

Massachusetts Department of Correction
Carol A. Mici, Commissioner

**Female inmates ages 18 to 24:
Yearly trends and current population overview**

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While females have always made up a small portion of the overall state prison population in Massachusetts, they have experienced their own changes and trends over the past several years. This research brief describes a group of 37 criminally sentenced inmates and pre-trial detainees between the ages of 18 and 24 (hereafter ‘young females’) in Massachusetts DOC (MADOC) custody as well as the 519 female inmates of all ages actively in custody on July 8, 2019.¹ Data come from the MADOC’s Inmate Management System and from MADOC public dashboards and research reports.

Research in neuroscience has shown that the road to brain maturity extends far beyond the age of 18, when certain privileges like voting, smoking, and being tried in adult court are afforded to individuals. Though some research suggests the female brain matures faster or earlier than the adolescent male brain, other studies conclude that maturity for both sexes wraps up well into their twenties. In either case, there is major potential for intervention for young incarcerated females - who may lack the resources and supports to steer them away from criminal behaviors - while they are still neurologically malleable, receptive to change, and responsive to community norms.

Since 2014, the overall MADOC female population has experienced consistent decline among all three commitment types (civil, pre-trial, and criminally sentenced).² The same is seen in young females, with a significant drop between 2014 and 2016; civil commitments of young females have dropped to negligible levels, and the criminally sentenced population has decreased by 58 percent since 2014.³

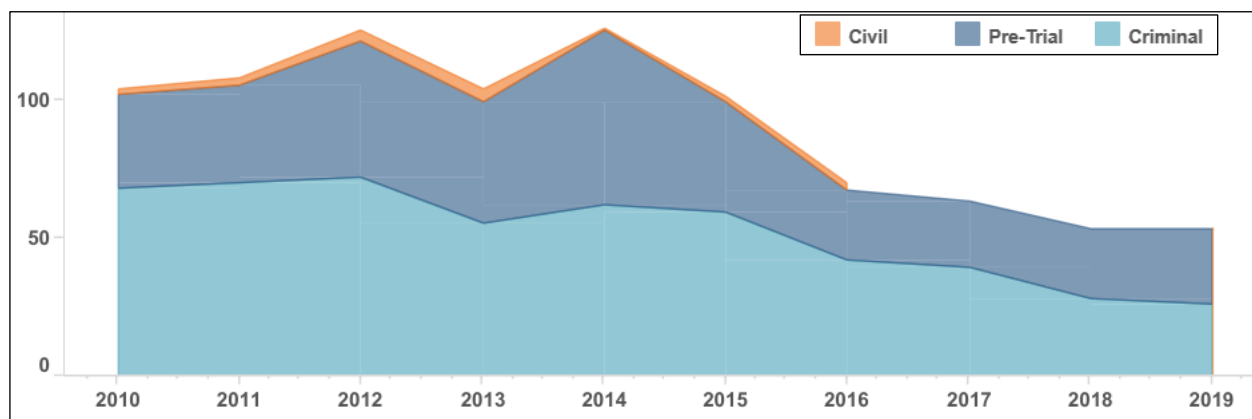


Figure 1. Young females in MADOC custody on January 1st, 2010 through 2019. Source: MADOC Public Dashboards.

¹ The cohort of 519 includes several civilly committed females.

² One exception to this is in 2019 when the total pre-trial population increased by 7 percent.

³ These declines are thought to be due to the 2014 expansion of the Western Massachusetts Regional Women’s Correctional Center.

The cohort of 37 females is described in further detail below. The cohort includes a number of pre-trial detainees (see Table 1); while pre-trial denotes individuals have not been sentenced with a crime, some will go on to be sentenced and serve time in state prison, and may benefit from receiving services or treatment right away. Additionally, some women will enter pre-trial detention multiple times in one year. Though a more transient group than criminally sentenced females, pre-trial detainees deserve a place in a conversation about young adult incarceration.

The medium security institution, MCI Framingham, normally houses between 80 and 90 percent of the female population, while the rest are housed at the lower security South Middlesex Correctional Center. This ratio is reflected in the young female population: 84 percent, or 31 females, were housed at MCI Framingham. Overall, young females were 7 percent of the total population on July 8, 2019.

Inmate Type	Young Females (18-24)	Institution	Young Females (18-24)	All Females
State Sentenced	11	MCI Framingham (medium security)	31 (84%)	449 (87%)
County Sentenced	10	South Middlesex CC (lower security)	6 (16%)	70 (13%)
Pre-Trial Detention	16	Total	37	519

Table 1. Females by commitment type (left) and age group and institution (right) in MADOC custody on July 8, 2019.

Demographics

Looking further into age, half of the young female population was aged 23 or older (Figure 2). This distribution somewhat mirrors the young male population, with more inmates on the older end of the age group. The six females housed at South Middlesex are also highlighted in Figure 2 for reference.

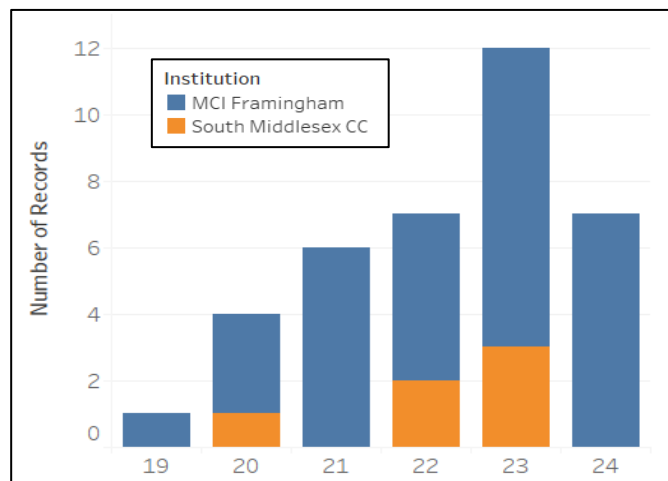


Figure 2. Age distribution of young females in MADOC custody on July 8, 2019.

Another way to look at age is to consider older female inmates who may have been committed while much younger. Figure 3 tracks females who entered MADOC custody between 18 and 24 years old, some of whom are much older today. This graph does not capture female inmates who had prior commitments. While zero young females have life sentences to serve, some expect to be in their 30s or older upon release.

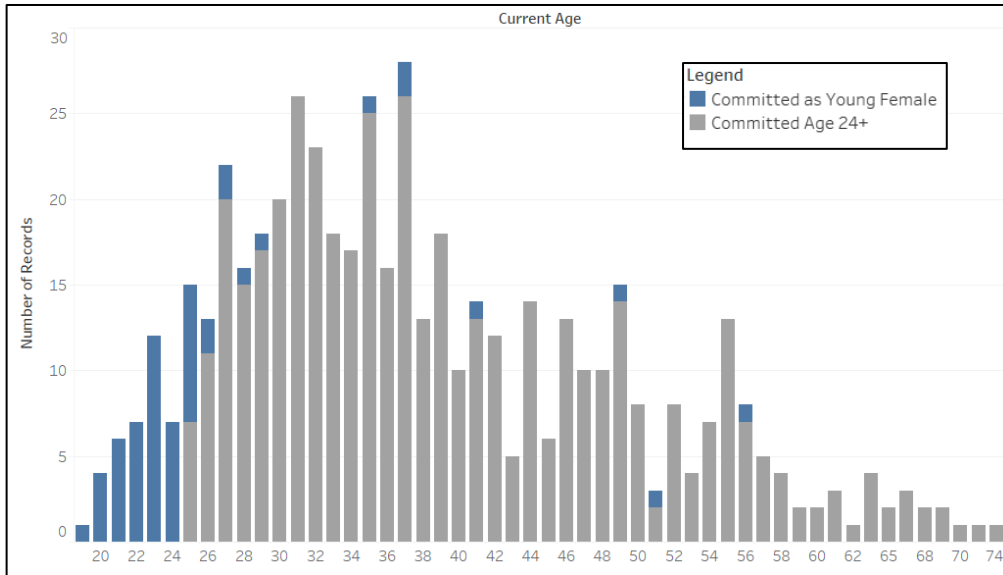


Figure 3. Current age of 519 females in DOC custody on July 8, 2019. Blue denotes an inmate originally committed as a young female.

Last known residence serves to identify where reentry or other wraparound services may be most needed. Figure 4 shows the majority of the young females arriving at the MADOC from eastern Massachusetts, with many from Middlesex and Essex counties. These data align with release data from 2016 through 2018, where the most releases to the community were to locations in these two counties.⁴

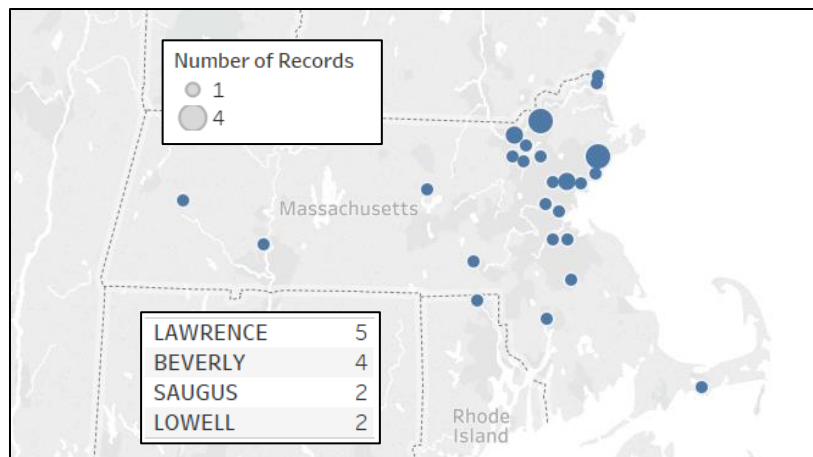


Figure 4. Last known zip code of, and most common cities represented by, young female MADOC inmates on July 8, 2019. 36 of 37 inmates reported a zip code.

⁴ This data is accessible on the public DOC data dashboards: <https://public.tableau.com/profile/madoc#!/>

Two-thirds of the young female population identified as white, while about one-fifth identifies as black; none identified as Hispanic, whereas about 8 percent of the overall female population was Hispanic. While the young male population of DOC inmates looks noticeably different from the overall population with respect to race and ethnicity, young females appear to mirror older female inmates, with the exception of Hispanic inmates.

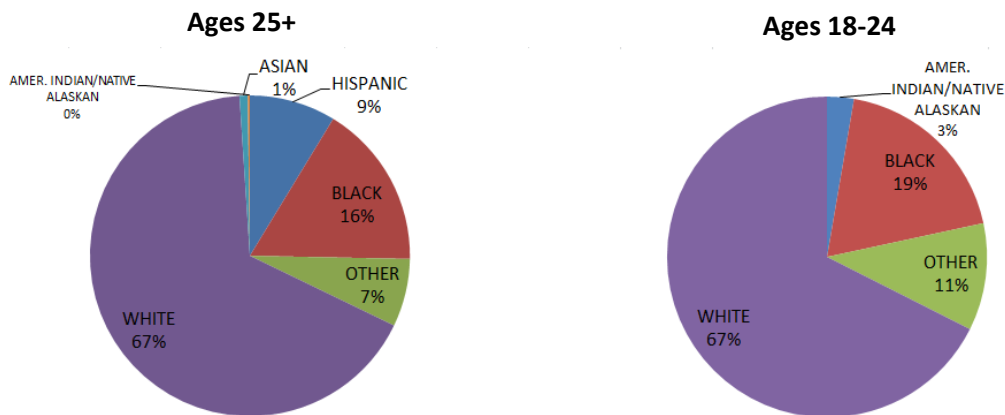


Figure 5. Self-reported race/ethnicity of females 25 and older (left) and young females ages 18 to 24 (right) on July 8, 2019.

Length of stay

Average length of stay was calculated for criminally sentenced females released in 2018 who were between 18 and 24 **when first committed to the MADOC**. These figures will provide a sense of how long today’s young females may expect to spend in MADOC custody, and therefore inform treatment and program planning.

In 2018, 67 criminally sentenced young females were released to the community via expiration of sentence or positive parole vote. These females stayed an average of 328 days, or about 10.8 months.

Type of Release to Community	N	Avg. Length of Stay (Days)
Expiration of Sentence	46	238.8
Parole	21	522.6
Total Average Length of Stay		327.7

Inmate Type	N	Avg. Length of Stay (Days)
State Sentenced	11	1,418.6
County Sentenced	56	113.4
Total Average Length of Stay		327.7

Table 2. Young female length of stay after release from MADOC custody in 2018.

State sentenced females released to the community in 2018 spent an average of 1419 days, or 3.9 years in custody, while county sentenced females spent 113 days, or just 3.7 months. Still, there were more than *five times* as many county sentenced females in the 2018 release to community cohort.

Offenses

Young females in the MADOC on July 8, 2019 were serving for a wide range of offenses. The 21 sentenced young females covered all offense types, with the most common offenses involving assault and battery and controlled substances. Young females' offenses largely reflected the relative shares of the older population's offenses (see Figure 6). However, a higher proportion of young females were serving drug offenses, and a lower proportion was serving Person offenses, which include assault and battery among other crimes against a person.

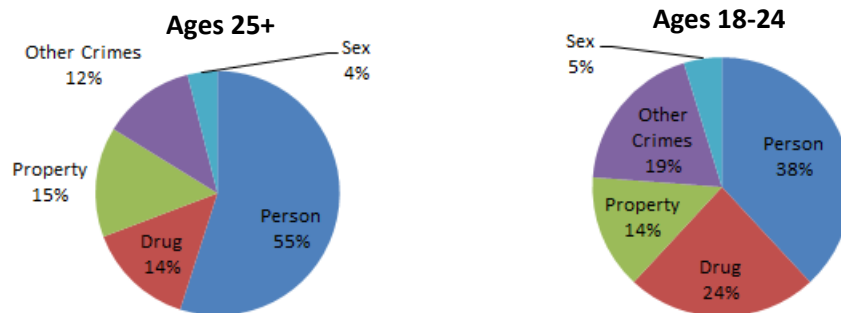


Figure 6. Governing offense type of females 25 and older (left) and young females ages 18 to 24 (right) on July 8, 2019.

Behavior

Of all 519 females housed at MCI Framingham and South Middlesex Correctional Center on July 8, 2019, 62 percent or 322 inmates had one or more guilty disciplinary reports on file. Among these were 31 out of the 37 young females; in other words, 84 percent of the young females had at least one guilty disciplinary report, whereas just over half of females older than 25 had a disciplinary record. This imbalance suggests impulsivity and an adjustment period for young female inmates.

	Total D-Reports of Female DOC Inmates (% of total)	Number of Inmates with Guilty D Reports (% of total)	Proportion of Age Group with Guilty D Reports
Ages 25+	2,626 (93%)	291 (90%)	56%
Ages 18-24	192 (7%)	31 (10%)	84%
Total	2,818	322	

Table 3. Disciplinary report counts by age group for females in MADOC custody on July 8, 2019.

Recidivism

It is widely understood that recidivism is more likely to be seen in younger people released from incarceration. Under the MADOC's definition of recidivism as re-incarceration of a formerly criminally sentenced inmate within three years, the youngest females (18 to 24) have largely upheld that paradigm but their rates have been volatile over the past six years (see Figure 7).

Among 2014 releases of young females, the three-year recidivism rate was a staggering 46 percent, well above the overall rate of 32 percent. Females 18 to 24 released in 2015, the most recent report year, returned to MADOC custody at a rate of 39%, above the overall average of 34%.

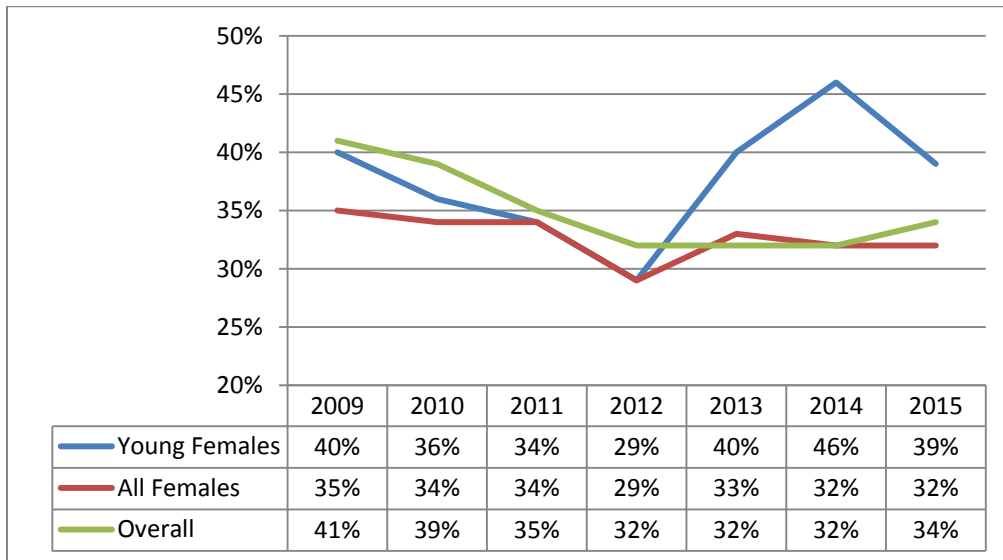


Figure 7. Three-year recidivism rates of young females (18-24), all females, and the overall MADOC criminally sentenced population, 2009 to 2015. Data source: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/research-yearly-reports>