

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

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**INTRODUCTION**

Data presented herein represents recidivism statistics and administrative data for 2,437 criminally sentenced inmates released to the community from the Massachusetts Department of Correction (MA DOC) during calendar year 2014 via expiration of sentence or parole to the community. Each release during the year is counted, making it possible for one inmate to be included multiple times<sup>1</sup>. For the purposes of this report, the 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. The data presented includes information on inmate demographics, governing offense, release type, and sentence information.

**METHODOLOGY**

Information for this brief was gathered from the MA DOC Inmate Management System (IMS) and the Massachusetts Board of Probation (BOP). Data is based on information available at time of data collection. Data is subject to change in future reports as information is updated. The criminal activity of inmates released to the community during 2014 was tracked through the Massachusetts Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) to determine any re-incarceration within one year of the inmate's release to the community. 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.

**TECHNICAL VIOLATIONS<sup>2</sup>**

A recidivist is defined as any criminally sentenced inmate released to the community from the MA DOC during 2014 who is re-incarcerated for a new sentence or violation of parole or probation to a Massachusetts state, county facility or a federal facility within one year of his/her release. Types of re-incarceration include technical violation of parole, parole violation with a new offense, return to county custody, return to state or federal custody, technical violation of probation, and probation violation with a new offense. An inmate, who is re-incarcerated due to a technical violation of parole or probation, is re-incarcerated for violating the terms of the conditions set forth regarding their release in the community, not for committing a new offense. A non-technical return would include a parole or probation violation with a new offense, or a new court commitment to a facility. When reporting on the recidivism rates for inmates released on parole, it is important to note that a portion of the paroled inmates re-incarcerated within the one-year period are no longer under parole supervision at the time they recidivate.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2014, there were 54 inmates who had two releases on the same commitment number within the calendar year.

<sup>2</sup> Inmates released on parole and/or probation are supervised in the community upon release and can be re-incarcerated for violating the terms of their supervision.

## **OVERVIEW OF 2014 RELEASE TO THE COMMUNITY POPULATION**

### ***Demographics***

- Of the 2,437 releases, 1,816 (75%) were male and 621 (25%) were female.
- Twenty-eight percent of the inmates were paroled to the community (n = 683), while 1,754 (72%) were released via expiration of sentence.
- The largest number of releases were Caucasian (n = 1,218) followed by African American/Black (n = 598) and Hispanic (n = 545). The remaining releases reported races of Asian, Native American/Alaskan Native, and Other (n = 576 ).
- The mean age at time of commitment to the MA DOC for this cohort of inmates was 33.1 years old.
- Female inmates were slightly older than males at time of commitment, 34.1 years old and 32.7 years old, respectively.
- The mean age of inmates at time of release was 36.6 years old.
- Male inmates were older than females at time of release, 37.1 years of age and 35.1 years of age, respectively, due to males generally having longer prison sentences.

### ***Offense Data***

- Forty-two percent of the male inmates were serving a governing person offense, followed by drug offense (27%), property offense (13%), ‘other’ offense (11%) and sex offense (7%).
- Thirty-four percent of the female releases were serving a governing property offense, followed by person offense (24%), ‘other’ offense (21%), drug offense (19%), and sex offense (2%).
- Fifty percent of governing drug offenses among releasing inmates carried a mandatory minimum term, including 57% of the male governing drug offenses and 18% of the female governing drug offenses.

### ***Sentencing Data***

- The average length of incarceration<sup>3</sup> for all releases was 40.3 months.
- The average length of incarceration for males was 50.3 months, compared to 11.2 months for females. This number differs significantly because of the amount of females that serve a county sentence within the Massachusetts Department of Correction.
- The majority of the males (59%) were released from a higher security facility; 45% from a medium security facility and 14% from a maximum security facility. The remaining 41% of the males were released from a lower security facility (minimum or pre-release).
- The majority of the females were released<sup>4</sup> from a medium security facility (63%), while 37% were released from a lower security facility.

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<sup>3</sup> Length of incarceration is defined as the number of days between the inmate’s most recent incarceration and their release to the community. This includes new court commitments, county inmates sentenced from the court to serve a county sentence in a state facility, parole violations, and probation violations on their current incarceration. This may be different than their entire “time served.”

<sup>4</sup> There is no maximum security facility for female inmates in the MA DOC.

Table 1 provides a comparison of the recidivism rates of inmates released during 2014, including and excluding re-incarcerations for technical violations. In order to calculate the recidivism rate excluding technical violations of parole or probation, the inmate's first non-technical re-incarceration within one year of their release was used. *Please note inmates who were returned for a technical violation were incarcerated for a period of time during the one-year follow up period, diminishing the likelihood of a non-technical return.*

**One-Year Recidivism Rates Including and Excluding Re-Incarcerations for Technical Violations by Type of Release and Gender**

**Table 1:**

<b>Recidivism Rates by Release Type and Gender - <u>Excluding</u> Technical Violations of Parole or Probation</b>									
	<b>Males</b>			<b>Females</b>			<b>Total</b>		
<b>Release Type</b>	<b>Number Releases</b>	<b>Rec</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Number Releases</b>	<b>Rec</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Number Releases</b>	<b>Rec</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Parole To Street	542	38	7%	141	10	7%	683	48	7%
Expiration of Sentence	1,274	132	10%	480	64	13%	1,754	196	11%
<b>Total Releases</b>	<b>1,816</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>2,437</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Recidivism Rates by Release Type and Gender - <u>Including</u> Technical Violations of Parole or Probation</b>									
	<b>Males</b>			<b>Females</b>			<b>Total</b>		
<b>Release Type</b>	<b>Number Releases</b>	<b>Rec</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Number Releases</b>	<b>Rec</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Number Releases</b>	<b>Rec</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Parole To Street	542	131	24%	141	35	25%	683	166	24%
Expiration of Sentence	1,274	132	10%	480	69	14%	1,754	201	12%
<b>Total Releases</b>	<b>1,816</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>2,437</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>15%</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 can have their parole revoked and can be re-incarcerated. A parole revocation can result from technical violation of the terms of release, or can result from the commission of a 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 notably higher recidivism rate (24%) than the recidivism rate of inmates released expiration of sentence (12%), including those with technical violations. 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.
- Of the 367 inmates who were recidivists using the definition including technical violations, 130 were re-incarcerated for a technical parole or probation violation. One hundred and twenty-five were technical parole violations and five were technical violations of probation.
- Of the 130 inmates who returned for a technical violation, seven of them had another return within the one-year period that was used when determining the recidivism rate excluding technical violations. This small number is likely due to the fact that most inmates re-incarcerated for a technical violation will remain incarcerated for the one-year follow up, thus decreasing the opportunity to re-offend.

- Overall, the recidivism rate decreased by five percentage points, from 15% to 10% when excluding technical violations, with inmates paroled to the community experiencing the largest decrease from 24% to 7%.

### One-Year Recidivism Rates by Post Release Supervision

Table 2:

Supervision Type	Males		Females		Total	
	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate
Parole Only	347	26%	84	25%	431	26%
Probation Only	626	14%	180	20%	806	15%
Both Parole and Probation	195	21%	57	25%	252	22%
No Supervision	648	7%	300	11%	948	8%
<b>Total Releases</b>	<b>1,816</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>2,437</b>	<b>15%</b>

- Of the 2,437 inmates being released to the community, those being released on parole only had the highest recidivism rate (26%), followed by those released with both parole and probation (22%) and probation only (15%). Those being released with no supervision had the lowest recidivism rate (8%).
- When examining male releases, those released on parole only had the highest recidivism rate (26%), whereas males being released with no supervision had the lowest recidivism rate (7%). The male rates mirrored the overall numbers more closely than female releases as they made up the larger number of releases.
- For female releases, those being released with parole only or both parole and probation supervision had the highest recidivism rates (both 25%) and those being released with no supervision had the lowest recidivism rate (11%).

### One-Year Recidivism Rates by Offense Category and Gender<sup>5</sup>

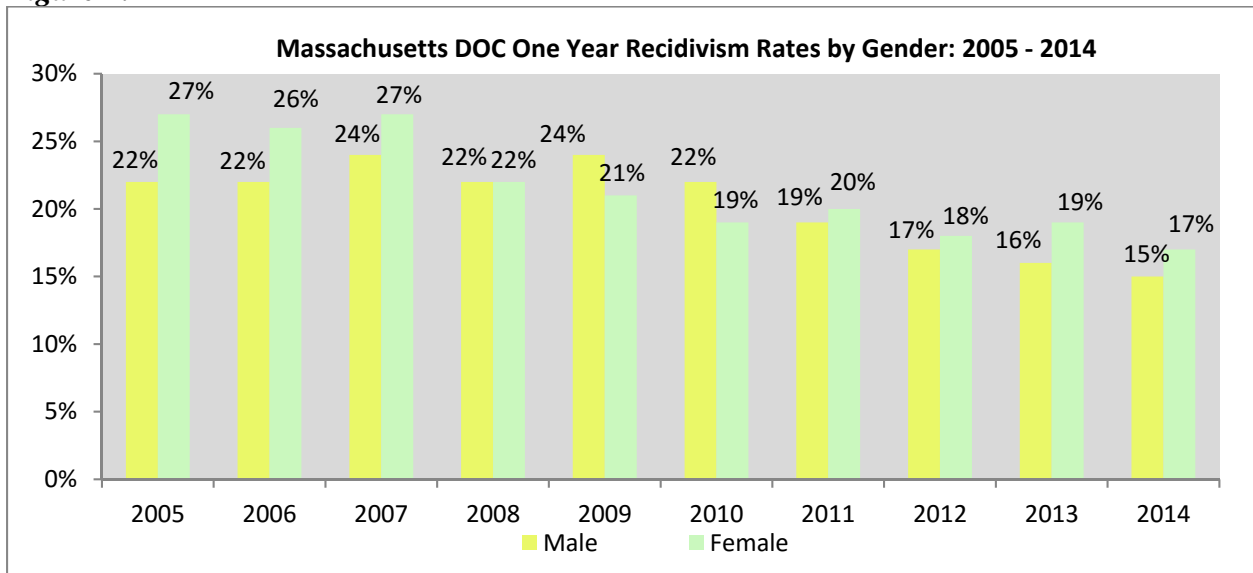
Table 3:

Offense Category	Males		Females		Total	
	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate
Property	229	25%	212	20%	441	22%
Person	768	17%	150	19%	918	17%
Drug	490	10%	116	13%	606	11%
Other	204	10%	132	12%	336	11%
Sex	125	7%	11	n.a.	136	7%
<b>Total Releases</b>	<b>1,816</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>2,437</b>	<b>15%</b>

- The highest recidivism rate for male releases was property offenders who recidivated at a rate of 25%, followed by person offenders (17%). Those who committed a drug or an 'other' offense both had a recidivism rate of 10%.
- The highest recidivism rate for female releases was also property offenders with a recidivism rate of 20%, followed by person offenders (19%) and drug offenders (13%).

<sup>5</sup> For releases where the numeric value was less than 20, recidivism rates were not reported in the table.

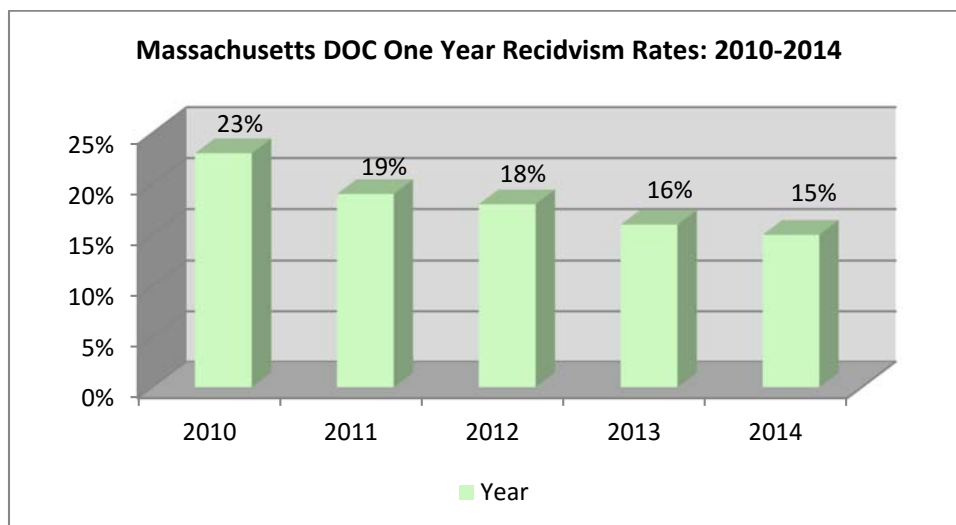
**Figure 1:**



The male recidivism rate remained fairly consistent from 2005 through 2010, ranging between 22% and 24%. There was a notable decline for the 2011 release cohort with a decrease to 19%. The decline in recidivism rates continued steadily through 2014, ending the trend with a male one year recidivism rate of 15%, a substantial decrease from the rates seen in the first half of the trend period. These rates may change as court information continues to update.

During the first three years of the trend period, females had a higher recidivism rate than their male counterparts, hovering around 27%. In 2008, the female rate experienced a steep decline to 22%, equaling the male rate for that year. Despite some fluctuation, the female recidivism rate has been experiencing a downward trend, ending the trend period with a rate of 17% for the 2014 release cohort.

**Figure 2:**



The overall recidivism rate peaked at the beginning of the trend period at 23% in 2010 before decreasing by 4 percentage points in 2011 (19%). This rate continued to gradually decrease each year before ending the trend period at 15% in 2014, a notable decrease of 8 percentage points since 2010. This is likely due to the decline in parole rates in 2011 as well as continued reentry efforts.

<b>Definitions</b>	
<b>County Sentence</b>	<p>Prior to the “Truth in Sentencing” law, if an offender is sentenced to the House of Correction, the term shall be two and a half years or less. Parole eligibility and discharge are based on the maximum term of a sentence.</p> <p>Under the “new” law (enacted in 1994), discharge on this sentence will change because of the elimination of statutory good time. There is no change in the parole eligibility date.</p>
<b>Governing Offense</b>	The governing offense is the offense associated with the longest maximum release date.
<b>Length of Incarceration</b>	Length of incarceration represents the number of days between the inmate’s most recent incarceration which represents a new court commitment including county inmates sentenced from the court to serve a county sentence, parole violation, and probation violation on their current incarceration and their release to the community.
<b>Lower Security</b>	Lower security includes minimum, pre-release, and contract pre-release facilities.
<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 and Offense category represents the inmates 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.
<b>State Prison Sentence</b>	<p>Prior to the “Truth in Sentencing” law, if an offender is sentenced to the State Prison, except for life or as a habitual criminal, the court shall not fix the term of imprisonment, but shall fix a maximum and minimum term for which he/she may be imprisoned. The minimum term shall not be less than two and a half years. All sentences that have a finite maximum term are eligible to have the term reduced by statutory good time, except for most sex offenses, crimes committed while confined and certain “mandatory” sentences.</p> <p>In the “new law”, all state sentences have a minimum and a maximum term, unless an inmate is sentenced for life or as a habitual criminal. The minimum term is used to determine parole eligibility, and the maximum term is used to determine discharge.</p> <p>Under both the “old” and “new” sentencing systems, an inmate is discharged from his/her sentence at the expiration of his term, less any statutory or earned good time. Under the “new” system none of the reduction will be attributable to statutory good time.</p>

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, 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).