

Massachusetts Department of Correction
Luis S. Spencer, Commissioner

Age of Custody Population 2002-2011

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Introduction

Currently, there is a prodigious amount of reporting by correctional departments across the country related to aging inmate populations. The aging of prison populations creates concerns that must be recognized and addressed, such as increased medical treatment, visits to hospitals outside the prison environment, housing issues associated with medical restrictions, limited mobility, special needs, and programming. These issues increase demands on staff and prison infrastructure, which in turn may create budgetary concerns. To best address this population, it is necessary to have an understanding of the increase in the number and proportion of older and elderly inmates.

This research brief details the extent of aging amongst the Massachusetts Department of Correction (MA DOC) criminally sentenced custody population, by examining population trends of the age of offenders serving criminal sentences on January 1st within the MA DOC over the period 2002-2011, as well as the age of offenders who are new court commitments to the MA DOC from 2002-2010. The analysis concentrates on the significant changes in age that are occurring in both the standing population and new court commitments.

Definitions

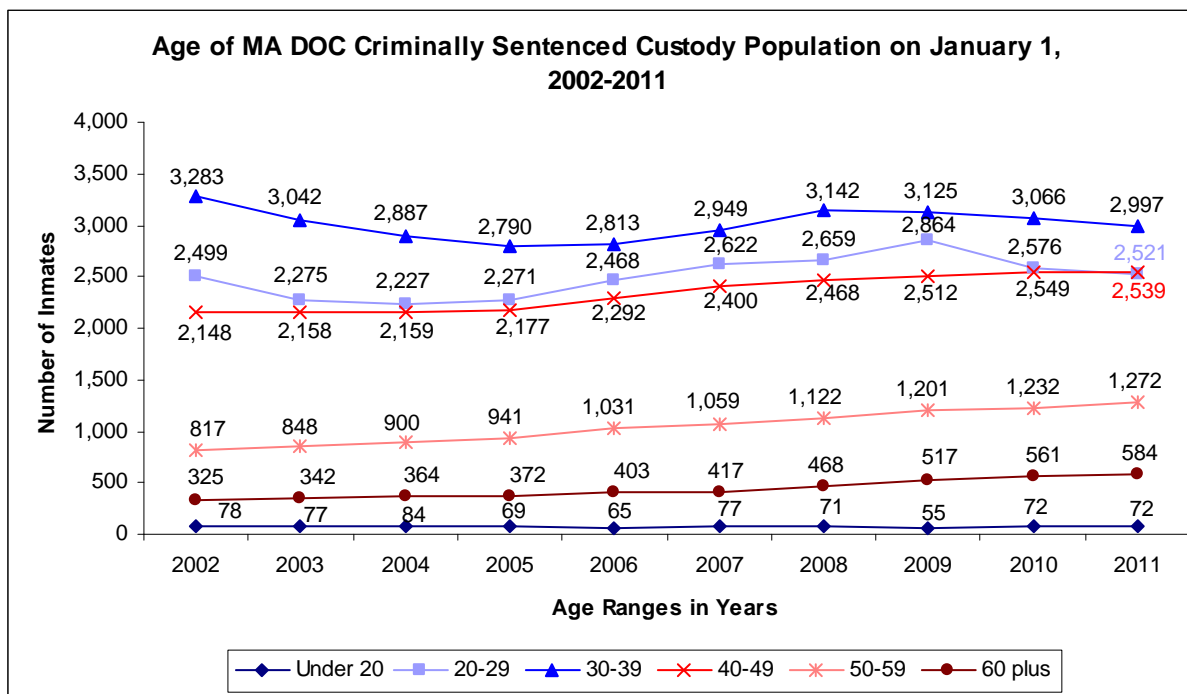
Criminally Sentenced or ‘Sentenced’: An individual who has been found guilty of a criminal offense through legal means, and is required to be incarcerated.

Custody population: An individual is considered to be in MA DOC custody when they are being held in a MA DOC facility.

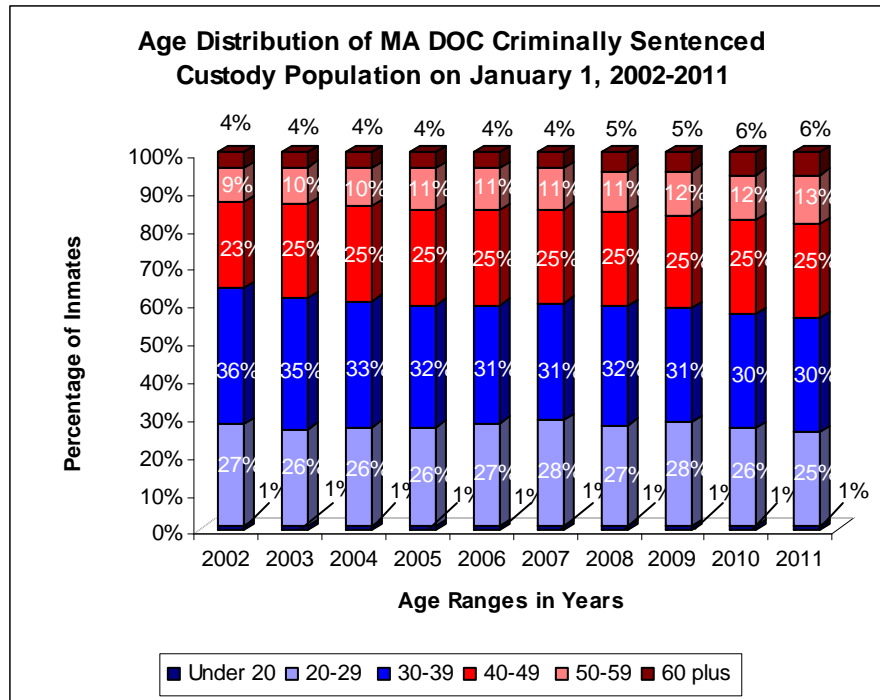
New Court Commitments: Individuals committed by the courts to the MA DOC as a result of a criminal offense. All new court commitments and those individuals who began serving new sentences (e.g., From and After Sentences) during the year are included in this category even if there was no physical release from custody when they moved from one sentence to another. If an individual is committed to the MA DOC more than once during 2009, each court commitment for that individual is counted separately.

Age of MA DOC Custody Population 2002 to 2011

In the 10 year trend period January 1, 2002 to 2011, the total custody population has increased by 9% from 9,150 in 2002 to 9,985 in 2011. Additionally, there has been recognizable increase in the age of the MA DOC custody population of criminally sentenced inmates. The following data details inmates are getting older in both number and proportion.



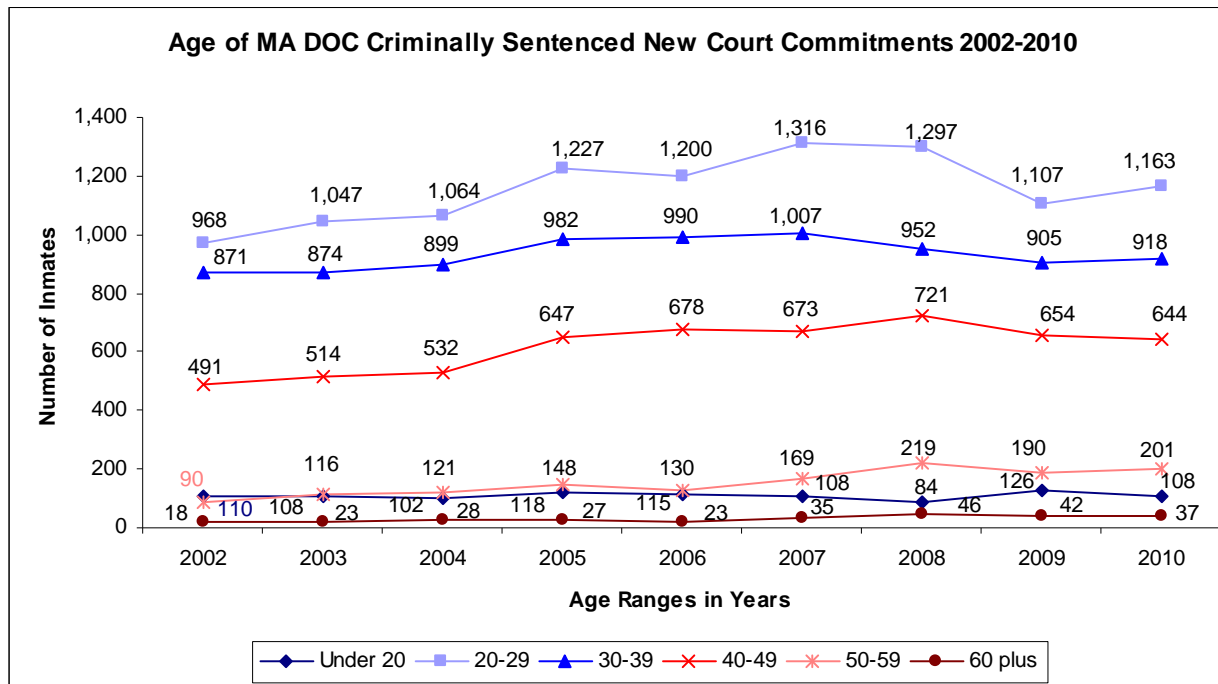
- During the trend period, January 1, 2002 to 2011, inmates aged 50 years or older experienced the greatest increase in number with a 63% increase. This age group increased steadily in number every year from 2002 to 2011.
- Age categories 40-49 years, 50-59 years and 60 plus increased throughout the trend period by 18%, 56%, and 80%, respectively.
- Throughout the time period, the majority of inmates were between 20-39 years of age. However, from 2002 to 2011 the number of MA DOC criminally sentenced custody population inmates 20-29 years of age increased by less than 1% while inmates 30-39 years of age decreased by 9%.
- The number of inmates aged 40 years or older increased in number by 34% from 2002 to 2011, while the number of inmates under the age of forty decreased by 5%.



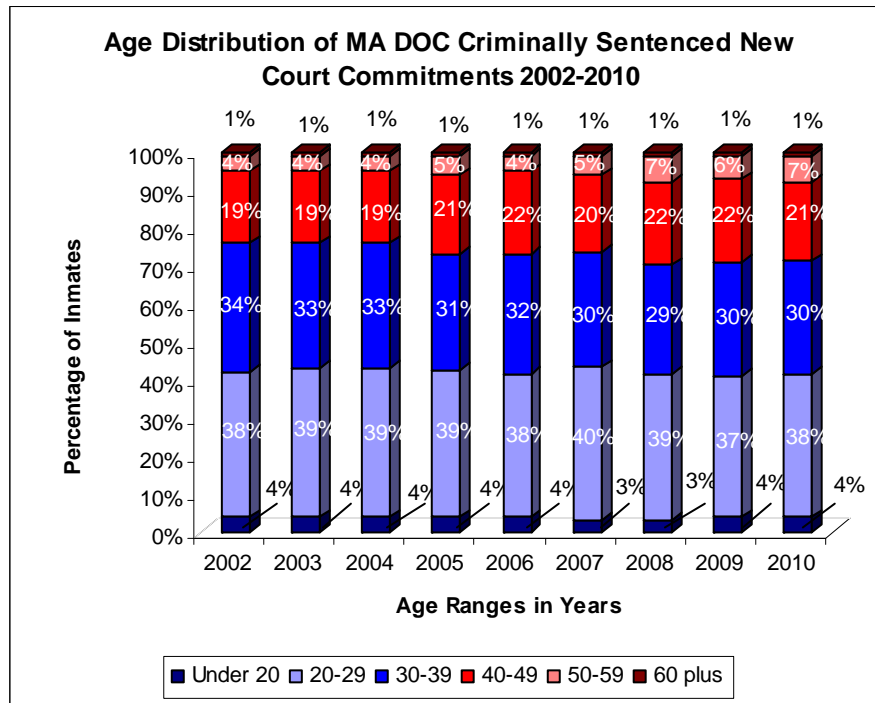
- Since 2002, the age category 50-59 years experienced the greatest proportion increase from 9% in 2002 to 13% in 2011.
- In contrast, the largest decline as a proportion of all MA DOC criminally sentenced offenders occurred within the 30-39 years of age category; from 36% in 2002 to 30% in 2011.
- Over the last five years, 2007 to 2011, criminally sentenced inmates 60 plus steadily increased by 2% from 4% in 2007 to 6% in 2011.
- The proportion of criminally sentenced inmates 40 years or older increased from 36% in 2002 to 44% in 2011.
- The proportion of inmates less than 40 years decreased from 64% in 2002 to 56% in 2011.

Age of MA DOC New Court Commitments 2002 to 2010

From 2002- 2010 the MA DOC new court commitment population increased by 21% from 2,548 in 2002 to 3,071 in 2010. When examining the MA DOC new court commitment population from 2002-2010, similar age trends to those illustrated in the January 1st snapshot population are evident. Although the greatest number of new court commitments are inmates 20-29 years of age, the data also details that the number and proportion of inmates 40 years or older has increased at a greater rate than those less than 40 during the trend period.

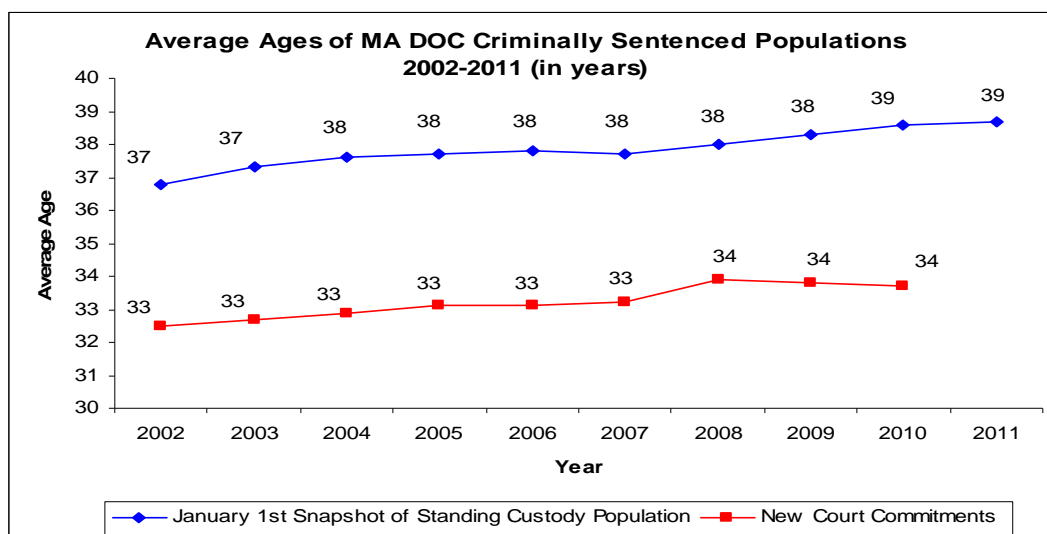


- During the trend period 2002 to 2010, the greatest percentage increases occurred in the number of new court commitments for inmates age 40-49, 50-59, and 60 plus which increased 31%, 123%, and 106%, respectively.
- Inmate's aged 20-29 years old represented both the greatest number and increase in number of new court commitments; from 968 in 2002 to 1,163 in 2010, increasing 20% during the nine year trend period.
- From 2002 to 2007, inmates aged 30-39 years increased 16%; however, overall (2002 to 2010) the number of inmates in this age category increased by only 5%.
- The number of new commitments aged 40 years or older increased by 47% from 2002 to 2010 while the number of new court commitments under the age of forty increased by only 12%.
- The number of new court commitments 50 years of age or older increased by 120% from 2002 to 2010.



- From 2002 to 2010, the age category 50-59 years experienced the greatest proportion increase throughout the trend period from 4% in 2002 to 7% in 2010.
- In contrast, the age group of 30-39 years experienced the greatest decline in proportion, from 34% in 2002 to 30% in 2010. Other categories remained relatively constant through the trend period, such as new court commitments age 60 years or greater.
- Proportionally, inmates age 40 years or older have increased from comprising 24% of the new court commitment population in 2002 to 29% in 2011. While those less than 40 years decreased from 76% in 2002 to 71% in 2011.

Changes in the Average Ages of MA DOC January 1st Snapshot & New Court Commitment Criminally Sentenced Custody Population



- The average age of the standing population increased by 2 years from 37 years in 2002 to 39 years in 2011.
- During the trend period, the average age of new court commitments increased by 1 year from 33 in 2002 to 34 years in 2010.
- The range of ages of MA DOC standing population varied throughout the trend period, the largest age ranged occurred in 2008 (17 to 91 years).
- The range of ages also varied for new court commitments, the largest age range occurred in 2002 (16 to 85 years).

Summary and Implications:

From January 1, 2002 to 2011, the MA DOC criminally sentenced custody population experienced a 9% increase. During the trend periods, the number of MA DOC criminally sentenced custody population inmates aged 40 or older increased by 34%, and the number of new court commitments aged 40 or older increased by 47%. Despite these increases, in 2011, inmates under the age of 40 represented 56% of the MA DOC criminally sentenced custody population, and in 2010, 71% of all criminally sentenced court commitments to the MA DOC. In conclusion, the MA DOC average population age is increasing; inmates are aging in prison, while also entering prison at older ages. With the age of inmates increasing, the MA DOC has become increasingly taxed in areas of medical, mental health, and programmatic resources. Therefore, the MA DOC continues to assess and evaluate its programs and services to accommodate an aging population and maintain organizational efficiency.

This brief was written and prepared by Matthew Moniz, Research Analyst. Any comments or questions can be addressed by e-mail: research@doc.state.ma.us.
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