

# OPM - Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division

# Prison Population Projection

## Highlights

- OPM estimates that the DOC will shed roughly 4.4% of its prison population over the next year. By January 2021, the prison population is predicted to fall to roughly 11,800.
- The prison population experienced an unprecedented decline in 2019. Falling by more than 1000 inmates, the prison system contracted by more than 7%. The largest single year decline in both real and percentage terms since at least 1980. The decline in 2019 was driven in large part by the pretrial prison population. The second largest group in Connecticut prisons, the pretrial population comprises roughly one quarter of the total prison population, but accounted for half of the decline in 2019.
- 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 peaked in 2017 resulting in slower contraction in 2018.
- 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 increased slightly.

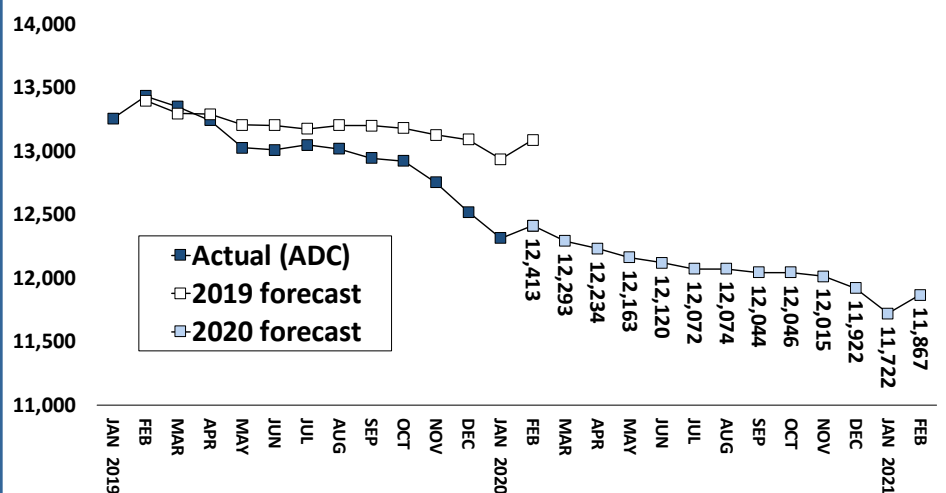
## Forecasting the size of the prison population

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.

Over the last three forecast cycles OPM has cyclically overestimated, underestimated and then overestimated the size of the prison population. In January 2018, there were 450 fewer inmates in prison than expected. Swinging in the opposite direction, there were 340 more inmates in prison than forecast. Over the past year, OPM again overestimated the size of the prison population, coming in 675 inmates over the actual figure on February 1, 2020.

Based on an analysis of recent, prison population trends, OPM anticipates that the number of prisoners will contract 4.4% over the coming year. Measured on a February-to-February basis, the prison population is expected to decline by approximately 550 prisoners. This past year, during the same period, the prison population shrank by more than 7%, which translates into a reduction of over 1,000 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 and the recent reductions among the pretrial population will not sustain at its current pace.

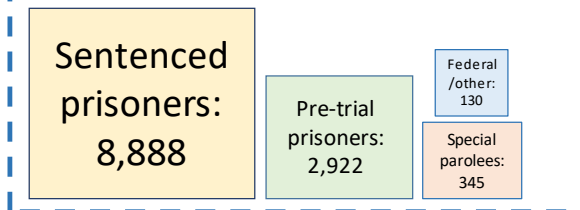
Connecticut's prison population, actual and projected



## 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, 1/1/2020: 12,285



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 2010 and 2019, sentenced prisoners accounted for 95% of the entire drop in inmate numbers.

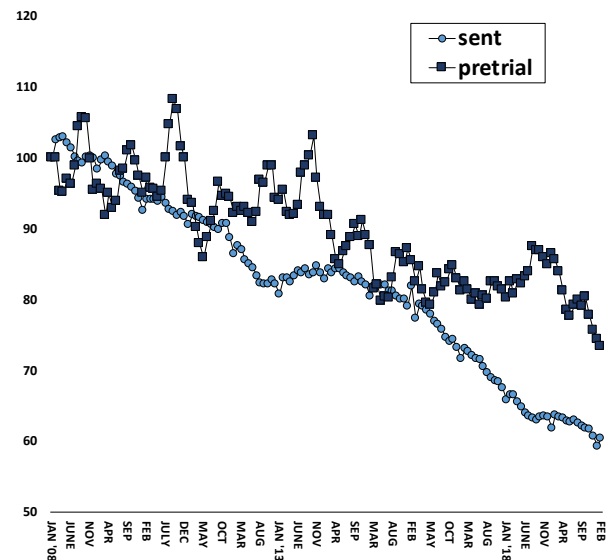
In 2019 the trend shifted. The sentenced prison cohort contracted more slowly. OPM failed to anticipate a substantial decrease among the smaller but still substantial, pre-trial prison population. The pretrial population fell by 14% in 2019 driving in large part the overall prison population reduction.

### Contraction in the prison population

Jan. 1st to Jan. 1st	Drop in total prison population	Drop in sentenced population	Drop in accused population	% drop from sentenced	% drop from accused
2010 to 2019	-4825	-4606	-337	95%	7%
2015 to 2019	-2939	-2793	-41	95%	1%
2019 to 2020	-943	-382	-479	41%	51%

Despite the rapid contraction seen in 2019, signs point to a more conservative rate of contraction in 2020. The pretrial population is smaller and substantially more volatile than the sentenced population. Sustaining a 14% reduction is unlikely. OPM predicts that the 2020 will see a return to the overall historical trend of a moderate reduction in the prison population, consistent with the input/output metrics tracked by the CJPPD's Research and Evaluation Unit in the Monthly indicators report. Arrests and admits to prison continue to fall at steady rates, roughly 5%-7% each year. As the primary inputs to the prison system, these metrics have a considerable effect on the size and trajectory of the prison population.

The chart below demonstrates the volatility of the pretrial population versus sentenced prisoners. The chart is indexed to the values of each group in January 2008, near the DOC's historical peak. The darker boxes representing the pretrial population show higher peaks and more movement over the past dozen years. The most recent, substantial decline is the primary driver of the prison population decrease in 2019.



Drawn from 2008 to the present, the linear trend line shown below, indicates a steady rate of decline in the prison system, interrupted periodically by fluctuations caused by system inefficiencies. When the actual count goes over the trend line, clear lines can be drawn to structural changes.

