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**NEWS**

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### **Wisconsin's Prison Population Two and a Half Times Larger Than Minnesota's But Minnesota Has More Residents Under Correctional Control**

MADISON— In 2008, Wisconsin had more than 23,000 people in state prisons, compared to fewer than 9,000 in Minnesota. Yet, despite the marked difference in prison populations, Minnesota had more residents under some form of correctional control—prison, jail, probation, or parole. A new study from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX), “The Cost of Corrections: Wisconsin and Minnesota,” examines crime and corrections in the two states. WISTAX is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research and education organization.

Wisconsin's larger prison population primarily reflects events that occurred from 1993 to 1999. During that period, Wisconsin added more than six times as many prisoners as Minnesota did. One factor in the rising number of prisoners here was parole changes. Due to heightened visibility of crime as a policy issue, public concern over insufficient prison terms, and resulting political pressure, Wisconsin's willingness to parole prisoners diminished. According to some estimates, the change effectively extended prison sentences by 16% to 18%.

Taking a different approach, Minnesota passed a community corrections law in the early 1970s and felony sentencing guidelines in the 1980s in an effort to contain the state's prison population. As a result, growth in Wisconsin's prison population was two times as fast as Minnesota's in the 1990s. However, from 1999 through 2008, the number of prisoners in Minnesota rose 50.8%, compared to 9.7% in Wisconsin.

By 2019, state officials estimate Wisconsin will need more than 5,000 additional beds to meet the needs of new prisoners and to reduce current overcrowding. During approximately the same time period, Minnesota's prison population is expected to grow more than twice as fast as Wisconsin's. However, because it has fewer inmates, Minnesota will add an estimated 270 prisoners per year vs. 306 here.

The reason that Minnesota has more people under correctional control but fewer inmates than Wisconsin has a lot to do with probation and community corrections. From 1980 to 2007, the number of probationers in Minnesota increased an average of 5.9% annually vs. 3.9% per year in Wisconsin. Minnesota had nearly 128,000 people on probation in 2007, compared to just over 53,000 probationers here. The shift in Minnesota from prison sentences to probation for lesser offenses was largely due to the state's community corrections program, which gave counties the option to administer and control correctional services locally in exchange for a state subsidy. With the average per person cost of incarceration more than 20 times the cost of probation or parole, the community-based approach is one reason Minnesota spends significantly less than Wisconsin on corrections.

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Corrections is now Wisconsin's third-largest general fund program (8.8% of GPR spending), behind only the UW System (8.9%) and school aids (38.6%). In 2008, corrections spending here totalled \$1.1 billion, or 133.9% more than neighboring Minnesota (\$460 million). About \$375 million of the difference in correctional expenditures was due to Wisconsin having 13,613 more inmates than its neighbor. As expected, the spending difference between the two states grew considerably as Wisconsin began adding more prisoners and paroled fewer of them than Minnesota did in the 1990s.

Wisconsin spent \$119 million on corrections in 1985—\$33 million, or 38.4%, more than Minnesota (\$86 million). Spending patterns in Wisconsin and Minnesota were relatively similar from 1985 to 1990, when corrections expenditures rose an average of about 8% annually. From 1990 to 2000, expenditure growth in Wisconsin averaged 14.8% per year, compared to 10.4% in Minnesota, reflecting Wisconsin's growing prison population. Since 2000, growth in corrections budgets in both states has slowed, increasing 5.3% per year here vs. 3.7% in Minnesota. Corrections spending here is expected to increase 2.3% in 2009-11 compared to 2007-09 spending.

In addition to comparing corrections in Wisconsin and Minnesota, the WISTAX study also compared Wisconsin with other states to provide a national perspective. In 2007, 13 states had total crime rates within 10% of Wisconsin's. Of those states, only three (Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Wyoming) spent more per capita on corrections. Wisconsin spent in excess of 15% more than the 13-state average.

A free copy of *The Wisconsin Taxpayer* titled "The Cost of Corrections: Wisconsin and Minnesota" is available by writing WISTAX at 401 North Lawn Ave., Madison, WI 53704-5033; e-mailing [wistax@wistax.org](mailto:wistax@wistax.org); visiting [www.wistax.org](http://www.wistax.org); or phoning 608.241.9789. □

*(Editor's Note: An electronic version of this release is available at [www.wistax.org](http://www.wistax.org).)*