Justice Atlas of Sentencing and Corrections

A new corrections-oriented online mapping tool is available to help states and agencies better target scarce criminal justice resources.

The Justice Atlas of Sentencing and Corrections allows users to map the residential distribution patterns of people entering and returning from prison and those under probation and parole supervision. The maps expose clusters of criminal justice activity.

The system was created and developed by the New York-based Justice Mapping Center, with support from the Ford Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trust and the Open Society Institute.

"As we know, pictures are worth a thousand words, and these pictures will provide state and local leaders with a powerful new tool to analyze what is driving their crime and incarceration rates and to devise new strategies that will produce a better return on the billions we spend on corrections," said Adam Gelb, director of Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project, during a webinar held in the fall to officially launch the Atlas.

Eric Cadora, founder and director of the Justice Mapping Center, noted that the Atlas differs from traditional crime mapping tools. It maps where people live, not where crimes occur.

"In many ways it's very distinct from what we traditionally understand as crime mapping. Crime mapping maps crime events, where they happen, their intensity," Cadora said. "We're mapping where people live, the concentrations, disparities, as well as a number of other dimensions. When we really looked at the data and started to map it, what we found were cycles, rather than static numbers, these cycles of high rates of removal to prison from particular neighborhoods and returns to prison in particular neighborhoods."

The Atlas highlights four issues:

■ **Revocations to Prison.** Revocation from parole and probation to prison plays a significant role in rising state prison populations. The Atlas provides data on the types of prison admissions, either through court conviction or through revocation of parole or probation.

■ **Cost Centers.** The system calculates how much is being spent on behalf of the neighborhoods that are experiencing high rates of incarceration and reentry.

■ **Reentry Disparities.** This addresses the disparity between a community's share of returning prisoners and its share of the overall resident population.

■ **Gender Rates.** Ninety percent of people in prison are male. The Atlas provides a comparison between men and women admitted to and returned from prison under probation and parole.

Twenty-two states currently participate in the Atlas, and Cadora said the system will be expanded and updated each year to include additional states, data and features. The states on active status are Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia.

The system is free. System users can select a state and find, for example, information by county on prison admission and release rates and parolee rates. As examples of the information the system can reveal, Cadora cited that 9 percent of prisoners returning to Austin, Texas, are returning to one ZIP code, which has only 2 percent of the general city population. In one county in Kansas, 75 percent of people admitted to prison are through revocation of probation and parole.

"It's important because this can provide a source of savings and a way of thinking about spending dollars differently in those places," Cadora said. "It also sort of highlights, and in some ways suggests, what the return on the public safety investment is for those particular places."

"Eric Cadora and his team pioneered the concept of the million dollar block — areas where government spending exceeds a million dollars in just a very small area to lock up offenders in that area," Gelb said. "He has helped reframe our understanding of effective criminal justice strategies and bridge the knowledge gap between cops on the beat and leaders at the capital. We're excited about this technology and what it can do across the country for policymakers in this arena."

The system has an export function to allow users to save and print tables and maps, which can be presented to decision makers to illustrate the need for resources in certain areas.

Cadora noted that every major urban area included in the system has ZIP codes that stand out as problem areas. The difference between the highest incarceration rate and the lowest incarceration rate neighborhoods is dramatic in every major city.

He said the data shows a remarkable amount of people nationwide returning to prison from probation and parole and spending shorter amounts of time in prison than people entering through court convictions.

"The states where we have worked have focused on that particular issue as a way of exploring new approaches to working with parolees and probationers that do not so quickly result in high rates of returns to prison," Cadora said. "That is some of the ways states are starting to manage their growing prison population better."

As the Atlas evolves to include more information, it may provide a broader community picture.

"The costs we have attributed to these places are the minimal way of figuring the per day use of a prison cell; it does not include unintended costs resulting from men returning to prison, such as law enforcement, parole and probation costs, social costs. These are minimal costs of renting a prison cell," Cadora said.

The system is meant as a tool to help states better use existing resources.

"The maps help policymakers set priorities and realize there are concentrations," Gelb said. "When you have to be more effective with funding, you have to prioritize and target and these kinds of maps will help demonstrate that there are different ways of doing business on a lot of fronts. There are a lot of efficiencies that can be squeezed out of systems, and these maps will help state and local policymakers find them."

For more information on the Justice Atlas of Sentencing and Corrections, contact Eric Cadora at ecadora@justicemapping.org or visit http://www. justiceatlas.org. For information on the National Institute of Justice's Mapping and Analysis for Public Safety (MAPS) program, contact Steven Schuetz at steve.schuetz@usdoj.gov, or visit the MAPS website at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/NIJ/maps/.