



2022 Criminal Justice Reform Advocacy Priority

Geriatric Parole

We know that the state legislature is called upon to generate policy solutions to injustice in our state. The issue of NJ's growing elderly prison population is both an expense and an issue of justice. This is about fiscal responsibility, the public's desire to maintain safe neighborhoods and the state's responsibility to care for the well-being of all its residents, even those who have committed a crime. What we are asking you today is how do you understand your role in leadership to shape and move public opinion around this issue, so that the elderly are provided with the care that they need? And the public should not be burdened with untruths about ex-offenders or asked to pay for excess spending at the Dept of Corrections.

State Parole Board does not appear to take age into account in its release decisions, even while the data clearly shows that elderly persons are not likely to reoffend. This is a financial hardship and a moral outrage that we, leaders of faith communities are challenging you to address.

Prisons were not designed for elderly inmates and are not equipped to handle their special needs. Yet the war on drugs, mandatory minimum sentences and a parole system that does not tend to release people convicted of violent crimes — even when the data suggests they are unlikely to reoffend — is forcing correctional facilities to keep inmates longer and try to meet the physical and mental health needs of seniors behind bars.

While the number of people incarcerated in New Jersey prisons has plummeted, the amount the state spends on corrections has not dropped proportionately. That's in part because older prisoners require more expensive care.

According to "The Health of America's Aging Prison Population," higher disability rates for older inmates "contribute to overall health care costs estimated at 3-9 times greater than that of younger inmates." A fiscal note from the nonpartisan Office of Legislative Services on a bill (A-1059) said it could not estimate the amount spent on health care for older inmates in New Jersey. The total amount budgeted in the 2020 fiscal year was almost \$167 million. As much as \$30 million of that may be attributed to about 480 individuals age 60 and older. *That is more than 20% of the total budget of for a small number of older inmates who, data indicates are not likely to reoffend.*

Assemblyman Schaer's is sponsoring a bill (A1059) that would create a system of geriatric parole for those 65 and older who have served at least a third of their sentence and for those 60 and older who have served at least half of their sentence. The parole request would still have to be approved by the parole board. The measure would exclude those who have committed more serious or violent offenses, including murder, kidnapping, terrorism, sexual assault and racketeering.

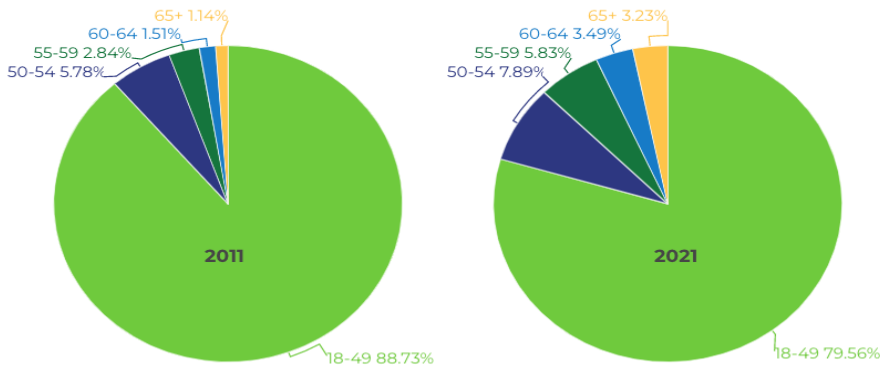
The NJ Corrections department's [2015 recidivism report](#), (the most recent available), states, "Inmates who were released after serving a sentence for a violent offense had the lowest rates of rearrest and reconviction. Inmates who served a sentence for a weapons offense had the lowest rates of reincarceration."



How can we as public leaders and faith leaders work together to change the public perception of the current prison population and move this legislation into law so that our elderly's needs are met and are treated with dignity?

NJ's aging prison population

The number and percentage of adult inmates by age group. Those age 50 and older are considered by experts to be elderly.



Source: NJ Department of Corrections