



STATE OF OKLAHOMA

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
COMMUNICATIONS UNIT

BACKGROUNDER: Oklahoma Department of Corrections

Established by the legislature in 1967, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections operates 24 state institutions and community corrections centers across the state, employing more than 4,200 people. Additionally, the agency contracts with two private companies, Core Civic and GEO Group, to run three prisons.

ODOC houses more than 27,000 inmates sentenced to prison, and typically has around 1,000 sentenced but awaiting transfer from county jails. Outside prison walls, ODOC Probation and Parole Services supervises more than 34,300 offenders completing their sentences in Oklahoma communities. This population is expected to grow by 2,367 inmates by 2026.

A \$480 million annual budget appropriated by the State Legislature makes ODOC Oklahoma's fifth-largest state agency. Employee salaries and benefits, private prisons and contracts, inmate medical services, and food take up more than 90 percent of that budget.

ODOC history

Despite that the agency has only been around since 1967, its history predates Oklahoma's statehood.

What would become its oldest prison, Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, was established in 1908 after a scandal over mistreatment of state prisoners sent for incarceration in Kansas.

The Oklahoma State Penitentiary received its first 100 inmates from Lansing, Kansas, on October 14, 1908.

Today, the facility is one of only eight state prisons that were originally built to house inmates. Its facilities stretch minimum-security William S. Key Correctional Center in historic Fort Supply in the west, to Jim E. Hamilton Correctional Center, a minimum-security prison nearly 400 miles away in Hodgen.

ODOC's newest prison is Sayre's North Fork Correctional Center, a medium-security prison for men built in 1998. Other medium-security facilities include Dick Conner Correctional Center in Hominy, James Crabtree Correctional Center in Helena, Mack Alford Correctional Center in

Stringtown, Joseph Harp Correctional Center in Lexington, and Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in McCloud, which is also home to the state's maximum-security death row unit for women.

Most facilities are located in rural areas of the state. In many communities, they are the chief employers.

Who works for ODOC?

Prison systems require a large, diverse workforce from custodial and food service crews on up to engineers, doctors, psychiatrists and law enforcement. Forty-one percent of ODOC staff work in security, such as correctional officers, investigators, or probation and parole officers. Thirty percent work as support staff, such as in human resources, accounting or administrative support.

Seven percent are case managers; 7 percent are medical. Two percent work in construction and maintenance. The prison system also employs teachers to prep its inmates for reentry, comprising about 2 percent of its workforce.

KEY STATISTICS

General ODOC statistics

- Oklahoma leads the country (and the world) in the rate at which it incarcerates its citizens.
- Nonviolent convictions were $\frac{3}{4}$ of admissions to prison in 2015.
- About 25 percent of former ODOC inmates end up back in prison (recidivism).
- Fifty-six percent of nonviolent inmates sentenced to ODOC in 2015 had either no or one previous felony conviction.
- Paroles (decided upon by an outside group of private citizens) have declined more than 75 percent, from 1,252 in 2008 to 291 in 2017.
- The percentage of state inmates over 50 increased 50 percent from 2008 to 2017.

Few resources to meet inmate needs

- ODOC data show 58 percent of inmates receive or have received treatment for mental health needs – a 25 percent increase since 2013.
- ODOC provided substance abuse treatment to 1,221 inmates in 2017 – just 28 percent of the estimated need.
- Nearly 11,000 inmates needed help reentering society in 2017, and ODOC could only provide 2,400 (23 percent) of them with services.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Oklahoma State Reformatory is home to the nation's first accredited high school program for inmates – Lakeside High School.
- Every inmate sentenced to prison in Oklahoma first goes to an assessment and reception center. For men, that's Lexington Assessment and Reception Center. For women, it's Mabel Bassett Correctional Center.

There, agency staff assess the severity of inmates' crimes, their background, risk and needs, and match them with the facility that best meets those. They are then transferred to that facility.

- The state's oldest prison is McAlester's Oklahoma State Penitentiary built in 1908.
- Forty-nine percent of ODOC employees have been with the department less than five years, including 71 percent of correctional officers, and 47% of Probation and Parole officers.
- Only eight of the department's 24 facilities were designed to house inmates.
- The department's top 20 infrastructure needs total to more than \$52 million.
- Nearly 40 percent of department employees earn so little they qualify for food stamps (for a family of four).
- "Contraband" is material that is not allowed in state prisons. In fact, it's a felony to bring those items into a prison.

Contraband includes not just illegal drugs or weapons, but tobacco and cellphones, too, and anything inmates can't get normally inside a facility. Contraband, a worldwide problem, plays a major role in violence inside prisons, injuring inmates and staff alike.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- **ODOC runs jails.**
 - ODOC prisons and other facilities house inmates have been sentenced in a court of law to serve time with the agency. Generally, county sheriffs run jails in Oklahoma, where suspects are held before trial or pending transfer to ODOC for incarceration after conviction and sentencing.
- **ODOC lets inmates out "early" for good behavior.**
 - ODOC is required by law to enforce sentences set by state courts. The agency does not have the authority to alter those sentences in any way.
 - Except for inmates serving life sentences, all inmates get credit for time served before they come to ODOC custody – per state law and agency policy.
 - That means they can graduate to a lower level of security and complete their sentence sooner than they would have without those credits.
 - Except for those serving life, all inmates get credits for completing educational programs, substance abuse programs, character development programs, et cetera, while behind bars.
 - That shortens their length of time at a higher security level, such as medium or minimum-security, and means they'll move to lower security levels, such as community-level, sooner than they would otherwise.

- **ODOC does not have law enforcement officers**
 - We do! ODOC Fugitive Apprehension and Investigations unit agents are law enforcement officers. They look for escaped inmates, and perform internal investigations of agency staff, facilities and inmates.
 - Similarly, ODOC Probation and Parole Officers are CLEET-certified law enforcement with full arrest powers.
 - Correctional Officers are not certified law enforcement officers. In other words, while they do an excellent job looking after our state's inmates, they do not have powers of arrest – and they are not armed inside prisons.

- **ODOC only looks after inmates**
 - In addition to providing 24-7 housing, the agency feeds all of its inmates – frequently with food it grows itself.
 - The agency is constitutionally required to provide all inmates medical, dental and mental health care, and employs a robust medical staff, from nurses on up to doctors and psychologists, to do so.

- **Inmates do nothing in prison**
 - While funding for programs is limited, ODOC staff and its dedicated volunteers provide a number of educational and technical training opportunities to help inmates avoid returning to prison once they release.
 - Inmates take classes in literacy, adult basic education, pre-high school equivalency, high school equivalency and some college-level courses (at no cost to taxpayers).
 - A partnership with CareerTech provides state inmates with a number of training and certification opportunities in a wide range of fields, from welding, logistics and warehouse management to licensed trades, automotive repair and electrical trades.

- **All prisons are full of murderers and rapists.**
 - That depends on the security level. Generally, the higher the prison's security, the more likely its inmates are incarcerated for violent offenses.

In other words, minimum security prisons have more people in for auto theft, second-degree burglary, or drug-related crimes (but that doesn't mean that they have no inmates serving time for violent crimes).

Meanwhile, medium and maximum security prisons typically have inmates serving longer and more severe sentences for violent crimes.

Sex offenders are not allowed at a facility lower than minimum security.

- **ODOC inmates get free college education**
 - Any inmate who takes a college course in prison has paid fees associated with the course, either through their own funds, or private scholarships or school grants.