

2024 FINAL REPORT

CORRECTIONS AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE OVERSIGHT TASK FORCE

January 2025



Authority

The Oversight Task Force is charged with the following responsibilities related to the implementation of H.B. 585, Regular Session 2014 (MISS. CODE ANN. § 47-5-6 [1972]):

- track and assess outcomes from the recommendations in the Corrections and Criminal Justice Task Force report of December 2013;
- prepare and submit to the Legislature, Governor, and Chief Justice, no later than the first day of the second full week of each regular session of the Legislature, an annual report on outcome and performance measures and recommendations for improvements; recommendations on transfers of funding based on the success or failure of implementation of the recommendations and a summary of savings; and any additional recommendations to the Legislature on future legislation and policy options to enhance public safety and control corrections costs;
- monitor compliance with sentencing standards, assess their impact on the correctional resources of the state, and determine if the standards advance the adopted sentencing policy goals of the state;
- review the classifications of crimes and sentences and make recommendations for change when supported by information that change is advisable to further the adopted sentencing policy goals of the state;
- develop a research and analysis system to determine the feasibility, impact on resources, and budget consequences of any proposed or existing legislation affecting sentence length;
- request, review, and receive data and reports on performance outcome measures as related to this act;
- undertake such additional studies or evaluations as the Oversight Task Force considers necessary to provide sentencing reform information and analysis;
- prepare and conduct annual continuing legal education seminars regarding the sentencing guidelines to be presented to judges, prosecuting attorneys and their deputies, and public defenders and their deputies, as so required;
- additionally, the Oversight Task Force is empowered to:
 - use clerical and professional employees of the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) for its staff;
 - employ or retain other professional staff upon the determination of the necessity for other staff;
 - employ consultants to assist in the evaluations, and when necessary, the implementation of the recommendations of the *2013 Final Report* by the Corrections and Criminal Justice Oversight Task Force Final Report; and,
 - apply for and expend grants, gifts, or federal funds it receives from other sources to carry out its duties and responsibilities.

Membership

Section 68, H.B. 585, Regular Session 2014, established a committee to be known as the Corrections and Criminal Justice Oversight Task Force, hereinafter referred to as “Oversight Task Force” and “Task Force,” to review and monitor the implementation of H.B. 585. The Oversight Task Force is composed of the following members:

- Hon. Prentiss G. Harrell, Circuit Judge, Fifteenth Circuit Court District - Task Force Chair;
- Jeffery Belk, State Parole Board Chair;
- Commissioner Burl Cain, Mississippi Department of Corrections;
- Sheriff John Ledbetter, Jackson County;
- Sheriff Travis Patten, Adams County;
- Troy Peterson (former Sheriff of Harrison County);
- Chief of Police Landon Tucker, City of Corinth;
- Lindsay Cranford, Director of Public Integrity, Attorney General’s Office;

- André de Gruy, State Defender, Office of State Public Defender;
- Kaylon McCou, Assistant District Attorney, Fourth Circuit Court District;
- John Weddle, District Attorney, First Circuit Court District;
- Rev. Eddie Charles Spencer, Pastor of Alta Woods United Methodist Church in Jackson and Mt. Salem Methodist Church in Terry, advocate for offender and families who have been directly affected by the prison justice system;
- Nick Bain, attorney (former state Representative);¹
- Matthew Dry, Joint Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review (PEER);² and,
- Member representing the Mississippi Association of Supervisors (no members designated for 2024).

Methods and Procedures

In the year since the release of the 2024 report, the Oversight Task Force visited and examined inmate housing areas and inmate educational programs at:

- Mississippi State Prison (MSP);
- Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF);
- South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI);
- Walnut Grove Correctional Facility (WGCF);
- Delta Correctional Facility (DCF); and,
- Marshall County Correctional Facility (MCCF).

Additionally, the Oversight Task Force was briefed on legislative actions related to criminal justice and received presentations from the following sources:

- Jeffery Belk, Mississippi State Parole Board Chair, presented an overview of the actions of the Parole Board to implement presumptive parole in the State and collaboration with MDOC pre-release programs;
- Nathan Blevins, Deputy Commissioner of Community Corrections (MDOC), presented data on MDOC's need to increase the pay for probation and parole officers and possible funding sources for such pay increases;
- Burl Cain, MDOC Commissioner, presented an overview of MDOC's efforts to reduce gang influence at MDOC facilities, expanding the use of transitional housing, work release programs, inmate educational opportunities, legislative action needed during the 2025 session, and the need for more correctional and probation and parole agents;
- Kelley Christopher, Deputy Commissioner of Programs, Education, and Re-Entry at MDOC, presented an overview of MDOC's Mississippi Rehabilitation Initiative program;
- Derrick Garner, Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Finance at MDOC, discussed ongoing efforts to upgrade the current MDOC database, OffenderTrak, and provided updates on MDOC's FY 2025 budget status;
- Brand Huffman, Superintendent of SMCI, provided a tour of SMCI facilities, presented an overview of programs offered at the facility, and efforts taken to improve the culture at SMCI;
- John Hunt, Superintendent of CMCF, provided a tour of CMCF facilities and highlighted new building/renovation projects at CMCF in addition to vocational offerings at the facility;
- Alesha Judkins, State Director at (Mississippi), fwd.us, presented recidivism data related to individuals released under S.B. 2795;
- George King, Statewide Reentry Coordinator at MDOC, provided an overview of peer-based reentry

¹ Mr. Bain is one of two appointees allocated to the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The other post is currently vacant.

² The representative of PEER took no part in the adoption of findings and recommendations found in this report.

programs utilized in other states;

- Chris Loden, Superintendent at MCCF, provided an overview of new construction/renovation projects at MCCF, inmate programs offered at the facility, and guided a tour of the facility;
- Steven Maxwell, Director of Corrections Investigation Division at MDOC, presented an overview of a statewide behavioral health deflection program;
- Audrey McAfee, Deputy Administrator of Technology and Program Information at MDOC discussed upgrading the current MDOC database. Ms. McAfee also presented updated corrections and parole data relevant to the efforts of H.B. 585;
- Marc McClure, Superintendent at MSP, presented an overview of corrective actions taken at MSP to improve inmate housing conditions and expand inmate services. Additionally, he provided a tour of MSP facilities; and,
- Dr. Mary Ann Ross, Chief of Staff at MDOC, provided an overview of reentry programs and a proposed transitional housing program.

Summary of Efforts to Date

Since the passage of H.B. 585 during its 2014 Regular Session, the Legislature has passed several pieces of legislation that address recommendations made by the Oversight Task Force. In 2018, the Legislature passed H.B. 387, which ended “debtor’s prisons” for failure to pay fines and clarified that people sentenced with enhancements prior to July 1, 2014, were eligible for parole. The bill also provided discretion to judges to deviate from the mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent habitual convictions. Furthermore, the bill created the Mississippi Sentencing Disparity Task Force for the purpose of studying and reporting on possible disparity in sentencing to promote the interest of uniform justice throughout Mississippi.

During its 2019 Regular Session, the Legislature enacted H.B. 1352, known as the Criminal Justice Reform Act. The bill’s primary focus was to rename drug courts, mental health courts, and veterans’ courts as “intervention courts,” to be under the oversight of the Administrative Office of Courts. Additionally, H.B. 1352 made some technical changes to the administration of intervention courts, such as requiring better data collection, and reconstituted the Drug Court Commission into the Intervention Court Advisory Commission.

During the 2020 Regular Session, the Legislature passed H.B. 851, which added two additional members to the Task Force: an advocate for offenders and families who have been directly affected by the criminal justice system (appointed by the Governor), and a member to be appointed by the Mississippi Association of Chiefs of Police.

During the 2021 Regular Session, the Legislature passed S.B. 2795, which expanded parole eligibility for certain violent crimes. Approximately 6,300 offenders either gained a parole eligibility date or received a reduced eligibility date under the new statute.

During the 2021 Regular Session, the Legislature passed H.B. 747, which authorized the Rankin County Sheriff’s Department to create a pilot work release program to help qualified inmates learn skills and make employment connections before release.

During the 2022 Regular Session, the Legislature passed H.B. 586, which authorized Harrison and Lee counties to develop similar pilot work release programs. Additionally, S.B. 2437 established a pilot work initiative program, limited to 25 participants, operating from the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility.

During the 2024 Regular Session, the Legislature passed S.B. 2445, which authorized the expansion of the work release program to include Hinds County; and authorized the expansion of the work initiative program to SMCI, MSP, and the Mississippi Correctional Institute for Women.

Mississippi Department of Corrections Status Report

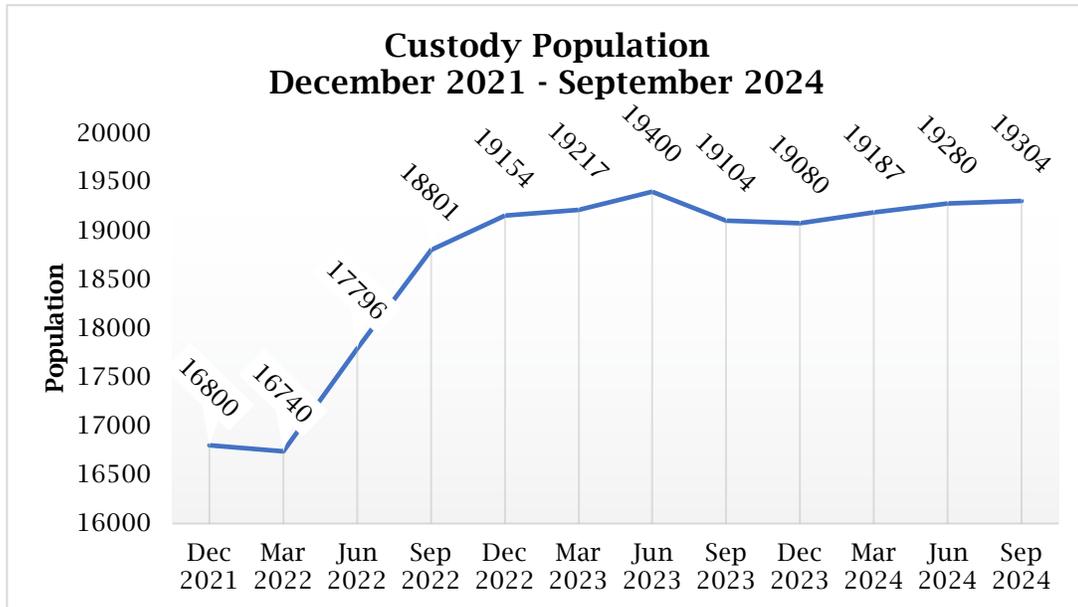
Data sources were provided by the Office of the State Public Defender, the Mississippi State Parole Board, and MDOC, which provided the following status report:

Summary

- The incarceration growth rate has significantly slowed since December 2022, with an average stable population of 19,216 over the past 21 months.
- There was a notable decline in admissions throughout 2023. In 2024, admissions have stabilized, with the first two quarters nearing expected levels. The overall average for the period is 1,755 admissions per quarter.
- Releases have remained steady over the past year.
- Overall, admissions increased by 5.5% from 2023-Qtr2 to 2024-Qtr2. Admissions for drug convictions increased by 8.1%, non-violent offenses by increased by 10.7%, while violent crimes decreased by 2.8%.

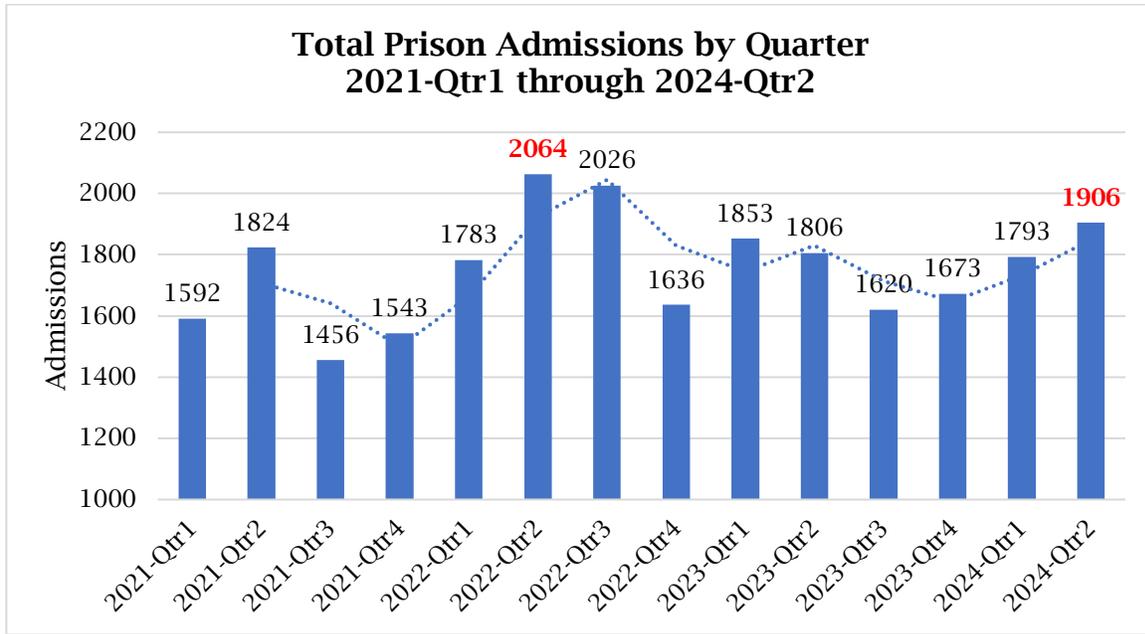
Review of Custody Population

Since December 2022, the incarceration growth rate has slowed considerably, with the population remaining stable over this period. The average population for the past 21 months is 19,216. The chart below shows the population changes from December 2021 to September 2024.



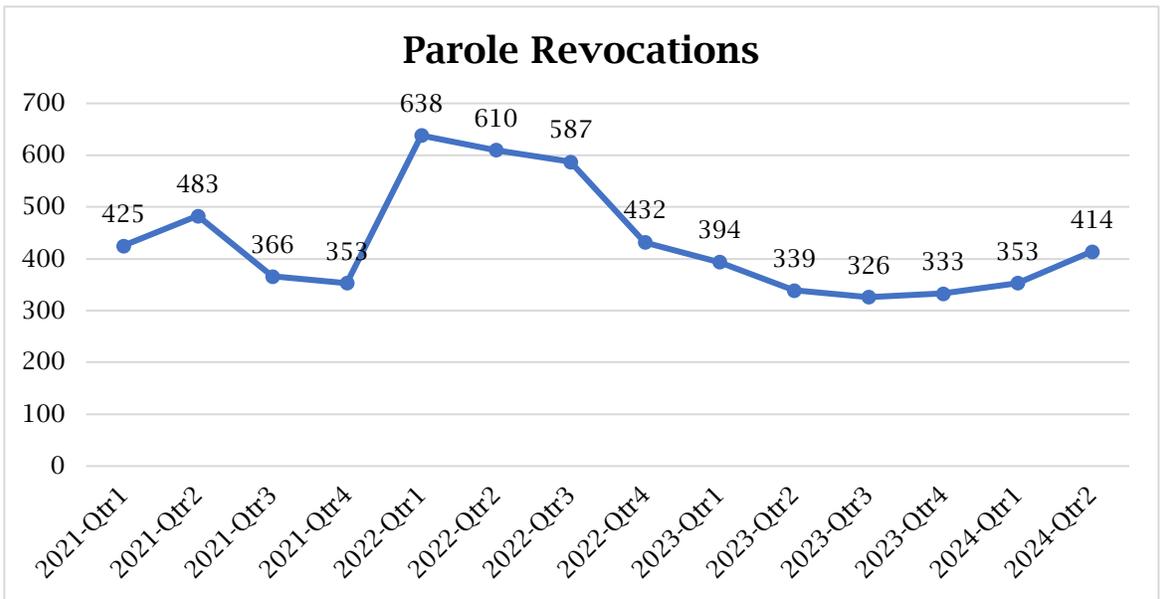
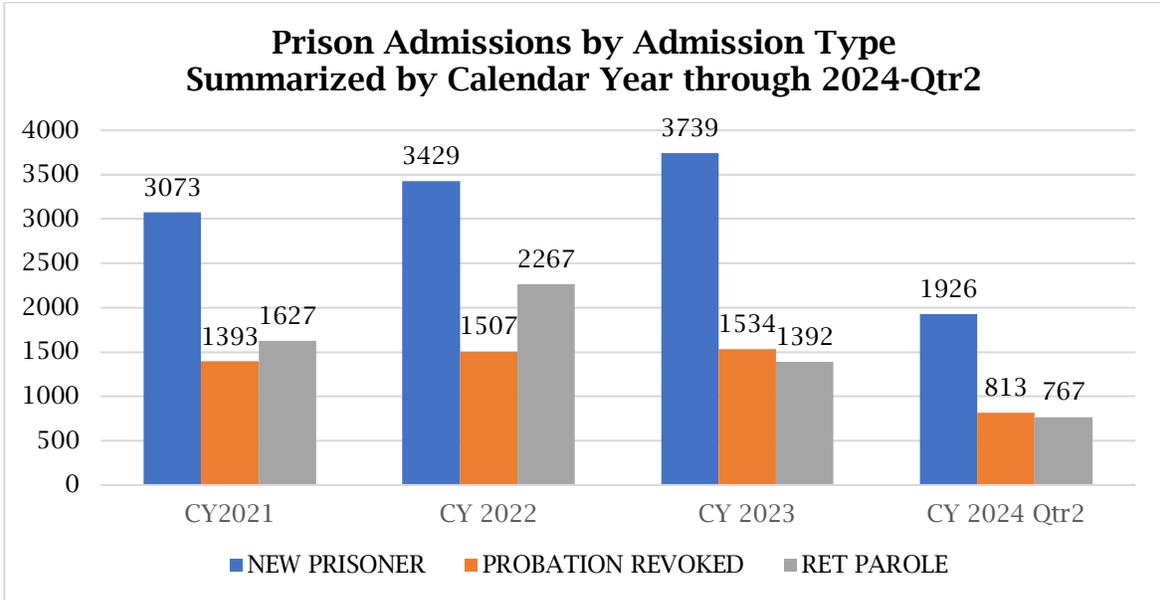
Review of Prison Admissions by Admissions Type

The chart on page 6 shows total admissions per quarter from 2021-Qtr1 to 2024-Qtr2. It can be observed that overall prison admissions returned to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022-Qtr2. There was a noticeable decline in admissions throughout 2023, but the first two quarters of 2024 have returned to near expected levels. The overall average for this period is 1,755 admissions per quarter.



A more in-depth analysis of admissions by admission type shows a 2% reduction in new prisoner commitments over the past 12 months. Probation revocations have increased by 4%, while parole revocations have surged by 22%. Notwithstanding, overall revocations are close to 2021 levels and have significantly decreased since 2022.

Admission Type	2021-Qtr2	2022-Qtr2	2023-Qtr2	2024-Qtr2	(%) Change 2022 - 2023 Qtr2	(%) Change 2023 - 2024 Qtr2
New Prisoner	858	972	972	953	0%	-2%
Other	19	15	21	20		
Probation Revoked	372	389	418	436	7%	4%
Returned ERS	34	14	9	36		
Returned House Arrest	58	64	47	47		
Returned Parole	483	610	339	414	-44%	22%
Total	1,824	2,064	1,806	1,906		

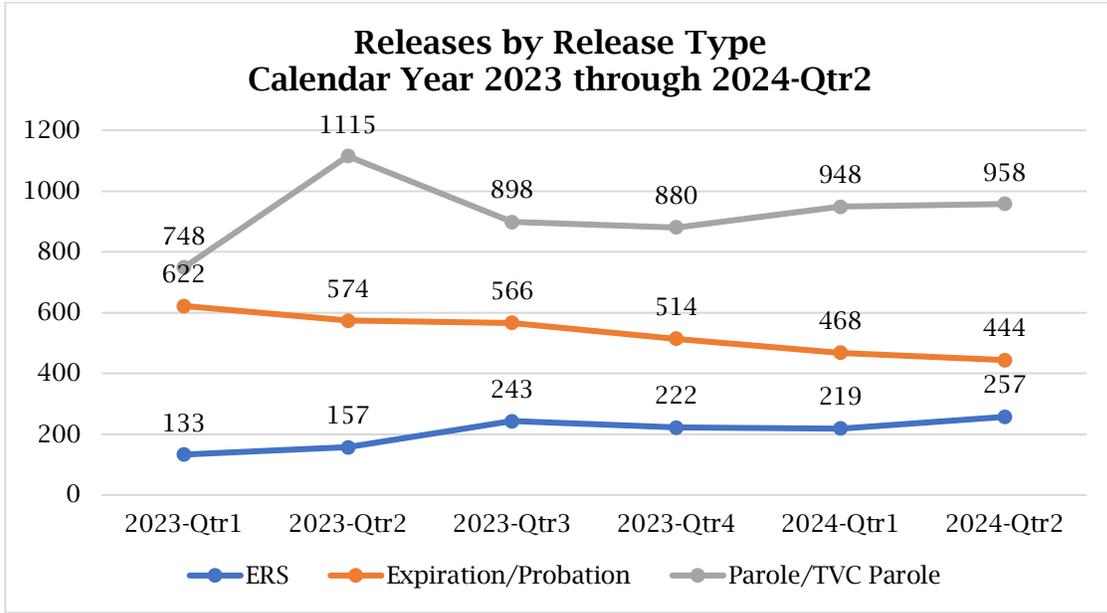


Review of Admissions by Offense Type

There has been a 5.5% overall increase in admissions by offense type when comparing 2023-Qtr2 to 2024-Qtr2. Presently, drug convictions make up 37.6%, other non-violent convictions 44.4%, and violent offenses 34.5%. By comparison of 2023-Qtr2 and 2024-Qtr2, drug convictions are up by 8.1%, other non-violent crimes have increased by 10.7%, and violent crimes have decreased by 2.8%.

Review of Releases by Release Type

The chart on page 8 shows that releases have remained steady over the past year. The average number of releases per quarter by major release type is: Earned release supervision (ERS) - 205; Expiration of Sentence - 531; and parole - 925.



Release Type	2023-Qtr1	2023-Qtr2	2023-Qtr3	2023-Qtr4	2024-Qtr1	2024-Qtr2
ERS	133	157	243	222	219	257
Other	39	41	24	39	47	51
Expiration/Probation	622	574	566	514	468	444
Parole/TVC Parole	748	1115	898	880	948	958
Total	1,542	1,887	1,731	1,655	1,682	1,710

The stability of the inmate population can be attributed to several factors. Parole and probation revocations have been on a downward trend and are now being maintained at manageable levels. Other release types, such as expiration of sentence and ERS, have remained consistent. Additionally, the slower pace of revocations indicates that offenders are not being returned to custody as quickly, which contributes to the overall stability of the population.

FY 2021 Releases (Overall)	Released	Returned	36-Month Recidivism (%)
Non-Violent Offenses	4,228	1,792	42.4
Violent/Sex Offenses	2,154	705	32.7
Total	6,382	2,497	39.1

FY 2021 Releases (Parole)	Released	Returned	36-Month Recidivism (%)
Non-Violent Offenses	2,985	1,239	41.5
Violent/Sex Offenses	488	255	52.3
Total	3,473	1,494	43.0

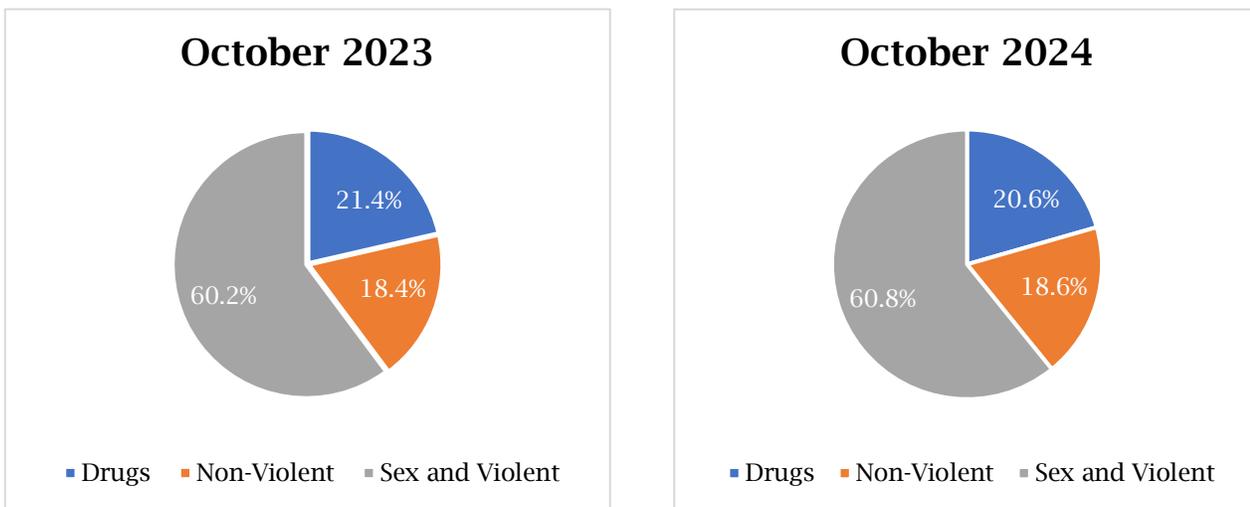
FY 2021 Releases (Expiration/Probation to Follow)	Released	Returned	36-Month Recidivism (%)
Non-Violent Offenses	731	237	32.4
Violent/Sex Offenses	961	191	19.9
Total	1,692	428	25.3

FY 2021 Releases (Other)	Released	Returned	36-Month Recidivism (%)
Non-Violent Offenses	512	316	61.7
Violent/Sex Offenses	705	259	36.7
Total	1,217	575	47.2

Custody population by offense type

In comparing the incarcerated population from October 2023 to October 2024 by offense type, it remains evident that sex offenders and violent offenders continue to make up the majority of the custody population. During the last report, there was a slight increase in non-violent offenders. However, over the past year, growth in this category has stabilized, indicating a positive shift towards favorable parole considerations for drug and other non-violent offenders.

The percentage of incarceration for drug offenses and other non-violent offenses make up approximately 39% of the custody population. Correspondingly, sex offenders and violent offenders make up 61% of the incarcerated population.



Length of Sentence for New Commitments

Tracking the length of sentence for new commitments to incarceration is one of the measures required by House Bill 585. The data indicates that the average term of sentence imposed by offense type for new commitments has remained consistent. Closer examination of the data shows that higher average terms for a report period are due to the imposition of lengthy sentences for a small number of offenders rather than reflecting a change in overall sentencing patterns.

Offense Type	2023-Qtr1	2023-Qtr2	2023-Qtr3	2023-Qtr4	2024-Qtr1	2024-Qtr2
Drug	82.73	81.84	85.37	80.53	86.23	95.07
Non-Violent	56.92	62.69	55.29	55.46	54.05	59.30
Violent	167.80	166.73	165.35	154.15	170.47	163.98
Overall Average	109.8	106.4	103.3	98.4	103.1	109.1

Percent of time served for new court commitments

As reflected in the chart on page 10, release practices for 2023-Qtr1 and 2024-Qtr2 are similar. By comparison, the most notable change was in the percent of the term served for drug offenses during the current quarter. Drug offenders served 4.8% less time than those released in 2023-Qtr1. Non-violent offenders served 1% more;

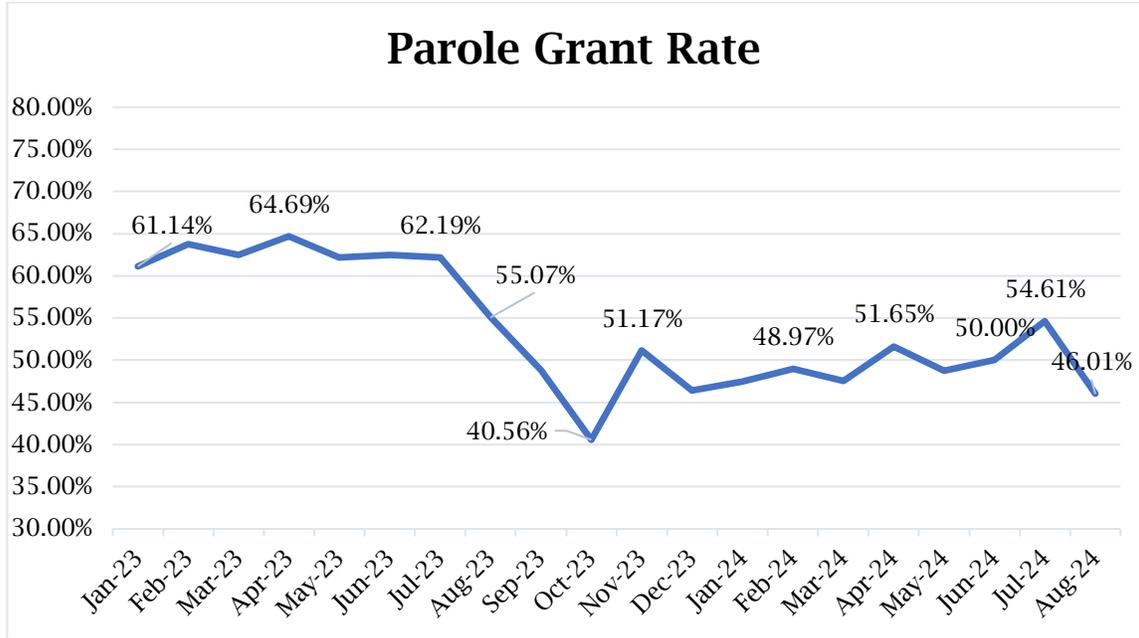
sex offenders served 2% less; and violent offenders served 3.4% more. Release trends are stable and consistent with previous reporting periods.

Period and Offense Type	Average Term of Sentence ¹	Average Term Served	Percent Term Served
2023-Qtr1	85.87	45.28	55.3%
Drug	76.20	29.15	44.8%
Non-Violent	51.60	21.12	49.9%
Sex	114.07	110.65	97.9%
Violent	129.87	72.21	59.9%
2023-Qtr2	85.19	43.28	52.5%
Drug	72.80	27.34	43.1%
Non-Violent	54.15	22.43	47.8%
Sex	118.33	114.52	98.2%
Violent	139.92	77.77	60.6%
2023-Qtr3	81.47	44.50	56.6%
Drug	66.71	27.26	47.9%
Non-Violent	49.89	23.88	52.2%
Sex	100.61	93.45	98.0%
Violent	135.87	78.91	61.2%
2023-Qtr4	87.31	46.20	54.9%
Drug	75.45	29.39	46.3%
Non-Violent	58.39	25.28	49.8%
Sex	98.76	93.41	98.1%
Violent	143.33	86.88	62.2%
2024-Qtr1	85.70	46.12	55.4%
Drug	80.26	33.23	46.6%
Non-Violent	51.85	23.64	51.1%
Sex	107.39	95.59	94.8%
Violent	134.94	79.29	60.4%
2024-Qtr2	87.87	46.64	54.3%
Drug	85.99	30.97	42.7%
Non-Violent	51.16	22.50	50.4%
Sex	136.09	124.51	96.0%
Violent	125.71	76.17	62.0%

¹ Term of Sentence and Term Served are in months.

Parole Board Grant Rate

The parole grant rate was 38% for calendar year 2022, rising to 56.75% for calendar year 2023. The average for 2024 year-to-date is 49.38%. As reflected in the chart on page 11, the grant rate has remained consistent over the past 12 months.



Impact of S.B. 2795

Released on Parole	Non-Violent	Violent	Total	Violent as a Percent of Total (%)
2019-Qtr1	896	117	1,013	12
2019-Qtr2	991	104	1,095	9
2019-Qtr3	1,012	92	1,104	8
2019-Qtr4	986	134	1,120	12
2020-Qtr1	1,072	118	1,190	10
2020-Qtr2	1,109	114	1,223	9
2020-Qtr3	837	94	931	10
2020-Qtr4	769	108	877	12
2021-Qtr1	719	115	834	14
2021-Qtr2	812	107	919	12
2021-Qtr3	763	147	910	16
2021-Qtr4	807	582	1,389	42
2022-Qtr1	739	615	1,354	45
2022-Qtr2	323	151	474	32
2022-Qtr3	303	121	424	29
2022-Qtr4	371	79	450	18
2023-Qtr1	537	121	658	18
2023-Qtr2	856	166	1,022	16
2023-Qtr3	711	138	849	16
2023-Qtr4	685	123	808	15.2
2024-Qtr1	708	142	850	16.7
2024-Qtr2	699	140	839	16.7
2024-Qtr3	679	187	866	21.6

S.B. 2795 Outcome Measures

Received Parole Eligibility Under S.B. 2795	9,339
Eligible for Hearing	5,262
Received a Hearing	4,911
Granted Parole	2,890
Denied Parole	2,022
Released on Parole (first release post 7-1-2021)	2,335
Expiration of Sentence or Otherwise Released	405

Recidivism Statistics for S.B. 2795: July 1, 2021, through September 30, 2024

Released	Returned	Within 12 Months	12-24 Months	24-36 Months	Revoked New Sentence	Revoked Other Violation
2,335	568	307	166	95	126	442
Recidivism (%)	24.3	13.1	7.1	4.1	5.4	18.9

Issues Discussed During 2024

During the 2024 term, the Oversight Task Force reviewed and discussed issues relating to offender programs, a statewide behavioral health deflection program, inmate enterprises, an inmate data management system, transitional housing, and MDOC personnel needs. These discussions are summarized below.

MDOC Program Participation at the Seven State Facilities

Representatives from MDOC made several presentations highlighting inmate participation and achievements in educational, health, and skill development programs offered throughout the correctional system. As of September 2024, of the 10,549 inmates incarcerated in the seven state facilities, 8,436, or 79.9%, of inmates were enrolled in at least one educational, health, or skill development program.

Program	Participants/Students
Drug and Alcohol/Mental Health	741
Religious Programs	1,553
NOBTS ¹ Seminary	93
Vocational Programs	1,134
NCCER ²	642
iCEV ³	77
Evidence Based Programs	2,233
Reentry Academy	621
MRI ⁴	375
Educational Programs ⁵	1,796
Community College ⁶	103
Organized Recreational Programs	276
YOU ⁷ Adult Secondary Education	46
Vocational Certifications Earned	269

¹ New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

² National Center for Construction Education and Research.

³ Computer based certification program.

⁴ Mississippi Rehabilitation Initiative for violent offenders.

⁵ HiSet (high school equivalency test), Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and Smart Start (middle-skill job skill training, i.e., machinist, registered nurse, computer technician, and medical assistant).

⁶ Hinds Community College, Delta Community College, and Mississippi Valley State University (Adult Education & Family Literacy Act grant).

⁷ Youthful Offender Unit.

Statewide Behavioral Health Deflection Program

Throughout the 2024 term, the Oversight Task Force discussed the utility of establishing a statewide behavioral health deflection program in Mississippi aimed at diverting individuals in behavioral health crises, including mental health and substance use disorders, from the criminal justice system and linking them to treatment, care, and housing services. Initial encounters with law enforcement represent a critical intervention point. Deflection programs nationally have demonstrated success in diverting individuals from incarceration to care, reducing incarceration rates, recidivism, and promoting public health outcomes.

The Oversight Task Force identified several factors justifying the need for such a program, including:

- Centers for Disease Control data indicating that approximately 758 Mississippians died from drug related overdose in 2022, ranking 27th nationally among all states;

- an estimated 44% of individuals in jails have a mental illness, which is much higher than the 18% of the general population. In addition, 63% of people in jails have a substance use disorder, compared to 6% of the general population over age 25; and,
- MDOC data indicates that approximately 21.7% of individuals confined, 37.29% of probationers, and 42.81% of parolees are committed for drug related crimes. In addition, 21.23% of individuals confined, 41.05% of probationers, and 35.36% of parolees committed non-violent offenses. This highlights the necessity for appropriately navigating the behavioral health landscape to avoid the pitfalls of criminalizing substance use disorders and mental illness rather than addressing their root causes.

Currently, while the Mississippi Drug Court Program provides a model for rehabilitation and community reintegration, it does not comprehensively address individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders or offer transitional housing options. An individual must meet the Drug Court candidate criteria for accessing the existing program benefits, which means that person has been arrested and thrust into the judicial system. A statewide behavioral health deflection program would augment the existing Drug Court Program by functioning as a first level measure before, but in conjunction with, the Drug Court.

Overall, a statewide behavioral health deflection program would seek to:

- reduce incarceration rates among individuals experiencing behavioral health crises;
- establish links to care, including treatment for mental health and substance use disorders;
- integrate housing, employment, and education into recovery plans; and,
- foster partnerships among state agencies, community providers, and law enforcement for efficient service delivery.

This would be accomplished by:

- developing a collaborative network of partnership entities (e.g., Mississippi State Department of Health, Mississippi Department of Mental Health, state universities, MDOC, community health providers, local and state law enforcement, and the judicial system);
- access to care thoroughfare - law enforcement officers encountering individuals in crisis will have the option to deflect them to a Crisis Assessment and Stabilization Center instead of jail;
- care thoroughfares will include warm handoffs to mental health professionals and immediate intake into treatment programs;
- an accountability framework requiring participants to adhere to personalized treatment plans and establishing success metrics, to include securing employment, completing educational opportunities, and sustained treatment adherence;
- incorporation of a housing component to include transitional living options for individuals without stable housing and long-term housing support for eligible participants, facilitated through partnerships with housing authorities and non-profit organizations; and,
- data monitoring and evaluation to measure program outcomes, including recidivism rates, treatment completion, and long-term behavioral health improvements.

A behavioral health deflection program represents a necessary augmentation to Mississippi's Drug Court Program, addressing systemic gaps in care for individuals in behavioral health crises. By prioritizing treatment over incarceration, the program will reduce incarceration and recidivism rates, improve public safety, and enhance health outcomes statewide.

Inmate Enterprises

On several occasions during the 2024 term, the Oversight Task Force discussed the prohibition against inmates being able to sell goods or crafts created through membership in an inmate club or organization. Currently, MISS. CODE ANN. § 47-5-571 (1972) states that "except as otherwise specifically provided by law, no goods, wares, services or merchandise manufactured, mined or offered in whole or in part by prisoners shall be sold or offered by any person or other authority except by the corporation, as authorized by Sections 47-5-531 through 47-5-575." The "corporation" refers to prison industries or MAGCOR.

For MDOC to fully utilize “Inmate Clubs” – allowing inmates to not only develop and use their talents but to learn entrepreneurial skills that will allow them to market these talents after release and to make the program fiscally sustainable – specific statutory authority to market the goods and services is needed.

Clubs form with a common philanthropic, educational, and commercial purpose, and provide an opportunity for the members to work together to produce goods or services to improve their community. Additionally, clubs have the potential to:

- keep inmates focused on something good;
- provide a sense of belonging;
- help prevent and combat gang activities;
- provide skills for re-entry (e.g., entrepreneurship, food service, and business administration training)
- provide certifications opportunities (e.g., Serv-Safe);
- develop human relationship skills; and,
- teach moral rehabilitation through integrity, helping others, and giving back.

Clubs would fall into three categories: food service, photography, and crafts. Inmates would apply for membership and selected through a process which ensures that the inmate has been rules violation report (RVR) free for three years and is in good standing at the prison. The clubs would elect officers and host regular membership meetings. The membership would decide on which projects and programs that the club will support. These projects would then be approved by the Superintendent at each facility.

These projects and programs would be funded by the club profits. Inmates that are members of the club would not be compensated for their work in the club. All revenue would be managed by Premier Supply Link (Premier), the MDOC contracted commissary company. The club would order supplies, raw materials, etc., with Premier, through an approved requisition process. Each club would be responsible for maintaining inventory.

With such authority, goods and services could be sold to families and friends at visitation and to prison staff. Families and friends could enjoy sharing a meal with their loved ones, providing an atmosphere of normalcy. Staff could purchase food as a convenient low-cost high-quality alternative to brown-bagging or having to leave the facility for a restaurant meal. Inmates could purchase food items from the club as an alternative to commissary items.

Criminal Justice Data Management

The Oversight Task Force was provided periodic updates on MDOC’s efforts to acquire a new inmate data management system. As discussed in the 2023 Task Force report, Offendertrak, MDOC’s current inmate data management system, is scheduled to have its servicing halted by the provider in the upcoming year. As such, MDOC has been exploring possible replacement systems to migrate its current offender data to and identify future data collection needs of the organization.

MDOC, in discussion with other interested parties such as the Parole Board and local law enforcement agencies, has outlined several features that would improve data management and transparency over the current system. These database upgrades would include a system that allows for non-MDOC entities (i.e., the Parole Board, circuit courts, and state/local law enforcement organizations) to have system access (read only privileges) to create reports pertinent to their subject area or jurisdiction and improve user flexibility.

MDOC stated that it has begun collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services to clarify the needs of the department and identify possible data systems that could replace their current system. After reviewing inmate data management systems of other states and their cost, MDOC has developed an estimated cost range for both the data system and system servicing agreement that will be needed and anticipates that solicitation for a new inmate data management system will be completed in 2025.

Transitional Housing

A topic of re-occurring discussion during the 2024 term was the need and utility of transitional housing for new MDOC releasees. Research on recidivism rates demonstrates that returning citizens have insufficient life skills, resources, community, and emotional support to deal with the stresses of daily life. Undiagnosed complex trauma from abuse and neglect compounds their mental health distress, often manifested in symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, and other behavioral health issues. These challenges severely compromise the health and well-being of homeless returning citizens and jeopardize their efforts to reconnect with society and succeed at education and employment. Without appropriate and compassionate intervention, many returning citizens are at high risk of entering into an irreversible cycle of chronic homelessness, total dependence on welfare, and permanent aversion to society.

Although most of these individuals are eligible for supportive services, they are all too often denied access to these services due to behavioral issues resulting from unaddressed trauma and untreated mental health disorders. The human and fiscal cost of this dramatic ineffectiveness is borne on the back of the individuals, their families, and the community. It doesn't have to be this way.

A MDOC proposed program labeled "Our House" could be a reentry program that would provide transitional and supportive housing through individualized mental health and substance use disorder treatment, targeted case management for community linkages, and workforce development/supportive employment to returning citizens who meet the following criteria:

- non-violent or drug related offense(s);
- homeless or in an at-risk environment;
- willingness or seek employment;
- physically and mentally capable of self-care;
- agreement of participant to anti-narcotic testing and to adhere to program rules; and,
- not receiving Social Security Insurance or Social Security Disability Insurance at the time of admission.

"Our House" would be divided into five phases designed to address community re-entry barriers specific to five targeted areas: recovery from mental illness and/or substance abuse, adult daily living skills, education, employment, and permanent and supportive housing. The therapeutic milieu is facilitated by a treatment team devised of security staff (i.e., program monitors), community mental health therapists, substance use disorder counselors, and an on-site probation and parole agent who will serve as the officer for all participants. The Baton Rouge based Parole Project, similar in nature, has served 577 participants since 2016, averages a less than 2% recidivism rate, and has saved the State of Louisiana an estimated \$150 million annually.³

Concepts of evidenced-based practices such as the Matrix, Recovery and Club House Models as well as Seeking Safety and Thinking for a Change would be interwoven into the curriculum of the program. For example, participants will be referred to as "members" because they are contributing members of a designated *therapeutic community*. This membership will allow the returning citizens to self-govern through a Member Counsel that meets with the facility Warden weekly to discuss participant needs.

Research asserts that the utilization of a comprehensive interdisciplinary treatment team and the use of evidenced- based practices not only provides returning citizens with a sense of belonging but positions them to take ownership of their recovery from adverse mental health, addiction to illicit substances and criminal thinking. Moreover, programs of this nature also see lower instances of property damage, gang-affiliation, violence, and contraband.

Approximately 40% of MDOC's current population (8000 inmates) meet the eligibility criteria. However, 124 inmates have been paroled but remain incarcerated because they do not have an address for release and cost the state of Mississippi \$2.5 million annually.

³ LSU Office of Research and Economic Development, 2021.

Need for Additional Probation and Parole Officers

MDOC staff provided an overview of staffing levels at the department and highlighted position types that MDOC needs to bolster. Specifically, MDOC cited correctional officers and probation and parole agents as the department's highest current need. Low pay, a high stress working environment, and work overload were cited by MDOC as the main factors hindering the department's ability to recruit and retain these position categories.

MDOC stated that recent salary adjustments (increased to \$40,392) have helped increase the number of correctional officers throughout the state, but certain facilities still struggle with recruiting and retaining correctional officers.

To address the shortage of probation and parole agents in the state, MDOC will be seeking an adjustment to the starting salary of these agents in the upcoming year. As currently envisioned, MDOC would need an additional \$4 million per year to fund the proposed salary increases. To lessen the need for these salary increases to be funded fully via General Fund appropriations, MDOC suggested that a significant percentage of the salary increases could be funded through increased supervision fees paid by releasees participating in probation and parole programs. Based on MDOC estimates, increasing supervision fees by \$5.00 would result in an additional \$1.3 million per year and a \$10.00 increase could generate \$2.6 million per year to offset the cost of the proposed salary increases. Currently, supervision fees are set at \$55.

Additionally, increasing the number of probation and parole agents will help offset the cost of the proposed salary increases through increased supervision fee collection rates. In 2023, MDOC collected \$12 million in supervision fees throughout the state. However, this figure does not represent the total supervision fee amount assigned to probation and parole participants. Overall, in the state:

- Region I (north Mississippi) - collected 83% of all supervision fees in their territory (an average of \$253,259 per month);
- Region II (central Mississippi) - collected 74% of all supervision fees in their territory (an average of \$228,920 per month); and,
- Region III (south Mississippi) - collected 63% of all supervision fees in their territory (an average of \$191,884 per month).

With additional probation and parole officers, MDOC could increase supervision fee collection percentages to offset the need for General Fund appropriations or increases to supervision fees paid by probationers and parolees.

Recommendations

1. The Legislature should fund a new data system for MDOC to replace the current data system that is scheduled to be retired. The new data system would include real-time dashboards or other user-friendly presentations of MDOC data and provide appropriate access for agencies (e.g., the Parole Board) to query underlying data, which is not public, but is intrinsic to their work.
2. The Legislature should explore and/or create an inter-agency coalition tasked with establishing a statewide behavioral health deflection program for the purpose of diverting certain individuals with behavioral or mental disorders who commit non-violent minor crimes away from a traditional incarceration setting and instead to an appropriate mental health care facility.

Adoption

After due consideration, the Oversight Task Force adopts this report on January 20, 2025, and directs its chair to sign and deliver copies of the report to the Legislature, the Governor, and the Chief Justice.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Prentiss Harrell". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Prentiss G. Harrell, Circuit Judge, Chair