

Illinois' \$83 Billion Mistake

A supplement to

The \$3.4 Trillion Mistake: The Cost of Mass Incarceration and Criminalization, and How Justice Reinvestment Can Build a Better Future for All

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Since the early 1980s, Illinois has followed the national “tough-on-crime” trend of investing heavily in police, prosecutors, courts, jails, and prisons to address not only public safety issues but also public health concerns such as the effects of poverty, mental illness, and drug use. This report examines the cost of criminal justice system expansion over the 30 year period from 1982 to 2012; provides a comprehensive analysis of expenditures across four categories of justice system spending including (1) police, (2) legal/judicial, (3) corrections, and (4) immigration enforcement; and, finally, considers alternative investments in resources aimed at addressing the “root causes” of crime and violence.

Key findings include a massive investment in justice system expansion at the federal, state, and taxpayer levels, with cumulative “surplus justice spending” totaling \$3.4 trillion nationally and \$83 billion in Illinois over the last three decades. For example, in 1982, before the escalation of the failed “War on Drugs” and rise of “tough on crime,” the U.S. already had an expansive justice system. In fact, our incarcerated population then — 621,885 — would still rank as the third highest in the world today, behind only China and Russia. In 1982, justice system spending totaled \$90 billion with Illinois justice spending among the highest in nation, tied for third with Texas at \$4 billion, behind only California and New York. By 2012, Illinois justice system spending had cumulatively inflated by 112% to a whopping \$8.5 billion annually, amounting to \$83 billion in “surplus justice spending” over 30 years. Skyrocketing state spending on the justice system has squandered overwhelming monetary and human capital, without any meaningful return in public safety.

Surplus Justice Spending: additional spending on criminal justice system expansion, above what we would have spent if the size of the justice system had simply remained the same as in 1982

The wasted resources over three decades has led to an astounding increase in the correctional population, significant increases across all areas of the justice system — especially on policing — and a hefty bill with “surplus justice spending” climbing to \$4.5 billion annually. The following sections highlight key data related to criminal justice system expansion as well as a brief examination of how Illinois’ resources could otherwise be put to use.

Correctional Population

- In 1980, Illinois had 20,124 people in jail or prison. By 2013, that had risen to 69,300, an increase of 244%. As a result, Illinois now has the most overcrowded prisons in the country.¹
- In 1980, Illinois had another 72,867 people on probation or parole. By 2013, that had more than doubled to 151,963.²

1 in 45 Illinois adults is either in prison, in jail, or on probation or parole

