OPM - Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division
Prison Population Projection

Highlights

- OPM estimates that the DOC will shed roughly 2.3% of its prison population over the next year. By January 2020, the prison population is predicted to dip below 13,000. The population, peaking at 19,894 in February 2008, last dropped below 13,000 in September 1993.

- The prison population has declined considerably over the last decade. The rate of contraction in was not linear. In fact, between 2012 and 2014, the decline in the prison population actually stalled and in one year – 2013- it actually increased.

- Some of the largest annual declines in the prison population occurred after 2015. In this period, the CT DOC was able to implement new procedures that streamlined and centralized the re-entry review process. During the same period, efficiencies at the Board of Pardons and Paroles increased the timeliness of the parole hearing process. These efficiencies are no longer effecting the prison population resulting in smaller declines.

- Improvements to release and supervision processes at the DOC have resulted in a larger proportion of sentenced offenders completing their sentences in the community. In 2013 61% of sentenced discharges were from facilities, in 2017 – 53%. More eligible and suitable offenders are getting out to supervision and completing their sentences in the community that in the recent past.

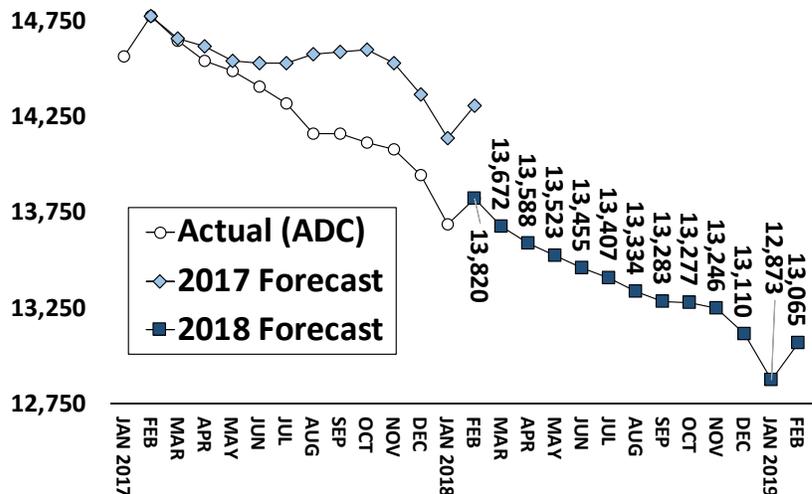## Forecasting the size of the prison population

Each February, the Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division at OPM forecasts the state's prison population over the subsequent 12 months. The forecast relies on 1) an analysis of prison-population trend data 2) the use of an input-output model to track operational flows and rates of change in the size and composition of the prison population, and 3) assessments of the impact of proposed legislative and policy changes.

In the last two forecast cycles, OPM has overestimated and underestimated the size of the prison population. In January 2018, there were 450 fewer inmates in prison compared with the figure OPM had anticipated in its February 2017 forecast. In January 2019, there were 358 more prisoners incarcerated than OPM projected in its February 2018 forecast.

Based on an analysis of recent, prison population trends, OPM anticipates that the number of prisoners will contract 2.3% over the coming year. Measured on a February-to-February basis, the prison population is expected to decline by approximately 310 prisoners. This past year, during the same period, the prison population shrank by 3.0%, or about 420 prisoners. The projected slower rate of contraction is based on OPM's belief that the sentenced population is no longer able to sustain large, system-wide population reductions.
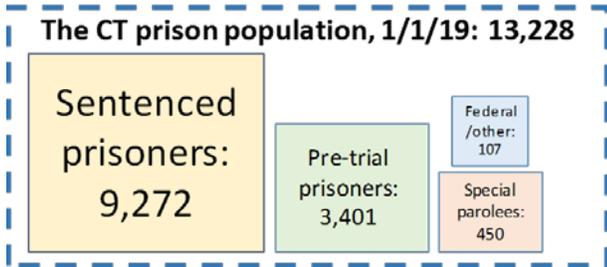
OPM believes that its 2017 forecast underestimated the impact of recently streamlined review and release processes and a diminishment in the overall size of the sentenced population due to fewer sentenced prisoner admissions. In 2018, OPM believes that it erred in not anticipating that an inflection point would appear during the year, effectively signaling a slowing rate in the prison system's contraction.

Connecticut's prison population, actual and projected

Constructing the Forecast

Inmates incarcerated by the CT DOC are supervised by their legal status as prisoners. Although they are not a homogenous group, sentenced prisoners constitute the largest single group within the system.

The CT prison population, 1/1/19: 13,228

Sentenced prisoners: 9,272

Pre-trial prisoners: 3,401
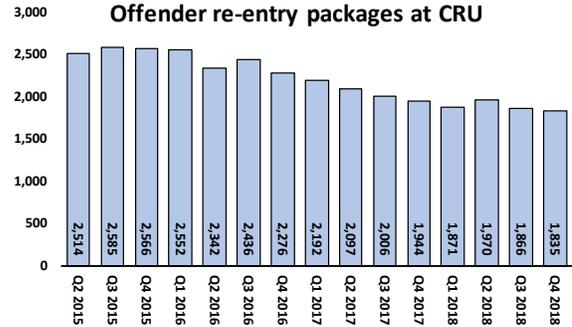
Federal /other: 107

Special paroles: 450

Over the last decade, almost the entire contraction in CT's prison population was accounted for by reductions in the state's sentenced population. Between 2008 and 2018, sentenced prisoners accounted for 91% of the entire drop in inmate numbers.

In recent years, the contribution of sentenced prisoners to the prison system's contraction has increased dramatically. In between July 2016 and July 2018, sentenced prisoners accounted for 98.9% of the drop in the size of the prison population.

July 1st to July 1st	Drop in total prison population	Drop in sentenced prisoners	% drop from sentenced
2008 to 2018	-6,042	-5,499	91.0%
2012 to 2018	-3,220	-2,966	92.1%
2016 to 2018	-1,971	-1,949	98.9%
2017 to 2018	-964	-1,053	109.2%

Signs point to a slowdown in the rate of contraction. In March 2015 the Semple Administration at CT DOC created the Community Re-entry Unit (CRU), in an effort to streamline the process governing the review of release-eligible offenders. Prior to CRU, the discretionary release review and decision-making was done at 15 prison facilities. Ample evidence suggested that many release-eligible prisoners were sitting in prison longer than they were required to. Once CRU became fully operational it had an immediate impact on the entire DOC re-entry process. Within several months, the sentenced population began to fall as hundreds of release-eligible prisoners were moved into the community as expeditiously as possible.

Over the past two years, the number of re-entry packages - a measure of how many offenders can be reviewed for release within 120 days - has contracted significantly. OPM believes this to be an indicator that recent rates of contraction in the prison system cannot be sustained.

Offender re-entry packages at CRU

Quarter	Packages
Q2 2015	2,514
Q3 2015	2,585
Q4 2015	2,566
Q1 2016	2,552
Q2 2016	2,342
Q3 2016	2,436
Q4 2016	2,276
Q1 2017	2,192
Q2 2017	2,097
Q3 2017	2,006
Q4 2017	1,944
Q1 2018	1,871
Q2 2018	1,970
Q3 2018	1,866
Q4 2018	1,835

An inflection point - or knee - in the rate of decline in the prison population was observed at the beginning of 2018.

Given the dynamics of the prison system, OPM believes this inflection portends an overall slowing in the contraction of the prison system.

Without significant structural change to the way the system currently operates, it appears unlikely that drops in the prison count witnessed in 2016 and 2017 can replicated in the near term.

First week ADC against trendline