

# OPM - Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division

## Prison Population Projection

### Highlights

- The state’s prison population is expected to decline at a moderate 0.9% pace through January 2015.
- Between 2008 and 2012, the number of prisoners in the state declined by an average 3.4% annually, on a January-to-January basis. Last year, the state’s prison population grew by 1.5%. This reversal was a direct result of a dramatic slowdown in the processes that are intended to release offenders to community supervision programs like parole and transitional supervision.
- Last year’s unanticipated growth in the prison population was detected in April. Initially, it was assumed that the expansion in the number of inmates was due to an increase in the pre-trial population which tends to grow as the weather improves. It quickly became apparent however that the surge in prison numbers was most pronounced among the sentenced population.
- There is little evidence that the causes that constricted the flow of prisoners into community supervision programs during 2013 - resulting in a growing prison population – have been addressed in a structural way. As a result, it is unlikely that the prison population will drop at rates that until last year appeared quite reasonable.
- We are unlikely to witness new policy changes affecting the size of the prison population in the coming legislative session.

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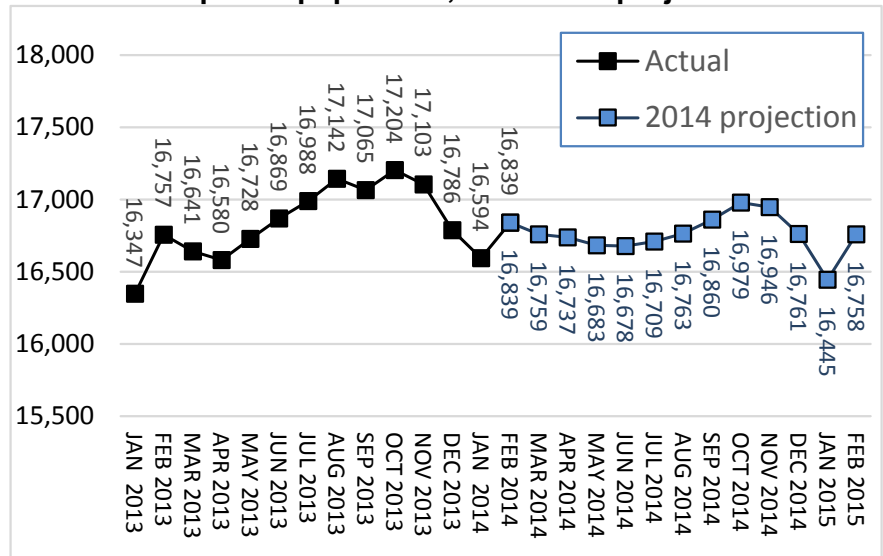
### Forecasting the size of the prison population

Each year in February, the Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division at OPM produces a forecast of the state’s prison population for the upcoming year. The forecast is based on prison population trend data for the last two decades, analysis of the historic rates of change in the size and composition of the prison system, seasonal factors and a survey of recent policy or operational changes that might impact the size of the prison population. With this information in hand, OPM makes a series of assumptions about where the prison population will be trending over the next 12 to 18 months. These assumptions are then fitted against a range of pre-calculated trend lines.

In 2013, the prison population – measured on a January-to January basis – grew for the first time since 2008. During 2008, the prison population almost topped 20,000 in the aftermath of the Cheshire murders. There was no single cause for this year’s reversal. At this juncture, one thing is certain, the 2013 uptick in the prison population was due to structural and operational impediments that negatively impacted the normal flow of sentenced offenders leaving prison, and not to an increase in crime. This conclusion is based on the facts that the number of criminal arrests across the state fell, as did the number of DOC prison admissions.

This year’s projection anticipates that the prison population will decline at a very modest, -0.9%, rate over the next 12 months. Calculated on a January-to January basis, OPM anticipates that the prison population will decline by 149 inmates.

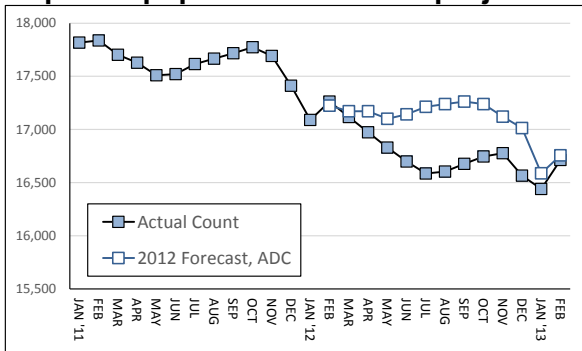
**Connecticut’s prison population, actual and projected**



## OPM's 2013 forecast

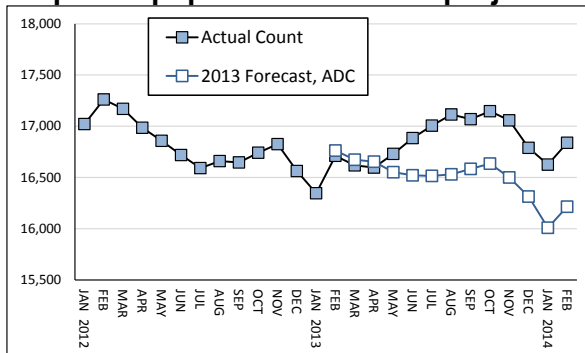
In each of the last two years, OPM's forecasts have failed to accurately project fluctuations in the state's prison population. Although OPM's 2012 estimate was only 44 prisoners, or 0.3%, off the actual count on February 1, 2013, it was wide of the mark by considerably more for most of the year. For two months, July and August, the projection was off by as many as 600 prisoners. Two factors significantly impacted prison counts in 2012: DUI home confinement and Risk-Reduction Earned Credits (RREC).

### CT prison population and 2012 projection



OPM's 2013 forecast also missed the mark by failing to capture 1) the downstream impact of RREC on the parole-eligible, sentenced population, and 2) a slowdown in the volume discretionary releases due to policy and procedural changes.

### CT prison population and 2013 projection



The Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division at OPM collects a wide range of operational data from the state's criminal justice agencies. Despite this, the Division currently lacks critical pieces of the information that would help to refine and improve its forecast model. Although they were off the mark over the last two years, OPM's projections do provide a reliable benchmark against which the impact of policy changes can begin to be quantified.

## OPM's 2014 forecast

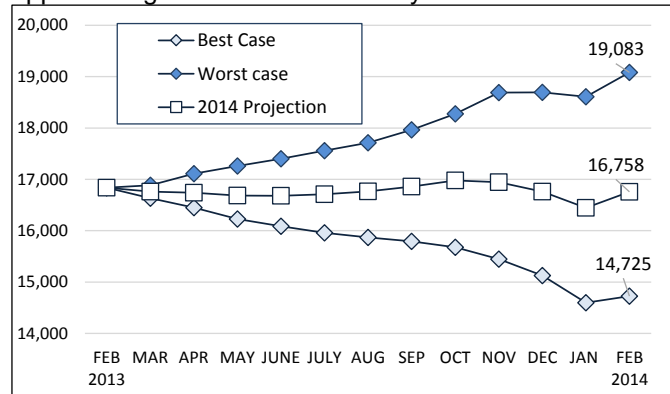
Over the coming year, OPM expects the prison population to adhere to typical seasonal patterns and to decline by 0.9% measured from January 1, 2014 to January 1, 2015.

### CT's prison population, actual and estimated

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
JAN	18,053	17,746	17,022	16,347	16,594	16445*
FEB	18,383	17,915	17,262	16,757	16,839	16758*
MAR	18,330	17,739	17,169	16,641	16759*	
APR	18,331	17,655	16,986	16,580	16737*	
MAY	18,259	17,486	16,858	16,728	16683*	
JUN	18,364	17,555	16,718	16,869	16678*	
JUL	18,431	17,631	16,591	16,988	16709*	
AUG	18,490	17,648	16,660	17,142	16763*	
SEP	18,593	17,739	16,646	17,065	16860*	
OCT	18,481	17,762	16,741	17,204	16979*	
NOV	18,320	17,774	16,826	17,103	16946*	
DEC	18,172	17,459	16,563	16,786	16761*	

Estimated values are denoted with an asterisk (\*).

This year's estimate is based on recent prison-population trends and on assumptions about where the prison population is heading. OPM's model is based on historical rates of expansion and decline in the prison population over the last 20 years. The worst- and best-case scenarios, shown below, present the theoretical maximum and minimum limits to growth or decline within the prison system on an annual basis. The probability of the prison population approaching these limits is virtually zero.



## Methodology

OPM's forecast methodology remains unchanged from previous years. Trend lines were based on calculations of population rates of change by month, by quarter and annually going back to 1999.

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