



Corrections Budget: A Failure to Plan for the Future

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

by **Anika Fassia**
Policy Analyst

The state budget and tax structure play an important role in quality of life and economic opportunity. The overarching goal of the Corrections budget is to provide for safe communities. Current and proposed policies for this area of the budget, however, represent a short-sighted and costly approach to accomplishing this goal. Failing to provide high quality education to all of its residents and investing too little in services that provide economic stability for families has forced Michigan to spend too much of its limited resources on incarceration. Better choices are possible that would not risk public safety and would free up resources for higher priorities. For example, what does it say about the state's priorities when, for every \$1 Michigan spends on higher education, the state spends \$1.19 on corrections?¹ Only one other state besides Michigan spends more on corrections than higher education. Over the last 10 years, there has been nearly a 30 percent increase in state spending in the Department of Corrections budget.

A rising Corrections budget impacts all residents by shifting resources away from the public structures we have established over time such as public education,

and health and employment opportunities that lead to greater security and economic mobility for everyone. Feeling safe in their community and having the ability to move up the economic ladder provide families with greater opportunities. Communities of color have been hit even harder by budget cuts to programs that help achieve economic security. Barriers to quality education, living wage employment and affordable health care make access to opportunity especially difficult for these communities and have led to their disproportionate representation in the corrections system.

Investments in education for all communities can reduce rising expenses in the Corrections budget. It costs the state an average of \$28,308 annually to house a prisoner in Michigan, on top of nearly \$7,000 a year for health care and mental health care, for an average total of \$35,308.² In Michigan, it costs an individual an average of \$9,732 in tuition per year to attend a four-year university, or a total of \$38,298.³ Access to a quality education has been cited as the No. 1 preventive measure against crime and incarceration. A study in Ypsilanti found that quality education saves \$16

¹ <http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/One%20in%20100.pdf>

² <http://Corrections.crcmich.org/schneider.pdf>

³ House Fiscal Agency, 2011. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education. Public University Tuition Rates. July 26th, 2010.

for every dollar invested.⁴ Shifting state resources toward investing in education opportunities for youth could significantly decrease their chances of ever being incarcerated.

Investing in Education vs. Incarceration for One Year	
Incarcerate prisoner.....	\$35,308
Tuition to attend a university.....	\$9,732

When former offenders are unable to find good jobs upon release, they are more likely to recommit a crime. By providing living wage employment on the front end and upon release from prison, recidivism is

reduced. Michigan’s unemployment rate continues to be near 10 percent. Michigan has been in the top five states with the highest unemployment rate for at least the last five years, yet the state uses under 2 percent of the total funding for economic security for employment and support services, making it the least funded economic security program in the state.

It is clear that investing in education and employment training reduces crime. However, budget cuts to programs that invest in communities and families continue in Michigan. The state needs to do more than reduce recidivism. The state budget needs to support children and families on the front end. It is time the state realizes the long-term benefits of investing in communities from the start, valuing security and economic mobility for children and families by providing pathways to success—not prison.

⁴ Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2010. *High-Quality Early Education: Cutting Crime and Saving Michigan up to \$560 Million a Year in Education Costs.*