



# Workforce Trends in State Departments of Corrections

A 50-State Analysis

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## What is the Safe Inside Report?

Safe Inside: A 50-State Analysis of Workforce Trends in State Departments of Corrections is the first comprehensive assessment of workforce trends in state corrections systems, and what those mean for public safety, state spending and the health and wellbeing of people who live and work in state prisons.

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## Why Does the Corrections Workforce Require Attention?

Secure, well-staffed correctional facilities are foundational to public safety. Yet state systems face severe staffing shortages, high turnover and an increasingly inexperienced workforce. The overwhelming majority of state corrections directors identify workforce issues (recruitment, retention, mandatory overtime, and staff morale) as their top concern.

The report finds that that these workforce challenges have high stakes:

**Increased violence.** In a national cross section of states, compared to 2019, death rates of people incarcerated in 2024 are up 47%, assaults on staff in 2024 have increased by 77%, and assaults on incarcerated people increased by 54%.

**Escalating costs.** Chronic vacancies and high turnover drive escalating overtime costs, emergency staffing measures and an inefficient use of public funds. Overtime spending doubled on average over the past five years, with some states experiencing increases of up to 300 percent.

**Declining experience.** Waves of retirements and departures have left states with an inexperienced labor force. In Florida, 58% of corrections officers have two years on the job or less. In Texas, 63% have three years or less.

**Excessive churn.** Many states are plagued by retention problems. In Minnesota, 25% of entry-level officers left their position after six months in 2023. In Louisiana, new hires stayed less than six months on average in 2024.

**Community impact.** Understaffing contributes to canceled programs, delayed medical care, and reduced access to rehabilitative services—conditions that undermine successful reentry and destabilize families.

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## How Can the Report Help?

The report makes clear each state's situation is unique and highlights innovative efforts across the US by corrections leaders. Increasing compensation has been a key strategy embraced by many states in addressing these challenges. However, it is not the only factor affecting recruitment and retention, and no single policy change can resolve the alarming trends in corrections staffing. The states that have made progress typically combine multiple strategies, such as:

- Improving data collection
- Reducing early attrition among new staff
- Investing in employee wellbeing
- Reengineering workplace culture
- Embracing or enhancing use of technology to augment staff functions

By pairing national data with operational insight from corrections professionals, the Safe Inside report provides a shared, evidence-based foundation for corrections leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to hold an informed dialogue, share learning across states, and collectively strengthen the corrections workforce to enhance public safety.

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## What is Safe Inside?

Safe Inside is a national initiative that combines research and operational insight to improve working and living conditions in state correctional systems. Safe Inside focuses on trends in the corrections workforce. Safe Inside is conducted in partnership with the Correctional Leaders Association. It was made possible through funding support provided by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. Additional assistance is provided by Arnold Ventures.