongst the recent 2019 cohort. Although a significant downward shift, much of these changes are likely attributable to pandemic impacts, especially given that the variance in rates clearly appears at 36 months for 2017 cohort, 24 months for the 2018 cohort, and six months for the 2019 cohorts. These intervals all largely correspond to when each cohort would likely encounter the pandemic's community impacts.

Reconviction

Reconviction rates for our 2019 cohort follow a similar pattern to other measures, albeit at slightly lower rates. Reconviction rates will be consistently lower than rearrest or return rates for two primary reasons: 1) not everyone arrested or readmitted to the DOC will be convicted following the outcome of their case, and 2) some cases may not reach a conviction disposition within the three-year follow up period. Despite these differences, **Figure 7** below presents the 2019 cohorts reconviction rates by month following release or discharge, and **Figure 8** compares across cohorts at six, twelve, eighteen, 24- and 36-month intervals. Both figures show a similar, pandemic-influenced reduction across cohorts as seen in the other measures, most evident in the 2019 cohort.

Figure 7: Cumulative Percentage Reconvicted by Month

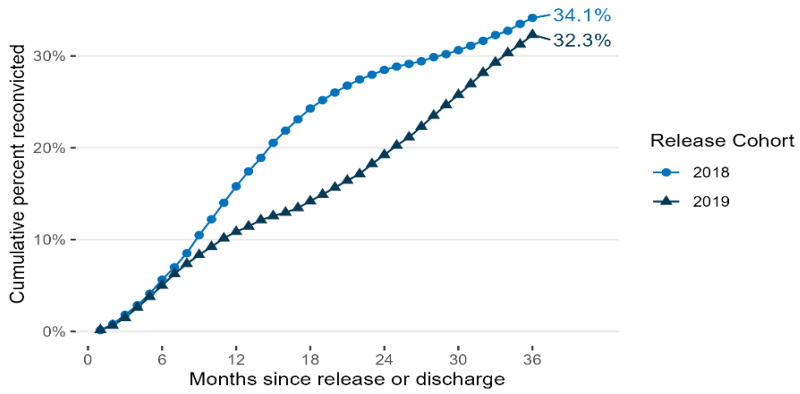
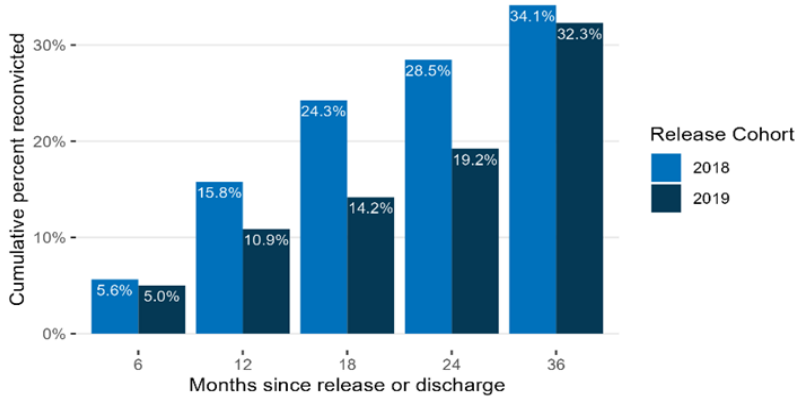


Figure 8: Comparison of Reconviction Rates at 6, 12, 18, 24, & 36 Months Since Release or Discharge



Most frequent highest charge at Reconviction: 2019 Cohort

- Larceny, 6th Degree
- Breach of Peace, 2nd Degree
- Assault, 3rd Degree
- Possession of a controlled substance, 1st Offense
- Interfering with Officer

New Incarceration Sentences

Rates of individuals returned to the DOC serving new incarceration sentences will be the lowest amongst the four common recidivism measures. Sentencing options following a conviction can include alternatives to incarceration, such as probation or special parole for instance; not all individuals convicted of a crime will return to the DOC to serve a prison sentence. Nonetheless, new incarceration sentence rates are useful for demarcating individuals' prolonged exits from the community as well as potentially examining medium and long-term facility impacts.

Figure 9: Comparison of New Sentence Rates at 6, 12, 18, 24, & 36 Months Since Release or Discharge

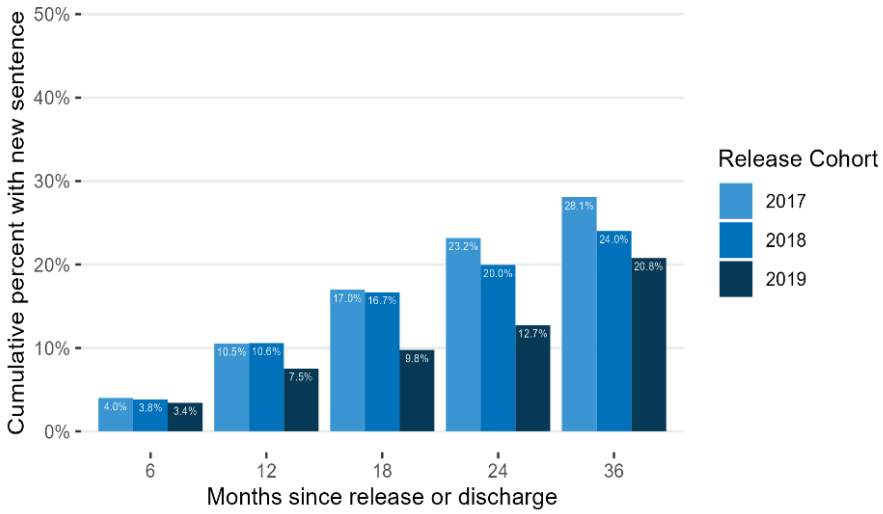
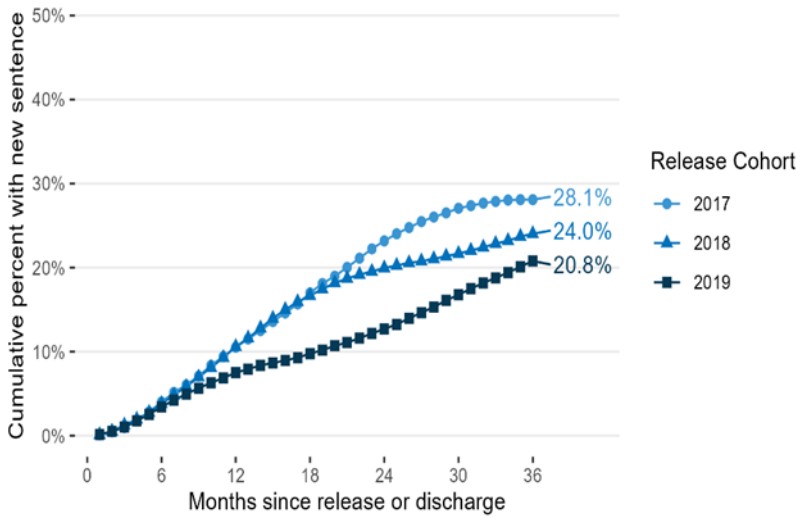


Figure 10: Cumulative Percentage Receiving New Sentences



Figures 9 and 10 above show trends in line with the other measures of recidivism. Just **over 20%** of the 2019 cohort received a new incarceration sentence within three years of release or discharge from the DOC. This rate is lower than observed for the 2017 cohort, which did not encounter the pandemic until late in its three-years following release.

Recidivism by Key Characteristics

In addition to examining overall recidivism by cohort year, we have also analyzed recidivism across several characteristics. For the remainder of this report, we will utilize the return-to-prison for any reason as our comparative measure. This measure is used for three reasons: First, unlike rearrest or re-conviction which may not involve further time spent in a correctional facility, returning for any reason clearly demarcates an exit from the community back into a correctional setting. Second, this return measure has specific utility for long-term DOC facility planning purposes. Third, return-to-prison rates were available at time of publication for all four study cohorts, enabling ready comparison across different dimensions.

Figure 11: Recidivism by Race and Ethnicity

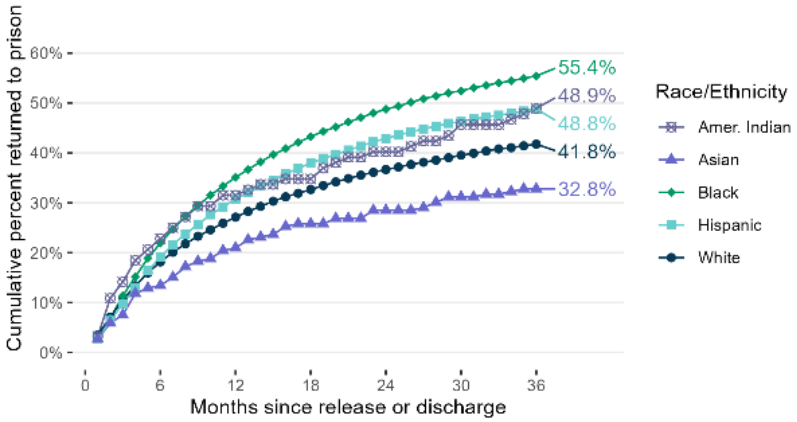


Figure 11 shows the cumulative percentage returned within three years following release or discharge by race and ethnicity across all cohorts. The chart demonstrates noticeable differences in returns over 36 months across the race and ethnicity categories available in DOC data. Among the three most common race and ethnic categories in the study data, **over 55%** of Black individuals returned over 36 months, while **48.8%** and **41.8%** of Hispanic and White individuals returned respectively.

The differences among these race and ethnic categories suggests a need for further study. It is important to emphasize that these statistics provide only a descriptive understanding of differences across race and ethnic categories, and they cannot discern causal factors behind the observed outcomes. A more robust study utilizing quasi-experimental methods and multivariate analysis of several characteristics, including risk level, programming, community and other key factors, would provide essential and far deeper understanding of observed differences in returns and their relationship to race and ethnicity. In the interim, these descriptive statistics provide an initial understanding of observed differences in outcomes by race and ethnicity, recommending further study across Connecticut's justice system stakeholders.

Changes in Study Populations

The table below presents differences in key population characteristics between the 2015 and 2019 study cohorts.

	2015	2019	Percent Change 2015-2019
DOC Population July 1	16,025	13,107	-18.2%
Release/Discharged Recidivism Study population			
Sentenced	11,332	9,120	-19.5%
Male	10,038	8,011	-20.2%
Female	1,294	1,109	-14.3%
Age 25 or younger	2,214	1,299	-41.3%

Figure 12: Recidivism by Age

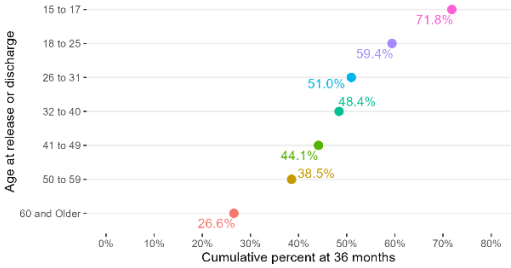


Figure 12 shows the cumulative percentage returned across cohorts by age category after 36 months following release or discharge. The figure illustrates a clear relationship between age and likelihood of returning. By the end of the three-year follow up period, **59.4%** of 18 to 25 year olds returned, while only **38.5%** of those 50 to 59 years old had returned.

Figure 13: Recidivism by Sentence History

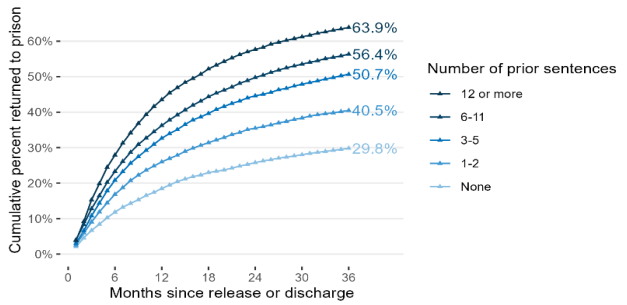


Figure 13 shows the cumulative percentage of returns within three years following release or discharge by prior sentence history combined across the 2017, 2018 and 2019 cohorts. **21.1%** (n=6,147) of individuals in these study cohorts were serving their first sentence at the time of release, with just **under 30%** returning to prison within three years. In contrast, **12.8%** (n=3,741) had a history of 12 or more prior sentences at the time of release, with nearly **64%** returned over 36 months. The chart demonstrates clear differences in return rates across the other sentence history groups as well.

Figure 14: Recidivism Among Women

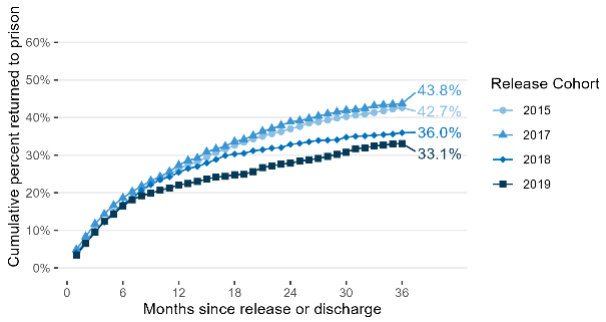
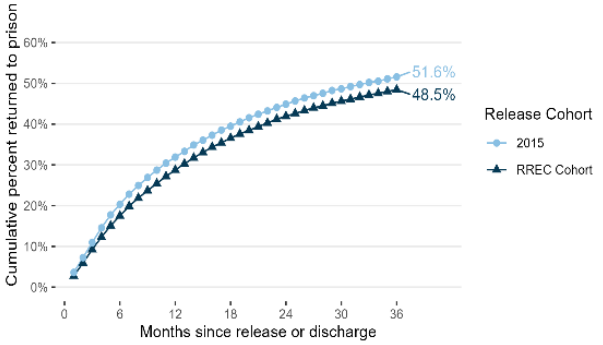


Figure 14 shows the cumulative percentage of women in each cohort returned by month within three years following release or discharge. Women in the 2019 cohort returned to correctional facilities at significantly lower rates than the previous three cohorts. By the end of the three-year follow up period, the 2017 cohort had the highest cumulative returns at **43.8%**. 2019's was nearly **10% lower** than the 2017 rate, with **33.1%** returned within three years of release or discharge.

Figure 15: By Risk Reduction Earned Credit



Again for 2023, OPM CJPPD analyzed whether a positive Risk Reduction Earned Credit (RREC) total at discharge contributed to any differences in rates over the three-year follow-up period. **Figure 15** presents the cumulative percentages returning over 36 months among individuals from all cohorts discharged with RREC. The 2015 cohort return rate is shown for comparison.

Across all cohort years, **49%** total of those discharging their sentence with Risk Reduction Earned Credits (RREC) returned to prison, **3% below** the 2015 benchmark. The RREC population returned at lower rates within the first year of release or discharge, and just slightly lower over the full period. After controlling for other characteristics, like sex and sentence history, having earned RREC at discharge does not significantly contribute to differences in rates of DOC returns.

This report was produced by the Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division Research Unit of:

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450 Capitol Avenue
Hartford CT, 06106

The full report will be presented to the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission in ***March 2023.***

This brief and other reports are available for download on the OPM CJPPD website.

OPM CJPPD wishes to acknowledge the contributions of:
The Connecticut Department of Correction
The Connecticut Judicial Branch – Court Support Services Division

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