



HB 585: *Recommendations of the CORRECTIONS AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE*

Cost of Doing Nothing: \$266 million

Mississippi's prison population has grown by 17 percent in the last decade, topping 22,600 inmates last year. The state now has the second-highest imprisonment rate in the country, trailing only Louisiana. Without action, these trends will continue and Mississippi prisons will need to house 1,990 more inmates by 2024 – costing taxpayers an additional \$266 million.

The large and growing cost of prisons has not brought taxpayers a good return on their investment: nearly one in every three nonviolent offenders released from Mississippi prisons returns within three years.

Key Findings Reviewed by the Task Force

The Corrections and Criminal Justice Task Force began its seven-month process last June by undertaking a comprehensive review of Mississippi's correctional trends and policies, and found the state could be using its public safety budget much more strategically:

- Earned time and release policies have created uncertainty about how long offenders will stay in prison and contributed to a 28 percent increase in sentence lengths in the past decade.
- With limited alternatives to incarceration, many of Mississippi's nonviolent offenders are sent to prison. Two-thirds of all prison admissions in 2012 were nonviolent drug or property offenders and many enter prison for violating the terms of their supervision rather than for committing a new crime.
- Increases in the state's prison budget have come at the expense of cost-effective public safety strategies that hold offenders accountable and reduce crime. The vast majority of Mississippi's corrections spending – 93 percent – pays for prisons, while the remainder funds the supervision of the nearly 40,000 felony offenders on probation, parole, and house arrest.

HB 585 will:

- **Ensure certainty and clarity in sentencing** – by enacting “true minimums” to guarantee that nonviolent and violent offenders are never released prior to serving 25 and 50 percent of their sentences, respectively; eliminating the Intensive Supervision Program as an early-release option; creating a clear definition of what constitutes a “violent” offense; instituting comprehensive case planning for parole-eligible inmates and restricting parole hearings to offenders who will not comply; and expanding and standardizing victim notification services.
- **Expand judicial discretion for imposing alternatives to incarceration** – by removing restrictions for the use of drug courts, intensive supervision, and other sentencing options; and authorizing the creation of veterans' courts.
- **Focus prison beds on violent and career offenders** – by ensuring that higher-level property and drug offenders are sanctioned more severely than lower-level drug and property offenders, and that prosecutors have the necessary tools to target drug traffickers and commercial theft enterprises; extending parole hearings to a limited number of geriatric offenders; and ensuring that nonviolent offenders are parole eligible.
- **Strengthen supervision and interventions to reduce recidivism** – by empowering supervision officers to use intermediate sanctions to swiftly and certainly respond to minor violations of supervision; creating specialized detention centers and limiting incarceration periods for technical violations of supervision; and streamlining jail transfers for offenders awaiting revocation hearings.
- **Ensure quality and sustainability of reforms** – by instituting drug court standards and reporting requirements; providing training in evidence-based practices for decision makers and community supervision officers; and establishing an oversight council to oversee implementation and ensure accountability.

HB 585 will NOT:

- It WILL NOT decriminalize or legalize the possession, sale, or manufacturing of any controlled substance.
- It WILL NOT lower or remove any time served requirements for violent and sex offenders; offenders who are currently required to serve 100 or 85 percent of their sentence would continue to serve at least those minimums.

Impact of HB 585

HB 585 will avert all of the projected growth in prison population and costs during the next 10 years, saving taxpayers a minimum of \$266 million.

HB 585 allows the Department of Corrections to redirect an estimated \$7 million from averted prison costs towards programs and policies proven to reduce recidivism and hold offenders accountable. Additionally, upon the strong recommendation of the Task Force, the Department of Corrections will devote a portion of the savings towards improving reentry services – including increasing the number of permanent beds available for offenders entering the community without adequate housing.

Impact on Localities

- **Reduce jail overcrowding** – by limiting to 21 days the length of time probationers and parolees can be held in county jails awaiting revocation hearings for technical violations.
- **Reimburse counties for holding probationers and parolees** – by mandating that the Department of Corrections pay localities for holding offenders awaiting revocation hearings for technical violations.
- **Improve community reentry services** – by implementing comprehensive reentry planning for all offenders returning to the community.
- **Establish an Oversight Council** – which will involve local representation in overseeing the implementation of sentencing and corrections reform and making further recommendations as needed.

Background on the Corrections and Criminal Justice Task Force and HB 585

Seeking a comprehensive and data-driven review of the sentencing and corrections systems, the 2013 Mississippi Legislature passed, and Governor Phil Bryant signed into law, House Bill 1231 to establish the bipartisan, inter-branch Corrections and Criminal Justice Task Force. The 21-member Task Force was charged with developing policies that improve public safety, ensure clarity in sentencing, and control corrections costs.

Beginning last summer and continuing through the end of 2013, the Task Force analyzed the state's corrections and criminal justice systems, including an exhaustive review of sentencing, corrections, and community supervision data, hearing testimony from wide-ranging stakeholders, and engaging in policy discussions. On December 17, the Task Force unanimously forwarded a report of its findings and 19 policy recommendations to the legislature for action in the 2014 legislative session.

Under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves and Speaker of the House Phillip Gunn, the 19 Task Force recommendations were crafted into HB 585 and introduced to the legislature in late January.

The full Task Force report, including findings and recommendations of the Task Force, can be accessed here: http://www.legislature.ms.gov/Documents/MSTaskForce_FinalReport.pdf

House Bill 585, which encompasses all 19 Task Force recommendations, can be accessed here: <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2014/pdf/HB/0500-0599/HB0585SG.pdf>