



Facts Matter is a series of briefs highlighting Michigan's budget and tax system

Corrections:

- Michigan is one of only four states that spends more on prisons than higher education
- Corrections workers now number nearly one in every three state employees
- Michigan has the highest incarceration rate among the Great Lakes states

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Facts Matter

Prison Spending: Corrections Takes Big Bite of Budget

When it comes to the state budget, there is a trio of big-ticket items that drive spending: Medicaid, corrections and higher education.

State Medicaid spending has grown, driven by need and the matching dollars offered by the federal government. Corrections, too, has grown, driven by demand for prison space. As a result, higher education has been squeezed. Michigan is one of just four states that spends more on prisons than higher education, according to a 2008 study by the Pew Center on the States.

How did prisons grow beyond higher education?

In the 1980s, beginning in the administration of Gov. Jim Blanchard and continuing through Gov. John Engler's years, there was a massive expansion of the state prison system. Over the past 25 years, the prison population has exploded from 15,000 inmates to more than 46,000 today.

The state workforce has shifted, too. In 1973, one in every 20 state workers was a corrections employee. As of March 2009, corrections workers made up 30 percent of the state workforce—nearly one in every three.

Driving these trends was a tough-on-crime political era and a system of parole that has resulted in longer average prison sentences. The administration of Gov. Jennifer Granholm has embarked on a project to reduce recidivism by providing more services to parolees. In addition, parole rates are up, and the prison population dropped from a peak of 51,500 in 2006 to 46,199, as of November 6, 2009. Nonetheless, while corrections spending has slowed, it still consumes a quarter of the state's General Fund.

Michigan is out of step with spending in other Great Lakes states

Among its neighbors, Michigan has the highest incarceration rate and above-average per-prisoner cost.

The Michigan League for Human Services estimates that closing the gap by 50 percent between the average of the other Great Lakes states and Michigan in these two areas, would free up \$300 million a year for spending on other services.

