

# **Our Work: A Guide to WIP Publications**

## **Demographics and life experiences of women incarcerated in Massachusetts**

### [Women Aging Behind Bars: A Massachusetts Fact Sheet](#)

Older women constitute a disproportionately high share of women serving life sentences in Massachusetts. Older women face serious health challenges as well as barriers to daily functioning in prison. Incarceration exacerbates physical and mental health problems and contributes to extremely high per capita costs at women's prisons. Research indicates that releasing older women does not constitute a threat to public safety.

### [Women, Substance Use, and Incarceration in Massachusetts: A Fact Sheet \(Oct. 2021\)](#)

The large majority of women incarcerated in Massachusetts use or have used licit and illicit substances to manage emotional and physical pain, and serve sentences on charges related directly or indirectly to their substance use. Review of the literature reveals no evidence that prison-based or coerced drug treatment is effective for women. Drug overdose is the leading cause of death after release from prison - particularly for women.

### [Women Who Cycle Through Jails and Prisons in Massachusetts: An Overview](#)

Massachusetts currently has the lowest rate of female incarceration in the United States. As of September 1, 2022 there were 217 women in the Massachusetts Department of Correction jurisdiction population: 174 criminally sentenced, 35 pre-trial detainees, and 8 civil commitments. The majority of women in Massachusetts jails and prisons struggle with physical and mental health challenges, experience housing insecurity, have been targets of assault and abuse as children and as adults, and cycle through treatment programs, shelters and therapeutic institutions as well as correctional institutions and programs.

## **Impacts of incarceration on women's health and well-being**

### [How Incarceration Harms Women](#)

Incarceration harms women's reproductive health, mental health and physical health. Incarceration also harms women's ability to secure housing and employment post-release, and disrupts relationships with children and families.

### [Incarcerating Men Harms Women Too: A Massachusetts Briefing \(Summer 2022\)](#)

As mothers, sisters, partners, co-parents, and neighbors of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men, women support men held in jails and prisons, share their homes and resources with men post-release, and live in households and communities harmed by the scars that incarceration leaves on those who have spent time behind bars.

## **The case against investing in a new women's prison in Massachusetts**

### [Why We Don't Need a New Women's Prison](#)

In addition to the estimated \$50,000,000 to design and build a new prison, the cost per capita to incarcerate women at MCI-Framingham is over \$200,000 per year. For far more modest costs, the Commonwealth could fund significant programs to help women secure safe housing, rise out of poverty and receive ongoing medical treatment--thereby addressing the root causes of incarceration.

### [Ineffectiveness of Prison-based Therapy: The Case for Community-based Alternatives](#)

Our review of over 200 studies showed little benefit to in-prison mental health or drug treatment services once women are released – as the vast majority of incarcerated women eventually will be. To the contrary, incarceration

in and of itself is likely to re-traumatize women and damage their health. Outcomes of community-based treatment programs show far more promise for women.

#### [What the Law Says: Understanding the Legal Definition of a Prison \(2021\)](#)

Massachusetts law loosely defines a prison as “any building, enclosure, space or structure used for the custody, control and rehabilitation of committed offenders.” There is nothing in the statutes that requires a particular type of building. The law is broad enough to encompass a complete re-envisioning of how this state can or should respond to individuals convicted of violating criminal laws.

#### [Women and Violent Crime: Do the Facts Justify Building a New Women’s Prison in Massachusetts? \(September 2021\)](#)

Fear of releasing violent criminals often is invoked as an argument in favor of “law and order”, including prison expansion. Women, however, have very low rates of arrests and convictions for violent crimes and are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violent crimes. Women released from prison are unlikely to commit a subsequent violent crime. Threats to public safety do not justify public investment in incarceration of women.

#### [More of The Same: The Flawed Ripples Plan to Incarcerate Women \(Summer 2022\)](#)

The “Strategic Plan for Women Who Are Incarcerated in Massachusetts” was submitted to the Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) by the Ripples Group on June 21, 2022. The Plan suffers from methodological shortcomings, superficial understanding of trauma, and failure to consider impacts of racism in the criminal legal system, strategies to overcome institutional obstacles to change, or alternatives to incarceration.

#### [There is No Such Thing as a Trauma-Informed Prison: The State’s Own Sources Agree \(March 2021\)](#)

Neither the government (DCAAM) nor the architectural firm (HDR) selected to design the new women’s prison offers evidence-based research demonstrating that prison can be an effective setting for healing from trauma. In fact, HDR’s sources emphasize ways in which incarceration harms women and families, costs the state financially, and is unable to effectively address women’s health challenges.

## **Pathways to decarcerating women**

#### [Decarcerating Women from MCI-Framingham: A Realistic Prospect Today](#)

The number of women incarcerated in Massachusetts has steadily declined over the past decades. The majority of currently incarcerated women could be released under existing statutes including bail reform as enacted in the Criminal Justice Reform Act of 2018; the Primary Caretakers Act; the law prohibiting civil commitment of women to prison; release due to COVID-19; clemency; and parole.

#### [Alternatives to Incarceration for Women in Massachusetts: An Opportunity and a Challenge](#)

Alternatives to incarceration include a broad array of practices, policies, and programs including home supervision, restorative justice, treatment programs, specialty courts, justice reinvestment in communities, supportive housing, and community service. We have developed a [checklist of core principles](#) to help policymakers identify programs and practices that should be endorsed or funded.