

Contemporary prison overcrowding: short-term fixes to a perpetual problem

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Abstract

Since the United States began using incarceration as its cornerstone of punishment for those who transgress the law, this method of discipline has been fraught with problems. One of the most ubiquitous problems found within correctional institutions are the conditions inmates are forced to live in particularly, when penal facilities are overcrowded. These conditions have led to extensive litigation, compelling the judicial system to change. Although overall conditions have improved, a perpetually increasing inmate population continues to plague correctional systems as costs continue to rise. As state budgets have become strained during the economic downturns, many states' officials view less punitive measures as possible solutions to the excessive costs of administering punishment and overcrowded inmate populations. Due to facility overcrowding, several states have actually been placed under federal court order to reduce their inmate population in order to protect inmates' constitutional rights. Although this has resulted in a change of policies to help alleviate prison overcrowding, there is little evidence these are anything more than short-term fixes to a problem with no end in sight.