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U.S. PRISON POPULATION DECLINED FOR THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR DURING 2012

WASHINGTON – The U.S. prison population declined 1.7 percent (or by 27,770 inmates) from 2011 to 2012, falling to an estimated 1,571,013 prisoners, the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today. Nine states had a decrease of over 1,000 prisoners in 2012: California, Texas, North Carolina, Colorado, Arkansas, New York, Florida, Virginia and Maryland.

This is the third consecutive year of a decline in the number of state prisoners, which represents a shift in the direction of incarceration practice in the states over the past 30 years. The prison population grew every year between 1978 and 2009, from 307,276 prisoners in 1978 to a high of 1,615,487 prisoners in 2009.

The 2012 prison population counts are based on data from 47 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Counts for the three states that had not submitted data to BJS by the time of publication were estimated. Final counts are expected in late 2013.

California accounted for the majority (51 percent) of the decline in state prisoners with 15,035 fewer inmates in 2012 than 2011. The decline in California was due in part to its Public Safety Realignment policy, which was designed to reduce overcrowding in the state prisons by diverting new admissions of “nonserious, nonsex, nonviolent offenders” from state prisons to local jails.

The decline in the state prison population was offset by an increase in the number of federal inmates. The federal prison population grew by 0.7 percent (or 1,453 inmates) during 2012, a slower rate than the average annual increase of 3.2 percent each year over the past 10 years.

The U.S. imprisonment rate dropped to 480 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 residents in 2012, continuing a decline since 2007. The national imprisonment rate for males (910 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 male U.S. residents) was over 14 times the imprisonment rate for females (63 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 female U.S. residents). The female imprisonment rate decreased 2.9 percent in 2012 from 65 per 100,000 female U.S. residents in 2011.

(MORE)

In 2012, states with the highest imprisonment rates included Louisiana (893 per 100,000 state residents), Mississippi (717 per 100,000 state residents), Alabama (650 per 100,000 state residents), Oklahoma (648 per 100,000 state residents), and Texas (601 per 100,000 state residents).

Maine had the lowest imprisonment rate among states (145 per 100,000 state residents), followed by Minnesota (184 per 100,000 state residents), and Rhode Island (190 per 100,000 state residents).

In 2011 (the most recent data available), the majority (53 percent) of sentenced state prisoners were serving time for a violent offense, including robbery (14 percent), murder or nonnegligent manslaughter (12 percent), rape or sexual assault (12 percent) and aggravated or simple assault (10 percent). About 18 percent were serving time for property offenses, 17 percent for drug crimes and 11 percent for public order offenses, such as weapon violations, drunk driving, commercialized vice and court offenses.

White prisoners comprised 35 percent of the 2011 state prison population, while black prisoners were 38 percent and Hispanics were 21 percent. The percentage of Hispanic inmates sentenced for violent offenses (58 percent) during 2011 exceeded that of non-Hispanic black (56 percent) and non-Hispanic white (49 percent) inmates, while the number of black inmates imprisoned for violent crimes (284,631) surpassed that of white (228,782) or Hispanic (162,489) inmates.

The number of white inmates sentenced for property crime (108,560) was larger than the number of black (78,197) and Hispanic (38,264) inmates sentenced for property crime, while more black inmates were sentenced for drug offenses than inmates of other races or Hispanic origin.

Today BJS also launched a new dynamic online tool that provides instant access to national and state-level prisoner data from 1978 to 2011. The data tool allows the media, stakeholders and other BJS web users to analyze prisoner data by yearend populations, admissions and releases and many characteristics of prisoners.

The report, *Prisoners in 2012 - Advance Counts* (NCJ 242467), was written by BJS statisticians E. Ann Carson and Daniela Golinelli. The data tool, *Corrections Statistical Analysis Tool (CSAT) - Prisoners*, was developed by E. Ann Carson and Joseph Mulako-Wangota. The report, data tool, related documents and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov/>.

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The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), headed by Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at <http://www.ojp.gov>.