

Advertisement



Feb. 29

## Prisons vs. Colleges

For years now, educators have been warning that U.S. society might soon be spending more on prisons than colleges. In five states, that moment has arrived, according to [a report](#) released Thursday by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Those states are (in order of spending the most proportionally on prisons in 2007): Vermont, Michigan, Oregon, Connecticut and Delaware. The state spending the least on prisons relative to higher education was Minnesota, where for every dollar spent on higher education only 17 cents was spent on corrections. The average for all states was 60 cents, nearly double the 32 cents spent 20 years earlier. Only three states saw gains in spending on higher education, relative to corrections: Alabama, Nevada and Virginia

The report, by the Pew Project on the States, urges state legislators to reconsider policies — such as mandatory sentences — that force states to devote funds to building and managing prisons. The period over the last 20 years in which many states imposed new sentencing rules and saw their prison populations swell has seen a growing gap between spending rates on corrections and higher ed. During the last 20 years, corrections spending has increased by 127 percent on top of inflation, while spending on higher ed has increased only 21 percent.

Some regional variations are present — although higher ed spending appears to be always falling behind prison spending. In the Northeast, inflation adjusted spending increased 61 percent on corrections and dropped 6 percent on higher education over the last 20 years. In the West, spending on both increased, but by 205 percent for prisons and 28 percent for higher education.

### Ratio of State Spending on Corrections to Higher Education, 2007 and 1987, by Region

State	2007	1987
Total	0.60	0.32
Northeast	0.78	0.46
—Connecticut	1.03	0.35
—Maine	0.49	0.31
—Massachusetts	0.98	0.30
—New Hampshire	0.73	0.29
—New Jersey	0.67	0.49
—New York	0.73	0.61
—Pennsylvania	0.81	0.20
—Rhode Island	0.83	0.32

—Vermont	1.37	0.37
Midwest	0.55	0.25
—Illinois	0.51	0.30
—Indiana	0.40	0.24
—Iowa	0.38	0.16
—Kansas	0.40	0.23
—Michigan	1.19	0.38
—Minnesota	0.17	0.09
—Missouri	0.67	0.25
—Nebraska	0.28	0.16
—North Dakota	0.24	0.08
—Ohio	0.69	0.28
—South Dakota	0.41	0.16
—Wisconsin	0.73	0.20
South	0.49	0.32
—Alabama	0.23	0.25
—Arkansas	0.46	0.14
—Delaware	1.00	0.45
—Florida	0.66	0.34
—Georgia	0.50	0.28
—Kentucky	0.35	0.21
—Louisiana	0.46	0.41
—Maryland	0.74	0.71
—Mississippi	0.30	0.20
—North Carolina	0.33	0.19
—Oklahoma	0.51	0.27
—South Carolina	0.49	0.35
—Tennessee	0.41	0.36
—Texas	0.51	0.17
—Virginia	0.60	0.79
—West Virginia	0.36	0.11
West	0.72	0.30
—Alaska	0.77	0.48
—Arizona	0.77	0.39
—California	0.83	0.32
—Colorado	0.78	0.18
—Hawaii	0.31	0.23
—Idaho	0.56	0.19
—Montana	0.81	0.29
—Nevada	0.43	0.44
—New Mexico	0.32	0.29
—Oregon	1.06	0.34
—Utah	0.41	0.23
—Washington	0.55	0.23
—Wyoming	0.23	0.13

— [Scott Jaschik](#)

*The original story and user comments can be viewed online at  
<http://insidehighered.com/news/2008/02/29/prisons>.*

© Copyright 2008 *Inside Higher Ed*