

Massachusetts Department of Correction
Three-Year Recidivism Rates: 2019 Release
Cohort

Calendar Year 2019



Executive Office of Public Safety and Security
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Maura T. Healey, Governor
Terrence M. Reidy, Secretary of Public Safety and Security



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Three-Year Recidivism Rates: 2019 Release Cohort

I. Introduction

Data presented herein represents recidivism statistics and administrative data for 1,947 criminally sentenced incarcerated individuals released to the community from the Massachusetts Department of Correction (MA DOC) during calendar year 2019 via expiration of sentence or parole to the community. Each release during the year is counted, making it possible for one incarcerated individual to be included multiple times.¹ The MA DOC defines a recidivist as any criminally sentenced incarcerated individual released to the community from MA DOC jurisdiction who is re-incarcerated in a Massachusetts state or county facility or to a federal facility for a criminal sentence within three years of their release to the community. The data presented² includes information on incarcerated individual 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 derived from information available at the time of collection and are subject to change. The criminal activity of incarcerated individuals released to the community during 2019 was tracked through the Massachusetts Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) to determine any re-incarceration within three years of their release to the community.

An incarcerated individual 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 or a federal facility, technical violation of probation, or probation violation with a new offense. The recidivism rate is calculated by dividing the number of re-incarcerations by the number of releases.

It is important to note that a released incarcerated individual may be dropped from the study for various reasons, including not having been released directly to the community upon further examination, or death prior to the close of the follow-up period.

Technical Violations

MA DOC publishes recidivism rates both including and excluding technical violations of parole and probation.

Incarcerated individuals released to the community with parole or probation conditions are supervised for a period of time while in the community. An incarcerated individual can be re-incarcerated for violating the conditions of their parole or probation supervision. A revocation can result from a technical violation of the terms of release or can result from an arraignment for a new crime.

To calculate the recidivism rate *excluding* technical violations of parole or probation, the incarcerated individual's first non-technical re-incarceration within three years of their release was used.

¹ In 2019, there were 49 incarcerated individuals who had multiple releases on the same commitment number within the calendar year.

² Data presented reflects information at the time data was collected.

II. 2019 Release Cohort Overview

Below are key details describing the 1,947 MA DOC criminal releases in 2019. See page 13 for the full profile.

- Males (n = 1,576) made up 81% of the 1,947 releases, while females (n = 371) made up 19%.
- Just under half (48%) of all releases self-identified as White – nearly 80% of females, and 41% of males. Of the male releases, over half identified as either Black or African American (27%) or Hispanic (31%).
- Altogether, 46% of the release population had served a violent governing offense. Fifty percent of males and almost a third of females released had served a violent governing offense.
- While more incarcerated individuals were serving non-violent offenses, the most common offense type for releases was person offense (39%), which is considered a violent offense.
- The age of incarcerated individuals at time of release from the MA DOC ranged from 20 to 84 years old.
- Thirty-one percent of the releases in the cohort were aged 40 or older at time of commitment. The percentage of the cohort aged 40 or older at time of release grew to 42%. Overall, males were younger than females at time of commitment but were older than females at time of release. This indicates males serving longer sentences than their female counterparts.
- The majority of the incarcerated individuals were released via expiration of sentence to their community (74%), while the remaining 26% were released via parole to their community.
- Nearly half (46%) of females and over one-third (39%) of males were released without parole or probation supervision.
- Forty-nine percent of releases came from medium security facilities, and another 37% of releases came from lower security facilities. The remaining 14% of releases came from a maximum security facility.

III. Recidivism Statistics

Of 1,947 criminally sentenced released to the community in 2019, 500 (26%) recidivated within three years of release. There were 84 female recidivists and 416 male recidivists.

Table 1. Three-Year Recidivism Rates: 2019 Release Cohort

Overall	26%
Female	23%
Male	26%

- The three-year recidivism rate is down by three percentage points compared to the 29% overall rate of the 2018 release cohort.

- The female three-year recidivism rate decreased from 28% to 23% compared to the rate for calendar year 2018, and the males decreased from 29% to 26%.

An incarcerated individual on parole or probation who violates the terms of the conditions³ set forth regarding their release may be re-incarcerated; this return is called a technical violation⁴. A non-technical violation would involve an arraignment for a new crime.

Table 2, and Figures 1 and 2, provide a comparison of recidivism rates excluding and including re-incarcerations for technical violations of parole.

Table 2: Three-Year Recidivism Rates Excluding and Including Re-incarcerations for Technical Violators: Re-incarceration Year by Assigned Sex

Three-Year Recidivism Rates by Assigned Sex and Year Excluding Technical Violations									
		1st Year		2nd Year		3rd Year		Total	
Gender	Number of Releases	Rec	Rate	Rec	Rate	Rec	Rate	Rec	Rate
Female	371	26	7%	12	3%	20	5%	58	16%
Male	1,576	125	8%	118	7%	98	6%	341	22%
Total	1,947	151	8%	130	7%	118	6%	399	20%
Three-Year Recidivism Rate by Assigned Sex and Year Including Technical Violations									
		1st Year		2nd Year		3rd Year		Total	
Gender	Number of Releases	Rec	Rate	Rec	Rate	Rec	Rate	Rec	Rate
Female	371	52	14%	14	4%	18	5%	84	23%
Male	1,576	212	13%	114	7%	90	6%	416	26%
Total	1,947	264	14%	128	7%	108	6%	500	26%

³ Technical violations are not necessarily the result of administrative conditions, and could include uncharged criminal conduct, or conduct that is under criminal investigation.

⁴ To calculate the recidivism rate excluding technical violations, the first non-technical re-incarceration within three years of release was used. Incarcerated individuals who were returned for a technical violation were incarcerated for a period of time, diminishing the likelihood of a non-technical return.

Table 3: Three-Year Recidivism Rates Excluding and Including Re-incarcerations for Technical Violations: Type of Release by Assigned Sex

Three-Year Recidivism Rates Excluding Technical Violations of Parole or Probation									
Release Type	Males			Females			Total		
	Number Releases	Rec	Rate	Number Releases	Rec	Rate	Number Releases	Rec	Rate
Parole To Community	394	65	16%	117	20	17%	511	85	17%
Expiration of Sentence	1,182	276	23%	254	38	15%	1,436	314	22%
Total Releases	1,576	341	22%	371	58	16%	1,947	399	20%
Three-Year Recidivism Rates Including Technical Violations of Parole or Probation									
Release Type	Males			Females			Total		
	Number Releases	Rec	Rate	Number Releases	Rec	Rate	Number Releases	Rec	Rate
Parole To Community	394	140	36%	117	43	37%	511	183	36%
Expiration of Sentence	1,182	276	23%	254	41	16%	1,436	317	22%
Total Releases	1,576	416	26%	371	84	23%	1,947	500	26%

Figure 2: Three-Year Recidivism Rate Excluding Technical Violations

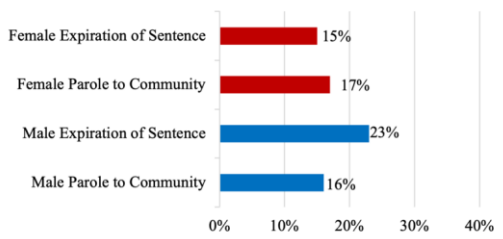
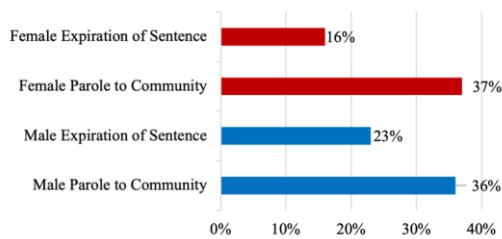


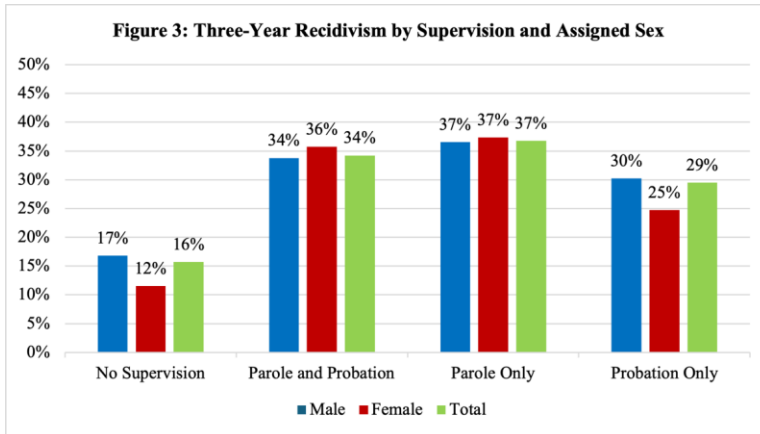
Figure 1: Three-Year Recidivism Rate Including Technical Violations



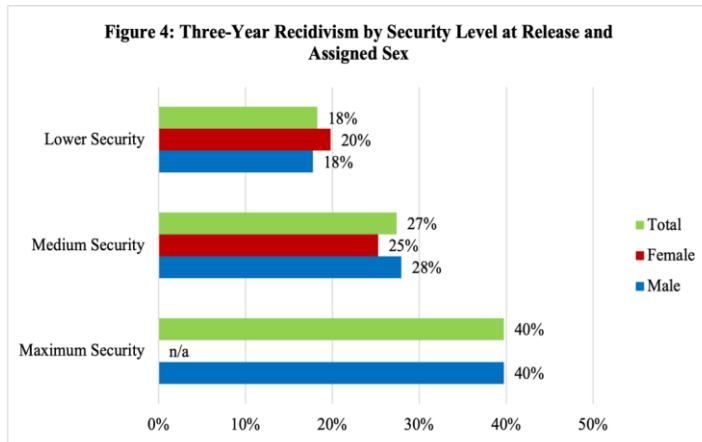
- Generally, incarcerated individuals paroled to the community recidivate at higher rates as they are under supervision, but only when considering technical violations (Figure 1). When excluding technical violations⁵, females paroled to the community recidivated at a slightly higher rate than those who were released upon expiration of their sentence while males recidivated at a lower rate (Figures 1 and 2).
- Of the 500 incarcerated individuals who recidivated using the definition including technical violations, 123 were re-incarcerated for a technical parole violation (120) or technical probation violation (3). The majority (94%) of technical violations occurred within the first year of release.

⁵ Note: incarcerated individuals who were returned for a technical violation were incarcerated for a period of time, diminishing the likelihood of a non-technical return. This is highlighted by the lower recidivism rate for paroled incarcerated individuals when excluding technical violations.

- Twenty-two incarcerated individuals had both a technical and a non-technical return within the three-year study period. These 22 represent about 18% of the 123 technical violators within the study period.
- Overall, the recidivism rate decreased by six percentage points, from 26% to 20% when excluding technical violators (Table 2).
- When excluding technical violators, the recidivism rate was 8% during the first year of the follow-up period, compared to a rate of 16% when technical violators were included.
- For the second and third years in the follow-up period, recidivism rates including and excluding technical violations remained the same, 7 % and 6%, respectively.



- Incarcerated individuals released with parole supervision only had the highest recidivism rate of 37%, followed closely by those with both parole and probation supervision (34%) (Figure 3). Again, incarcerated individuals under supervision consistently recidivate at a higher rate and most parolees return for technical violations.
- Female releases with probation only or no supervision upon release had lower recidivism rates than males with the same level of supervision.



- Recidivism rates for incarcerated individuals released during 2019 were positively correlated with the security level of the releasing facility (see Figure 4). The recidivism rate for both male and female incarcerated individuals increased as the security level of the releasing institution increased.
- Males released from maximum security had the highest recidivism rate (40%), followed by 28% for medium security releases and 18% for releases from lower security. Female releases from medium security had a recidivism rate of 25%, compared to a rate of 20% for those released from a lower security level.

Table 4. Female State and County Three-Year Recidivism Rate: 2019 Release Cohort

State Sentenced Females	24%
County Sentenced Females ⁶	22%

- State sentenced females had a recidivism rate of 24%, two percentage points lower than that of county sentenced females of 22%.

⁶ Females sentenced from the court to serve a county sentence often serve that sentence in a state correctional facility due to limited female bed space at the county level. County sentenced females comprised 78% of the criminally sentenced female releases from the MA DOC included in the 2019 recidivism cohort.

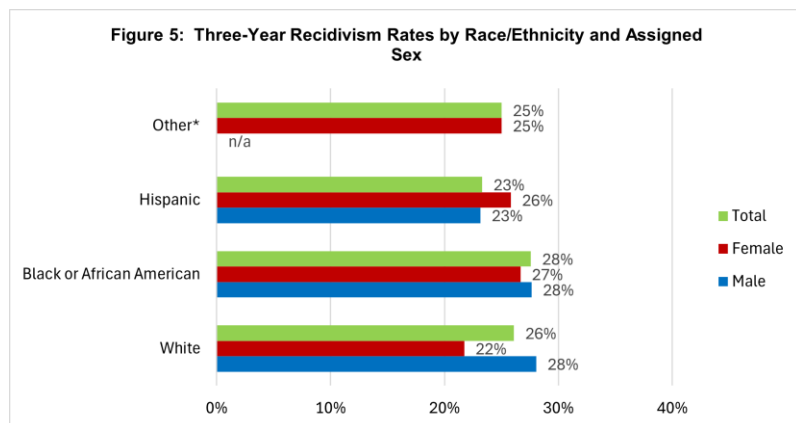
Table 5. Three-Year Recidivism Rates by Release Address: Massachusetts Counties⁷

Release Address County	Female		Male		Total	
	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate	Number Releases	Recidivism Rate
Barnstable	13	n/a	38	21%	51	20%
Berkshire	1	n/a	25	24%	26	23%
Bristol	29	24%	178	30%	207	29%
Dukes	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
Essex	86	28%	170	29%	256	29%
Franklin	0	n/a	6	n/a	6	n/a
Hampden	9	n/a	205	17%	214	17%
Hampshire	2	n/a	17	n/a	19	n/a
Middlesex	73	22%	163	25%	236	24%
Nantucket	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
Norfolk	37	24%	63	25%	100	25%
Plymouth	36	17%	111	29%	147	26%
Suffolk	55	35%	336	30%	391	30%
Worcester	12	n/a	196	32%	208	30%
Out of State	18	n/a	68	13%	86	10%
Unknown	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
Total	371	23%	1,576	26%	1,947	26%

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- Of the 1,947 releases in 2019, the vast majority (96%) released somewhere in Massachusetts. Table 5 ranks recidivism rates of counties to which incarcerated individuals were released.
- Incarcerated individuals released to Suffolk and Worcester counties had the highest recidivism rates both at 30%.
- Females saw the highest number of releases to Essex, Middlesex, and Suffolk counties, and highest recidivism rates from, Suffolk and Essex Counties.
- Males saw the highest releases to Suffolk County, followed by Hampden and Worcester Counties, while the highest recidivism rates were from Worcester, Suffolk, and Bristol Counties. Rates may be skewed due to the smaller number of releases to some counties.

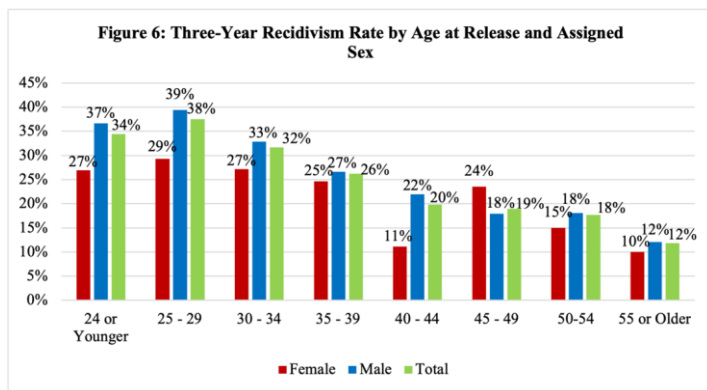
⁷ For releases where the numeric value was less than 20, recidivism rates were not reported in the table.



*Other includes American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Unknown

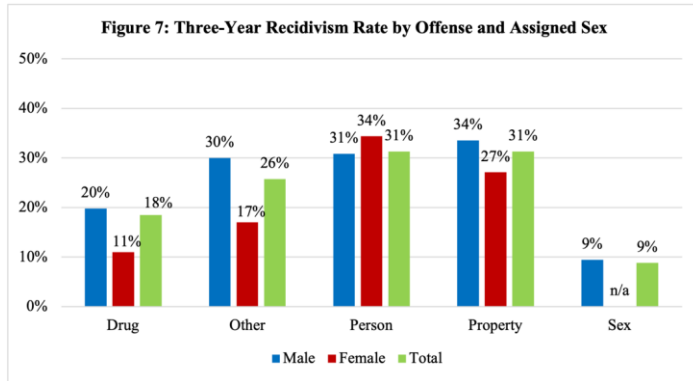
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- Male incarcerated individuals reporting a race/ethnicity⁸ of Hispanic had the lowest recidivism rate at 23%, while those reporting a race/ethnicity of Black or African American or White recidivated at the highest rate at 28%. Female incarcerated individuals reporting a race/ethnicity of Black or African American recidivated at 27%, followed by Hispanic at 26%.

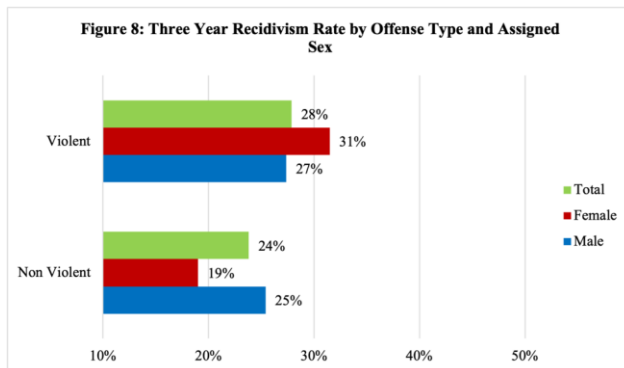


- Overall, the recidivism rates for male and female incarcerated individuals decreased, as age at release increased.
- Male and female incarcerated individuals aged 55 or older recidivated at the lowest rates, 10% and 12%, respectively. The lower recidivism rates for the oldest age groups are consistent with research on age and recidivism.

⁸ Race/ethnicity categories with less than 20 releases are not reported in the figure.

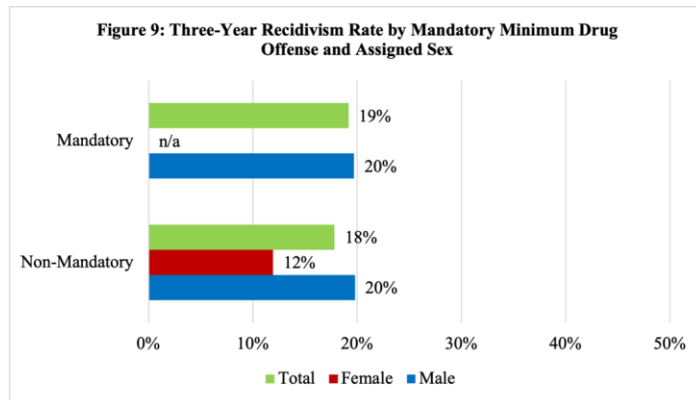


- Overall, person and property offenders had the highest recidivism rate of all offense types⁹ at 31%. Male property offenders and female offenders has the highest recidivism rate of 34%, while male sex offenders had the lowest recidivism rate of 9%.



- Recidivism rates for male and female incarcerated individuals released after serving a sentence for violent (Person, Sex) offenses were higher compared to non-violent (Property, Drug, Other) offenses.

⁹ For releases where the numeric value was less than 20, recidivism rates were not reported in the figure.



- In total, nineteen percent of mandatory minimum drug offense releases recidivated within three years. For those serving a governing non-mandatory drug offense, females had the lowest recidivism rate of 12%, while males recidivated at a rate of 20% (Figure 9).

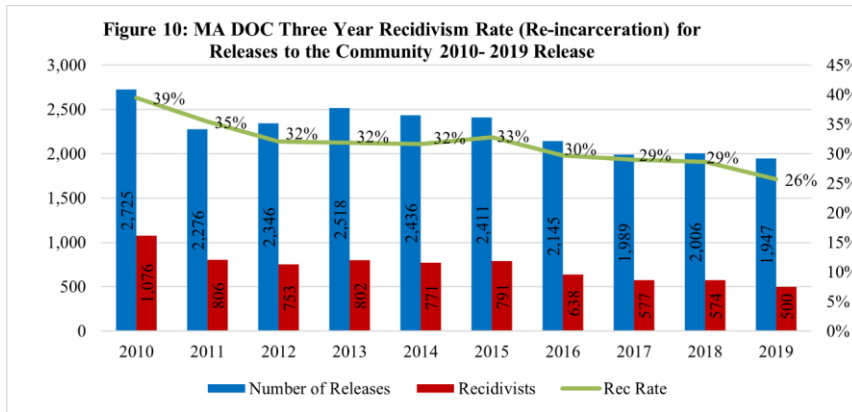
Table 6: Three-Year Recidivism Rates by General Recidivism Risk Level¹⁰ and Assigned Sex

Risk Level	Male			Female			Total		
	Number of Releases	Rec	Rate	Number of Releases	Rec	Rate	Number of Releases	Rec	Rate
High	687	247	36%	92	36	39%	779	283	36%
Moderate	384	95	25%	63	13	21%	447	108	24%
Low	485	66	14%	90	13	14%	575	79	14%
Total Releases	1,556	408	26%	245	62	25%	1,801	470	26%

- Three-year recidivism rates were positively correlated with the increase in risk level.
- Males with a low-risk level had a 14% recidivism rate, compared to a rate of 36% for those with a high-risk.
- Female releases with a low-risk level had a 14% recidivism rate, compared to a rate of 39% for those with a high-risk level.

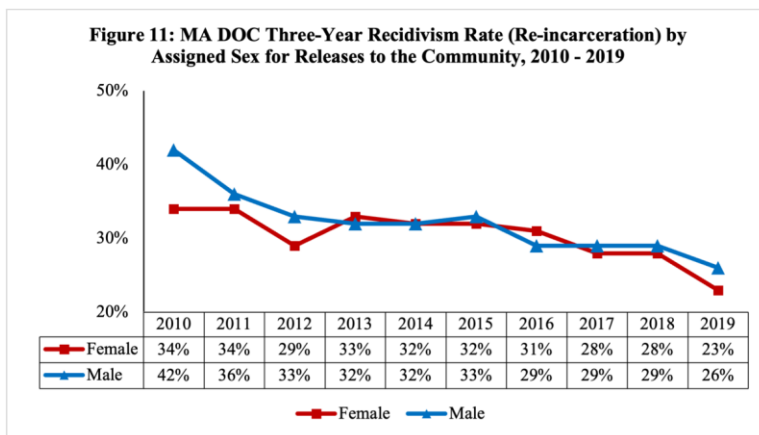
¹⁰ Of the 1,947 releases in the 2019 cohort, 146 did not have a risk score and are not included in the table.

IV. Yearly Trends



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- Over the ten-year trend period the recidivism rate for releases to the community via parole or expiration of sentence reached a high of 39% with the 2010 release cohort. The rate began to decline steadily beginning with the 2010 releases, reaching a low 26% for the most recent release cohorts.



- The downward trend over the past 10 years has occurred for both males and females. Male and female rates declined between 2010 and 2012, with males experiencing a more notable decrease. Females experience a slight uptick in 2013, surpassing the male recidivism rate for the first time since 2005. Rates were equal in 2014, and female recidivism rates surpassed the male rate again in 2016. Females ended the ten-year trend period with a recidivism rate of 23%, while males ended at 26%, both the lowest three-year rates experienced by male and female releases.

V. Conclusion

The goal of lowering recidivism rates through evidence-based programming and improved reentry efforts remains central at the MA DOC. In late 2018, MA DOC was recognized as a leader in reducing recidivism, as the best of 11 states ranked by the Council for State Governments Justice Center in a ten-year study¹¹.

Since the passage of the 2018 Criminal Justice Reform Act, increased program availability, opportunities for parole, and improved treatment of subpopulations within the MA DOC, among other sweeping changes, will affect the recidivism rate over the next several years. Additionally, the steady decline of the MA DOC population may push recidivism rates one way or another.

¹¹ Details about the CSG study can be found at <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrc/publications/reducing-recidivism-states-deliver-results-2018/>

Appendix I: 2019 Release Cohort Overview: Release Variables by Assigned Sex						
		Female		Male		Total
		Total	371	Total	1,576	Total
						1,947
Variable	Category	Number Releases	% Female Releases	Number Releases	% Male Releases	Number Releases
						% Releases
Age at Commitment	24 or Younger	39	11%	248	16%	287
	25 - 29	58	16%	332	21%	390
	30 - 34	81	22%	286	18%	367
	35 - 39	74	20%	225	14%	299
	40 - 44	41	11%	157	10%	198
	45 - 49	35	9%	134	9%	169
	50 - 54	22	6%	105	7%	127
	55 or Older	21	6%	89	6%	110
Age at Release	24 or Younger	26	7%	90	6%	116
	25 - 29	58	16%	246	16%	304
	30 - 34	81	22%	298	19%	379
	35 - 39	77	21%	259	16%	336
	40 - 44	45	12%	182	12%	227
	45 - 49	34	9%	156	10%	190
	50 - 54	20	5%	155	10%	175
	55 or Older	30	8%	190	12%	220
Release Type	Expiration to the Community	254	68%	1,182	75%	1436
	Parole to the Community	117	32%	394	25%	511
Post Release Supervision	No Supervision	165	44%	606	38%	771
	Parole and Probation	42	11%	145	9%	187
	Parole Only	75	20%	249	16%	324
	Probation Only	89	24%	576	37%	665
Race/Ethnicity	White	290	78%	649	41%	939
	Black or African American	30	8%	427	27%	457
	Hispanic	31	8%	484	31%	515
	Other	20	5%	16	1%	36
Governing Offense Type	Person	99	27%	662	42%	761
	Property	96	26%	182	12%	278
	Drug	73	20%	415	26%	488
	Other	94	25%	190	12%	284
	Sex	9	2%	127	8%	136
Governing Offense	Violent	108	29%	789	50%	897
	Non-violent	263	71%	787	50%	1050
Security Level at Release	Maximum	0	0%	272	17%	272
	Medium	194	52%	752	48%	946
	Lower	177	48%	552	35%	729

Appendix II: Male 2019 Release Cohort with Recidivism Rates				
Variable	Category	Number Releases	Number Recidivists	Recidivism Rate
Age at Commitment	24 or Younger	248	81	33%
	25 - 29	332	115	35%
	30 - 34	286	94	33%
	35 - 39	225	48	21%
	40 - 44	157	23	15%
	45 - 49	134	27	20%
	50 - 54	105	18	17%
	55 or Older	89	10	11%
Age at Release	24 or Younger	90	33	37%
	25 - 29	246	97	39%
	30 - 34	298	98	33%
	35 - 39	259	69	27%
	40 - 44	182	40	22%
	45 - 49	156	28	18%
	50 - 54	155	28	18%
	55 or Older	190	23	12%
Release Type	Expiration to the Community	1182	276	23%
	Parole to the Community	394	140	36%
Post Release Supervision	No Supervision	606	102	17%
	Parole and Probation	145	49	34%
	Parole Only	249	91	37%
	Probation Only	576	174	30%
Race/Ethnicity	White	467	182	39%
	Black or African American	309	118	38%
	Hispanic	372	112	30%
	Other	12	4	33%
Governing Offense Type	Person	662	204	31%
	Property	182	61	34%
	Drug	415	82	20%
	Other	190	57	30%
	Sex	115	12	10%
Governing Offense	Violent	789	216	27%
	Non-violent	787	200	25%
Security Level at Release	Maximum	272	108	40%
	Medium	752	210	28%
	Lower	552	98	18%

Appendix III: Female 2019 Release Cohort with Recidivism Rates				
Variable	Category	Number Releases	Number Recidivists	Recidivism Rate
Age at Commitment	24 or Younger	39	11	28%
	25 - 29	58	18	31%
	30 - 34	81	22	27%
	35 - 39	74	15	20%
	40 - 44	41	5	12%
	45 - 49	35	8	23%
	50 - 54	22	2	9%
	55 or Older	21	3	14%
Age at Release	24 or Younger	26	7	27%
	25 - 29	58	17	29%
	30 - 34	81	22	27%
	35 - 39	77	19	25%
	40 - 44	45	5	11%
	45 - 49	34	8	24%
	50 - 54	20	3	15%
	55 or Older	30	3	10%
Release Type	Expiration to the Community	254	41	16%
	Parole to the Community	117	43	37%
Post Release Supervision	No Supervision	165	19	12%
	Parole and Probation	42	15	36%
	Parole Only	75	28	37%
	Probation Only	89	22	25%
Race/Ethnicity	White	290	63	22%
	Black or African American	30	8	27%
	Hispanic	31	8	26%
	Other	20	5	25%
Governing Offense Type	Person	99	34	34%
	Property	96	26	27%
	Drug	73	8	11%
	Other	94	16	17%
	Sex	9	0	0%
Governing Offense	Violent	108	34	31%
	Non-violent	263	50	19%
Security Level at Release	Maximum	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Medium	194	49	25%
	Lower	177	35	20%

Definitions	
County Sentence	Prior to the “Truth in Sentencing” law, if an incarcerated individual 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. 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.
Crime Bill of 2012	The common term for Chapter 192 of the Acts of 2012. Effective August 2, 2012, which resulted in an immediate change to the sentence structure for numerous incarcerated individuals.
Crime Bill of 2018	The common term for Chapter 192 of the Acts of 2018, effective April 13, 2018, which resulted in changes to Restrictive Housing, Earned Good Time and Medical Releases.
Governing Offense	The governing offense is the offense that carries the longest maximum sentence.
Lower Security	Lower security includes minimum, pre-release, and electronic monitoring (ELMO).
Mandatory Drug Offenders	Incarcerated individuals serving a governing drug sentence that carries a mandatory minimum term.
Offense Category	Offense categories include Person, Property, Sex, Drug, and Other. Offense categories represent the incarcerated individual’s governing offense.
Parole	The discharge of an incarcerated individual from a Massachusetts DOC jurisdiction to the community while under the supervision of the Parole Board. Such discharged incarcerated individuals may be re-incarcerated for violating the terms of their supervision imposed by the Parole Board.
Race/Ethnicity	The race categories self-reported and used in this report include: African American/Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, White, and Unknown. The ‘Other’ race category reported in the tables includes American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Unknown. Incarcerated individuals who report a Hispanic ethnicity are reported as Hispanic in this race category.
Recidivism Rate	Number of incarcerated individuals re-incarcerated within three years of their release to the community divided by the number of incarcerated individuals released.
Recidivism Risk Score	On intake to the prison system, each incarcerated individual is given assessments to establish his/her Intake/Criminal History/Risk Scale Set. Components of the scale set are the General and Violent Recidivism Risk Scores which may be used to predict recidivism risk. The risk scores are based on a COMPAS Core scale (an automated risk need assessment tool). The amount of programming required for a given incarcerated individual is established based on a simplified scale of Low, Moderate or High recidivism risk incarcerated individuals. The incarcerated individual’s most recent general risk assessment data was used prior to his/her release to the community.
Release Address	Release address is self-reported by the incarcerated individual prior to release. When a release address is not provided, the last known address reported by the incarcerated individual is used.
State Prison Sentence	Prior to the “Truth in Sentencing” law, if an incarcerated individual 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. In the “new law”, all state sentences have a minimum and a maximum term, unless an incarcerated individual is sentenced for life or is charged as a habitual criminal. The minimum term is used to determine parole eligibility, and the maximum term is used to determine discharge. Under both the “old” and “new” sentencing systems, an incarcerated individual 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.
Violent/Non-Violent Offense	Person and Sex offenses are combined into the category ‘Violent Offenses’. Property, Drug, and ‘Other’ offenses are categorized into ‘Non-Violent’ offenses.