

*Massachusetts Department of Correction*  
**Thomas A. Turco III, Commissioner**  
**ONE YEAR RECIDIVISM RATES:  
2014 STEP-DOWN RELEASE COHORT**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In December 2013, several key initiatives were announced for the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) and the Department of Correction (MA DOC) including the launch of an inmate state to county step-down program in partnership with various Massachusetts Sheriffs' Offices via a Memorandum of Understanding. Initially, the step-down program was affiliated with only a few counties but has since grown to seven counties in Massachusetts. The MA DOC, however, works with all of the counties in some capacity. The notion behind this initiative is to not only increase the number of inmates being released from lower security (minimum and pre-release), but to allow inmates to be housed closer to their communities prior to their release. Houses of Correction have a distinct advantage within the criminal justice system as they are a part of the community in which inmates are released. Each facility within their respective county has established strong community partnerships within their surrounding cities and towns which strengthens reentry for the inmate and provides greater opportunity for reentry programs and resources. The goal is to promote reentry as well as reduce recidivism. As seen in recent recidivism briefs published, there is a correlation between lower recidivism rates and the facility security level of release as it decreases.

The step-down program was formally announced at the end of 2013; however, there were 105 inmates who had already been transferred to a House of Correction during that year. This figure grew to 174 in 2014 before dipping slightly to 159 in 2015. Participation is expected to remain constant if not increase in coming years. Eligibility for the program may vary for each county, however the general requirement is that a non-violent offender is within 24 months of their maximum release date or has received a positive parole vote, or for a violent offender, they be within 16 months of their maximum release date or has received a positive parole vote. There may also be other policy or statutory restrictions that may limit an inmate from participating. Only inmates already housed in pre-release are given the option to participate; otherwise inmates who are eligible are referred and are expected to participate in the step-down program. The data presented herein represents recidivism and administrative data for inmates who participated in the step-down program and were released in calendar year 2014 through expiration of sentence or parole to the community (n = 126) from a county facility. This includes demographics, offense information and release type.

### **METHODOLOGY**

For the purposes of this report, the Massachusetts Department of Correction (MA DOC) defines a recidivist as any criminally sentenced inmate released to the community from MA DOC

jurisdiction who is re-incarcerated in a Massachusetts state, county or a federal facility for a criminal sentence within one year of their release to the community. Information for this brief was gathered from the Massachusetts Department of Correction Inmate Management System (IMS) and the Massachusetts Board of Probation (BOP). Data is based on information available at the time of data collection. Data is subject to change in future reports as information is updated. An inmate can be re-incarcerated in one of the following ways: technical violation of parole, violation of parole with a new offense, new court commitment to a Massachusetts county, state facility or a federal facility, technical violation of probation, or probation violation with new offense.

## **OVERVIEW OF 2014 RELEASE TO THE COMMUNITY POPULATION (STEP-DOWN)**

### ***Demographics***

- Of the 126 releases, 119 (94%) were male and 7 (6%) were female. In comparison, 73% of those released not via the step-down program were male (n = 1,697) and 27% were females (n = 614). This may be attributable to the lesser number of county facilities that house females.
- Thirty-seven percent of the inmates were paroled to the community (n = 46), while 80 (64%) were released via expiration of sentence. The number of inmates paroled is considerably smaller for those who were not released via step-down (28%) with 72% wrapping up their sentence. This more closely resembles the total release to the community population.
- The largest number of releases were Hispanic (n = 62) followed by African American/Black (n = 32) and White (n = 31). There was one release who reported a race of Other. Conversely, the largest number of releases not through step-down reported a race of White, followed by African American/Black and Hispanic.
- The mean age at time of commitment to the MA DOC for this cohort of inmates was 34.3 years old, slightly older than those not released via step-down (33.0 years old).
- The mean age of inmates at time of release was 37.7 years old, also older than the comparison group with an average of 36.5 years old.

### ***Offense/Sentence Data***

- Fifty-one percent of the inmates were serving a governing drug offense, followed by person offense (24%), property offense (15%), and 'other' offense (10%). There were no offenders with a governing sex offense. The crime distribution for those not released from a step-down was less varied with 38% of inmates having served a governing person offense, followed by drug offense (24%), property offense (18%) and 'other' offense (14%).
- Forty-one percent of governing drug offenses carried a mandatory minimum term.
- The majority of inmates (52%) were released from a pre-release facility. Twenty-four percent were released from a minimum security facility, 16% while on electronic monitoring (ELMO) and 8% from a medium security facility. It is in this area where the largest difference can be seen between those who released from step-down and those who did not. While the step-down initiative mainly revolves around lower security situations, the majority of inmates not released from a step-down are released from a medium security facility (52%).

Table 1 provides a comparison of the recidivism rates of inmates released from a step-down program during 2014 by type of release.

**One-Year Recidivism Rates by Type of Release**

**Table 1:**

Recidivism Rates by Release Type			
	Total		
Release Type	Number Releases	Number Recidivists	Recidivism Rate
Parole to Street	46	6	13%
Expiration of Sentence	80	4	5%
<b>Total Releases</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8%</b>

Inmates released to the community with parole conditions are supervised for a period of time while in the community. Paroled inmates who do not adhere to the conditions of their release may have their parole revoked and may be re-incarcerated. A parole revocation can result from technical violation of the terms of release, or can result from the arraignment of a new crime. By virtue of being under supervision in the community an inmate may have a higher likelihood of re-incarceration.

- Inmates paroled to the community had a higher recidivism rate (13%) than the recidivism rate of inmates released via expiration of sentence (5%). The role of supervision to prevent future criminality suggests a reason for higher rates for paroled inmates with the vast majority of re-incarcerations occurring as a result of a technical violation of parole conditions. In this cohort, 5 out of the 10 were returned on a technical parole violation.
- In comparison, there were 2,311 releases via expiration of sentence or parole to the community who were not released via the step-down program. Of those, 357 (15%) recidivated within one year of release.
- The overall recidivism rate for the 2014 cohort, both with and without step-downs, was 15%. This rate was heavily influenced by those who were not released via the step-down program as they made up the overwhelming majority of the releases. A separate brief on this overall rate provides more analysis and detail based on multiple variables.

**CONCLUSION**

Though this cohort was not large in size, this brief was written with the goal of educating readers on the county step-down initiative as well as to provide a glance at the population and potential influences on recidivism. Doubling the previous year’s cohort, anticipation of continued larger cohorts in future release years will allow for stronger findings and reentry program implications. One of the focuses of the step-down program is to expand the amount of resources and programs available to inmates prior to release. Due to limitations on data collection of programming outside of DOC facilities, we cannot compare the effects or correlations of any of these specific programs on the inmates. We can however examine recidivism data through other variables

including supervision type, offense type, security level, etc. One other notable limitation to the evaluation of the step-down initiative is the criteria for eligibility and the limited number of participants. Additionally, there was a focus on those who were released directly to the community from step-down and as such does not consider those who may have been in step-down and returned to high custody back into a DOC facility. Though this figure may be low, incorporation of risk scores in future studies can help generalize and support the effects of the step-down initiative, thereby supporting the strength of our classification system.

<b>Definitions</b>	
<b>Governing Offense</b>	The governing offense is the offense associated with the longest maximum release date.
<b>Mandatory Drug Offenders</b>	Inmates serving a governing drug sentence that carries a mandatory minimum term.
<b>Offense Category</b>	Offense categories include Person, Property, Sex, Drug, and Other. Offense category represents the inmate's governing offense.
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	The race categories self-reported and used in this report include: Caucasian, African American/Black, Asian, Hawaiian-Pacific Islander, and American Indian-Alaska Native. Inmates who report a Hispanic ethnicity are reported as Hispanic in the race category.
<b>Recidivism Rate</b>	Number of inmates re-incarcerated within one year of their release to the community divided by the number of inmates released.

This Research Brief was written by Gina Papagiorgakis, Research Analyst. Any comments or questions can be addressed by e-mail: [Research@doc.state.ma.us](mailto:Research@doc.state.ma.us). The contributions by Hollie Matthews, Deputy Director, and the Classification Division are greatly appreciated. Copies of publications from the Research and Planning Division can be found on [www.mass.gov/doc](http://www.mass.gov/doc).