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Prisoner Reentry in Virginia

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research for safer communities

URBAN INSTITUTE
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Executive Summary

This report describes the process of prisoner reentry in Virginia by examining the trends in incarceration and prisoner releases, the characteristics of the state's returning prisoners, the geographic distribution of returning prisoners, and the social and economic climates of the communities that are home to the highest concentrations of returning prisoners. This report consolidates existing data on incarceration and release trends and presents a new analysis of data on Virginia prisoners released in 2002. The data used in this report were derived from several sources, including the Virginia Department of Corrections (VA DOC), the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Richmond Police Department. Highlights from the report are presented below.

Incarceration and Release Trends. Virginia's incarceration and reentry trends are similar to those observed at the national level. Between 1980 and 2003, the Virginia prison population more than quadrupled, increasing from 8,521 to 35,429 people. The per capita rate of imprisonment in Virginia rose from 159 to 471 per 100,000 residents in the state between 1980 and 2002, an increase of almost 200 percent. Virginia's release patterns reflect admission and population trends: 10,635 prisoners were released from Virginia prisons in 2003, nearly three times the number released in 1980 (3,582).

Characteristics of Prisoners Released in 2002. Of those released in 2002, the majority were male (89 percent) and black (63 percent). The average age at release was 35 years. One-half had been serving time for nonviolent offenses, one-quarter had been serving time for a violent offense, and the remaining quarter had committed a drug offense. The average time served was 3.6 years. In terms of admission type, 10 percent of those released in 2002 were incarcerated for a parole violation; an unknown number of releases were incarcerated for a probation violation. Almost one-quarter of individuals released in 2002 were released from a local jail facility; most of these individuals served their entire sentence in a local facility. Educational levels among released prisoners were severely limited: over half had not graduated from high school. A majority had a history of drug or alcohol abuse, and almost one in five had been diagnosed with a physical health condition. Almost half of released prisoners had participated in vocational or educational programs provided by the Virginia Department of Correctional Education. More than two in every five releasees had participated in substance abuse programming while in prison.

Release and Supervision Policies and Practices. The vast majority of the state's prisoners are released through a mandatory process, and most—81 percent—are released to a period of supervision. Since parole was abolished in Virginia in 1995, the number of individuals supervised on parole has decreased. However, more than half of Virginia's exiting prisoners are released to probation supervision. The average caseload for supervision officers is 77 cases per officer. In recent years, about 45 percent of admissions to prison were the result of violations of probation or parole.

Geographic Distribution of Released Prisoners. Prisoners released in Virginia return to most counties in the state, but distribution is not even. The jurisdictions with the highest numbers of returning prisoners are the cities of Richmond and Norfolk. Fifteen percent of prisoners released in 2002 came from two jurisdictions—Richmond City and Norfolk City—that together house but 6 percent of the state's population. These two cities face greater economic and social disadvantage than many other jurisdictions throughout the state. The number of individuals living in poverty is more than twice as high in Richmond and Norfolk cities than in the state as a whole. Unemployment rates are higher, and the share of families that are headed by a single female is significantly higher than the state as a whole. Within the cities, releasees are most heavily concentrated in a small number of the cities' block groups. High levels of disadvantage and crime also characterize some of these neighborhoods.

Introduction

This report examines prisoner reentry in Virginia. Prisoner reentry—the process of leaving prison and returning to society—has become a pressing issue both in Virginia and nationally, and with good reason. Rising incarceration rates over the past quarter century have resulted in more and more individuals being released from prison each year. Across the country, an estimated 630,000 prisoners were released from state and federal prisons in 2001, a fourfold increase over the past two decades.[1] Thus, released prisoners, their families, and the communities to which they return must cope with the challenges of reentry on a much greater scale than ever before.

And the challenges of reentry are many. More prisoners nationwide are returning home having spent longer terms behind bars,[2] exacerbating the already significant challenges of finding employment and reconnecting with family. Prisoners today are typically less prepared for reintegration, less connected to community-based social structures, and more likely to have health or substance abuse problems than in the past. In addition to these personal circumstances, limited availability of jobs, housing, and social services in a community may affect the returning prisoner's ability to successfully reintegrate.[3]

These challenges affect more than returning prisoners and their families; they can also have serious implications for the communities to which prisoners return. Two-thirds of the prisoners released in 1996 returned to major metropolitan areas across the country—up from 50 percent in 1984.[4] Within central cities, released prisoners are often concentrated in a few neighborhoods.[5] These high concentrations of returning prisoners may generate great costs to those communities, including costs associated with crime and public safety, greater public health risks, and high rates of unemployment and homelessness. Thus, developing a thorough understanding of the characteristics of returning prisoners and the challenges they face is an important first step in shaping public policy toward improving the safety and welfare of all citizens.

In many ways, the dimensions and challenges of prisoner reentry observed on the national level are mirrored in Virginia. Incarceration increased dramatically in recent decades. Between 1980 and 2003, the Virginia prison population quadrupled, increasing from 8,521 to 35,429 people. Similarly, the per capita rate of imprisonment tripled over that time period, rising from 159 per 100,000 to 471 per 100,000 residents in the state. Admissions to Virginia prisons climbed substantially over this period as well. In 1980, 4,215 individuals were admitted to the state's prisons. By 2002, annual admissions had grown to 11,048.

As a consequence of the growth in imprisonment, Virginia has also experienced a dramatic growth in the number of people being released from prison. In 1980, only 3,582 individuals were released from the state's prisons. In 2002, 9,960 individuals were released. The vast majority of those released from Virginia prisons in 2002 returned to communities in the state. Norfolk and Richmond cities together accounted for 15

[1] Paige M. Harrison and Jennifer C. Karberg. 2003. *Prison and Jail Prisoners at Midyear 2002*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Statistics.

[2] James P. Lynch and William J. Sabol. 2001. "Prisoner Reentry in Perspective." Crime Policy Report, vol. 3. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

[3] For an in-depth discussion of prisoner reentry nationwide, see Jeremy Travis, Amy L. Solomon, and Michelle Waul. 2001. *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

[4] Lynch and Sabol. 2001. "Prisoner Reentry in Perspective."

[5] Ibid. Nancy G. La Vigne, Vera Kachnowski, Jeremy Travis, Rebecca Naser, and Christy Visher. 2003. "A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Maryland." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute; Nancy G. La Vigne, Cynthia A. Mamalian, Chrsity Visher, and Jeremy Travis. 2003. "A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

percent of those released in 2002, almost 1,500 individuals.[6] The flow of prisoners was further clustered in a small number of communities within these cities.

Government leaders, corrections officials, local organizations, and service providers are increasingly aware of the reentry challenges experienced by states and communities across the country, and they have begun to use both research and programmatic knowledge to address them. Notably, the National Governors Association (NGA) launched the Prisoner Reentry State Policy Academy in summer 2003. The goal of the Academy is to help governors and other state policymakers develop and implement effective prisoner reentry strategies that reduce costly recidivism rates. Seven states—Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Virginia—were selected to participate in this 18-month policy academy. Activities include an in-state policy workshop, two policy academy meetings, and customized technical assistance, including the production of this report.

This report describes prisoner reentry in Virginia by examining the state's incarceration, admission, and release trends over time; describing the characteristics of persons released from Virginia prisons; examining the geographic distribution of those released prisoners across the state; and describing the social and economic climates of communities that are home to the highest concentrations of returning prisoners. The purpose of the report is to present these reentry findings in one document that can be used to inform state officials and policymakers as they develop strategies to address prisoner reentry in Virginia. This report does not attempt to evaluate a specific reentry program, nor does it empirically assess Virginia's reentry policies and practices. Rather, the report consolidates existing data on incarceration and release trends and presents a new analysis of data on Virginia prisoners released in 2002.

About the Data

The data used for this report were derived from several sources. Much of the data came from the Virginia Department of Corrections (VA DOC), which oversees the prison system and the supervision functions of probation and parole. In addition to providing data on individuals released in 2002, VA DOC also provided data on incarceration trends in Virginia. These were supplemented by data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Prisoner Statistics Series. In addition, the discussion of the geographic distribution of Virginia's prisoners is supplemented with data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, as well as data from the Richmond Police Department.

In the few cases in which Virginia DOC released an individual more than once in 2002 (in most cases this would occur when a person was released from prison, returned to prison for a violation of the conditions of his or her release, and was then released again in the same year) only the individual's first release is included in most analyses.

[6] Data on counties and localities to which prisoners released from VA DOC will return are limited. Actual addresses upon release are unavailable for about one-third of releases. The court of commitment is available for all releases, so it is used for this analysis. While the court from which an individual was committed to prison is not a perfect proxy for the county to which that individual will return upon release, research in other states has shown that a majority of individuals return to the county from which they were committed. (See Nancy G. La Vigne and Cynthia A. Mamalian. 2003. "A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.) Conversations with state officials also suggest that this is a reasonable proxy in Virginia.

CHAPTER 1

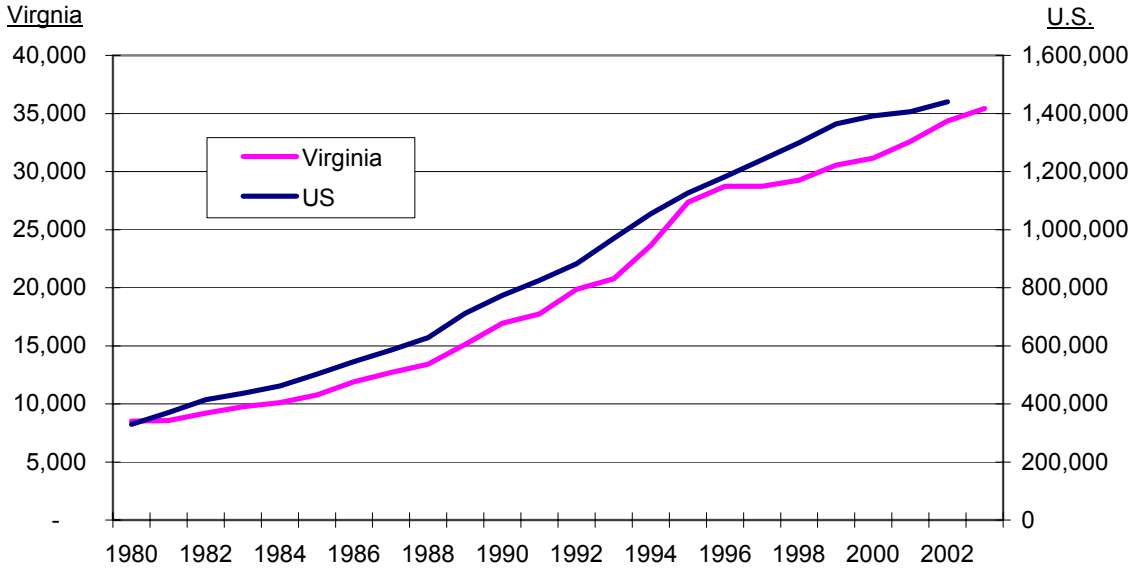
Incarceration and Release Trends in Virginia

In order to understand the reentry phenomenon in Virginia, it is first necessary to examine recent incarceration trends in the state. This section provides an overview of such trends and describes some basic changes in the state's prisoner population. This context will help frame the reentry issue and provides background for the discussion of the needs and challenges of returning prisoners that follows later in this report.

PRISON POPULATION ON THE RISE

The Virginia prison population has grown tremendously over the past two decades, reflecting the rise in prison populations nationwide. Between 1980 and 2003, the Virginia prison population more than quadrupled, increasing from 8,521 to 35,429 people. (See figure 1.) [7]

Figure 1. U.S. and Virginia Prison Populations, 1980–2003

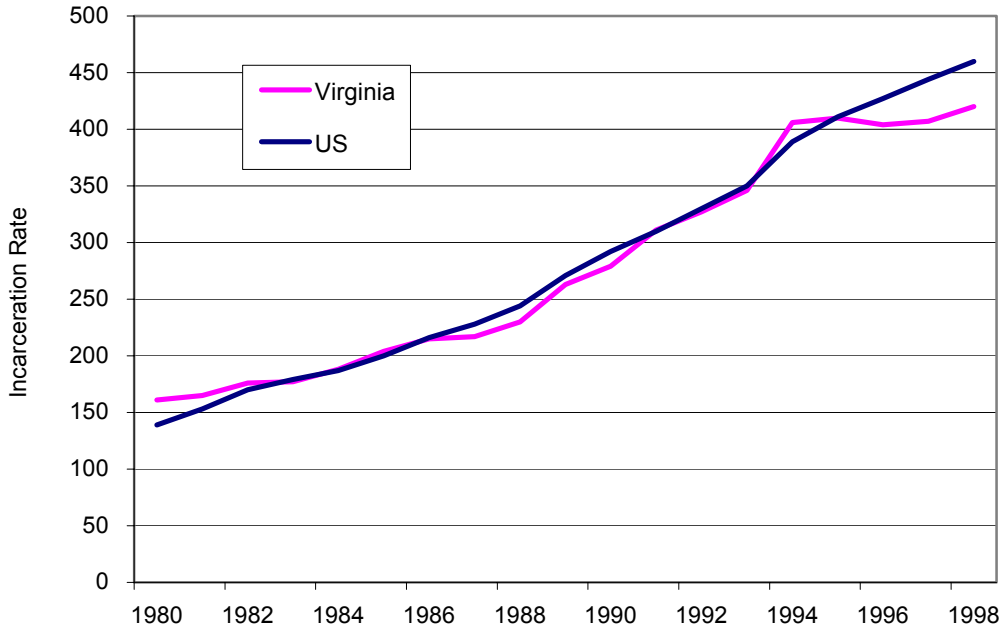


Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Statistics data series (NPS-1); VA DOC

[7] Over time, Virginia laws and policies have changed, affecting the definition of local- and state-responsible offenders. Therefore, variations across years in the numbers incarcerated and admitted to and released from Virginia prisons should be considered carefully. For most of the period presented, the counts include all individuals who were parole eligible and/or who were sentenced to more than 12 months in prison. This includes all state-responsible offenders and some local-responsible offenders through FY1996, but only state-responsible offenders between FY 1997 and FY 2003. Between 1991 and 1994, the state did not intake individuals with sentences of two years or less. For the period from January 1, 1995, through June 30, 1997, the state was responsible for individuals who were sentenced to more than six months for felonies, so these individuals are included in the admissions data for this period and in release data at the time they were released. Currently, the state of Virginia houses only felons who are sentenced to more than one year.

Between 1980 and 1998, the per capita rate of imprisonment in Virginia tripled, rising from 159 per 100,000 residents to 471 per 100,000 residents. Nationally, the rate of incarceration increased 228 percent over this period (figure 2). Like the national experience, the growth in incarceration in Virginia was relatively constant between 1980 and the early 1990s. However, while the national rate continued to increase in the late 1990s, Virginia's incarceration rate leveled off at this time.

Figure 2. Incarceration Rate, United States and Virginia, 1980–1998



Source: BJS, National Prisoner Statistics data series (NPS-1)

The Department of Corrections and the Virginia Parole Board

The Virginia Department of Corrections (VA DOC) oversees the operation of the state's adult correctional facilities and the statewide community-based corrections system. The VA DOC prison system operates approximately 50 institutions statewide. The community-based corrections system includes the functions of both probation and parole supervision. It is comprised of 43 probation and parole districts, drug court programs, day reporting centers, diversion centers, detention centers, and central support units. The VA DOC employs nearly 13,000 staff and supervises over 70,000 individuals. This includes over 35,000 inmates and over 46,000 probationers and parolees.

While the Department of Corrections employs probation and parole officers, the Virginia Parole Board, a separate agency, grants parole and makes parole revocation decisions.

ADMISSION AND RELEASE TRENDS

While admissions to and releases from state prisons continuously increased across the United States between 1980 and 2003, trends in Virginia were less consistent (figure 3).[8] Trends in admissions to prison increased and then dropped off in the early 1980s, and then rose dramatically upward between 1985 and

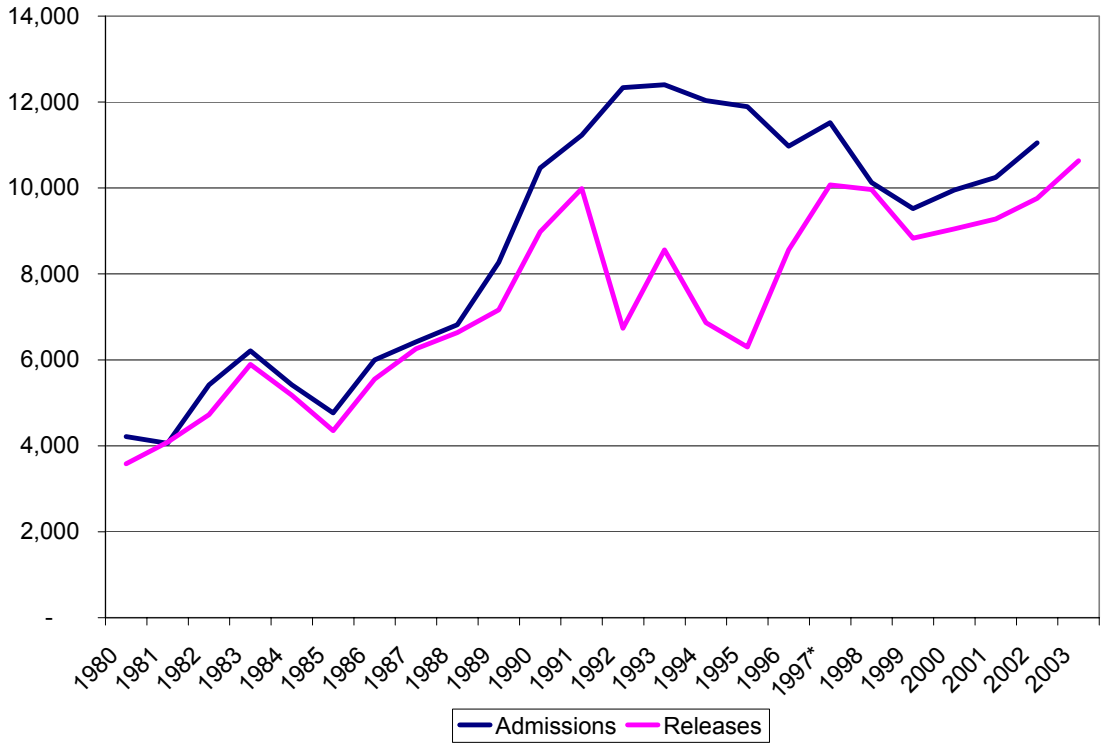
[8] Variations across years should be considered carefully, in light of the changes made to the definitions of state and local offenders.

1993, increasing over 160 percent in just eight years. Admissions to Virginia prisons declined through most of the 1990s, and then began to increase again from 1999 to 2002, never quite returning to the 1993 high of 12,402 admissions. In 2002, there were 11,048 admissions to Virginia prisons.

Through the 1980s, trends in releases from Virginia prisons generally followed trends in admissions. However, unlike admissions, releases stopped increasing in 1991 and actually decreased dramatically between 1991 and 1992. This was followed by a smaller increase between 1992 and 1993. Releases then declined until 1995, before a dramatic rise between 1995 and 1997. After a smaller decrease between 1997 and 1999, the number of prisoners released from Virginia prisons rose through 2003 to a more than 20-year high of 10,635. Much of the analyses in this report examine the population of individuals released to the community by the VA DOC in 2002.

Many forces have likely affected these trends in Virginia's prison population, incarceration rate, and prison admissions and releases over the past two decades. A thorough, conclusive analysis of what these forces are and how much effect each had on the observed trends is beyond the scope of this report. However, these forces almost certainly include sentencing policy reforms (see "Sentencing Law Overview," below), changes in the classification of offenders (see footnote 7), and changes in the composition and philosophy of the Parole Board. Other forces that may have affected these trends are crime rates, law enforcement practices (particularly for drug crimes), and population growth.

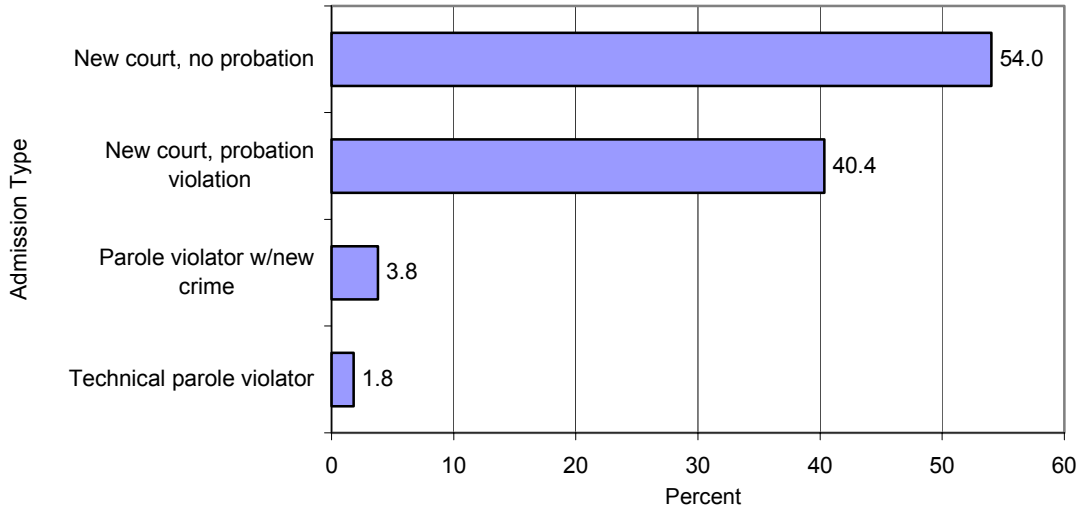
Figure 3. Virginia Prison Admissions and Releases, Fiscal Years 1980–2003



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

In 2002, the majority of admissions to Virginia prisons were "new court" commitments, composed of unsupervised individuals sentenced to prison terms for committing a crime (figure 4). However, 40 percent of admissions in 2002 were probation violators. These individuals either committed a new crime or violated a condition of their probation. About 5 percent of those admitted to prison in 2002 were parole violators, most of whom committed a new crime while on parole.

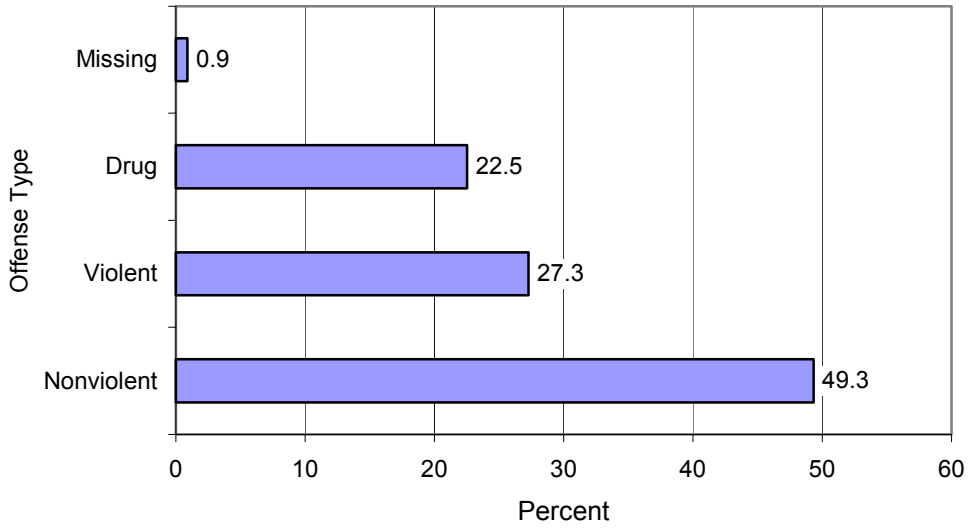
Figure 4. Admissions to State Prison by Admission Type, 2002 (n = 11,392)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

Almost half (49 percent) of admissions in 2002 were for nonviolent, nondrug offenses (figure 5).[9] The majority of these are property offenses, such as burglary, larceny, and car theft. Violent offenders accounted for 27 percent of admissions in 2002, while drug offenders comprised 23 percent.[10]

Figure 5. Admissions to State Prison by Offense Type, 2002 (n = 11,392)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data

[9] This is the offense for which individuals are currently incarcerated; individuals may have had prior convictions for other or more serious offenses. Research by the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission has shown that prior record plays an important role in judges' sentencing decisions.

[10] Offense type was missing for about 1 percent of 2002 admissions in Virginia.

Sentencing Law Overview

After a thorough review of parole and sentencing policies by a Governor's commission in 1994, Virginia legislators, with the support of the Governor, enacted dramatic reforms. Parole was abolished as of January 1, 1995, a sentencing commission was formed, and a truth-in-sentencing (TIS) scheme was developed. All three major reforms were designed to curb a perceived surge in violent crime and to renew faith among residents in the state's system of sentencing and punishment.[11]

The reforms instituted in 1994 and 1995 are based largely on the assumption that incarcerating violent individuals for longer periods of time reduces crimes committed by these individuals through incapacitation. The abolition of parole ended the early release of felons to parole supervision. The sentencing guidelines established and monitored by the sentencing commission aim primarily to increase the time spent in prison by violent and repeat offenders. TIS attempts to more closely align the amount of time served in prison with the actual sentences imposed by judges across the state.

The abolition of parole for offenders who committed felonies after January 1, 1995, effectively ends the systematic process of early release to supervision. In addition, the link between release and postrelease parole supervision was severed. However, most prisoners released in Virginia are released to a period of supervision in the form of probation. (For a further discussion of the use of probation postrelease see chapter 4.)

The sentencing guidelines established by the state General Assembly and maintained by the Sentencing Commission are designed to increase the length of time served in prison by violent and repeat offenders. The initial guidelines, established in 1995, set the actual time served by offenders sentenced between 1988 and 1992 as a "baseline." Recommended sentences for nonviolent offenders were generally similar to this baseline practice. For this population, the legislation required the Sentencing Commission to develop a risk assessment system and encouraged the use of alternative punishment programs. The legislation set a goal that 25 percent of nonviolent offenders be sentenced to alternative programs. The legislation establishing the sentencing guidelines also mandated that sentences for current and prior violent offenders be "enhanced," so that these offenders be required to serve longer periods behind bars.

It is important to note that the guidelines are discretionary—judges are not required to impose the recommended sentence. However, judges are required to provide the Sentencing Commission with written explanations for every case in which they impose a sentence that falls outside of the recommended range.

Due to TIS, inmates who committed felony offenses after January 1, 1995, can earn 4.5 days of sentence credits for every 30 days served. Previously, offenders earned up to 30 days of sentence credits for every 30 days served. This amounts to up to 15 percent of their sentence through good conduct and/or treatment and program participation. The DOC has established policies in place to govern how inmates can earn sentence credits. The system involves four rates at which inmates can earn sentence credits; the rate at which a given inmate earns credits is determined by his or her personal conduct, participation in programming and treatment, and other factors. Inmates will earn sentence credits at a lower rate if they do not participate in programming or treatment that DOC staff have deemed necessary.

Analysis by the Sentencing Commission concluded that the sentencing reforms have had the desired impact—violent and repeat offenders are spending more time in prison for the same crimes than inmates served under the previous system. Nonviolent, nonrepeat offenders typically serve the same amount of time as similar offenders sentenced under the parole system.[12]

[11] Governor's Commission on Parole Abolition and Sentencing Reform. 1994. *Final Report*. Richmond, VA: Commonwealth of Virginia.

[12] Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission. 2003 Annual Report.

CHAPTER 2

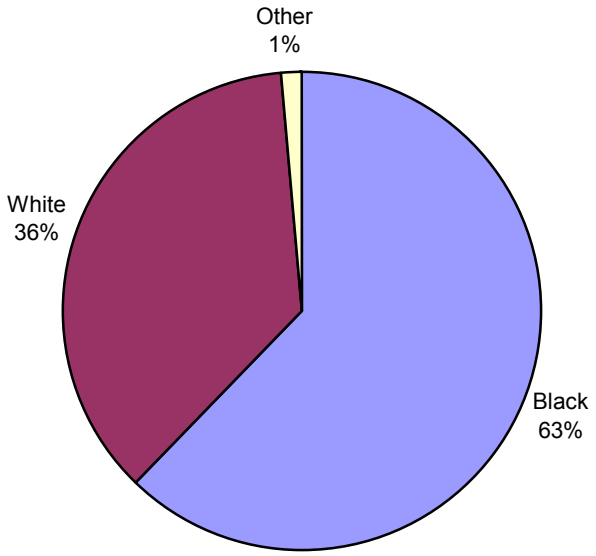
Characteristics of Virginia's Returning Prisoners

In order to better understand prisoner reentry in Virginia, it is important to examine the characteristics of the population being released from the state's prisons each year. This section describes the cohort released from the Virginia Department of Corrections in 2002, examining basic demographics, reasons for incarceration, time served, recidivism, education, work, and substance abuse history, and physical health conditions. In addition, the levels of program and treatment participation of those released in 2002 are examined.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In the 2002 calendar year, VA DOC released 9,960 unique individuals from prisons and jails to the street.[13] The vast majority of these individuals were male (89 percent), and the majority were black (63 percent) (figure 6). In contrast, only 20 percent of Virginia's overall population is black.[14] Whites, who make up nearly three-quarters of the state's population, comprise only one-third of releasees. A very small number of released prisoners are another race or ethnicity. Other races include Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. Importantly, VA DOC did not start classifying incoming inmates as Hispanic until recently. The DOC has not reclassified inmates who entered prison in previous years. Therefore, many Hispanic individuals have been classified as black or white.[15]

Figure 6. Race of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 9,960)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

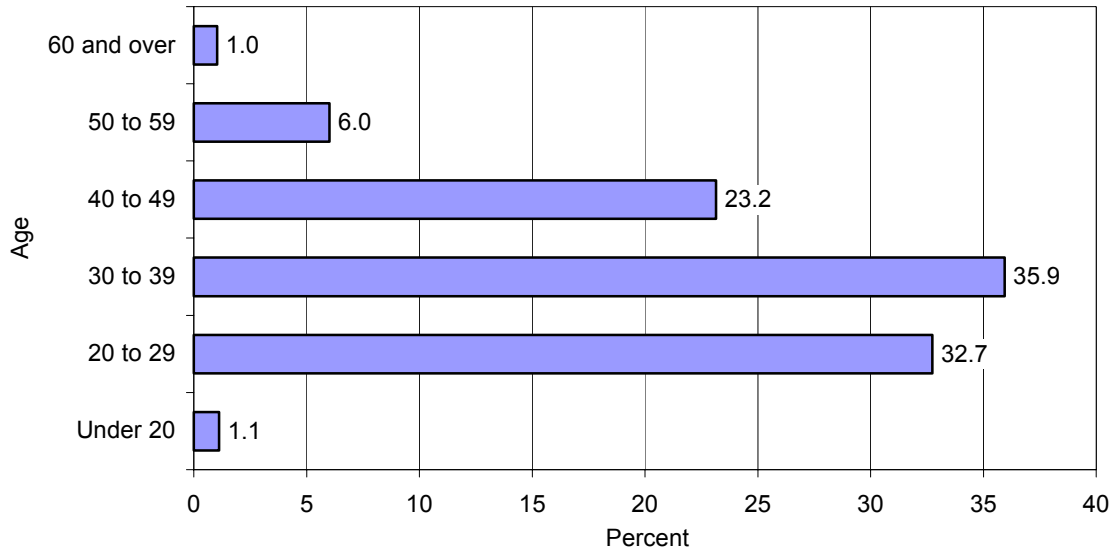
[13] Each individual is counted only once, even if VA DOC released him or her more than once in 2002.

[14] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000

[15] Of those admitted to Virginia prisons in 2003, when the Hispanic category was being used, 1.6 percent were Hispanic.

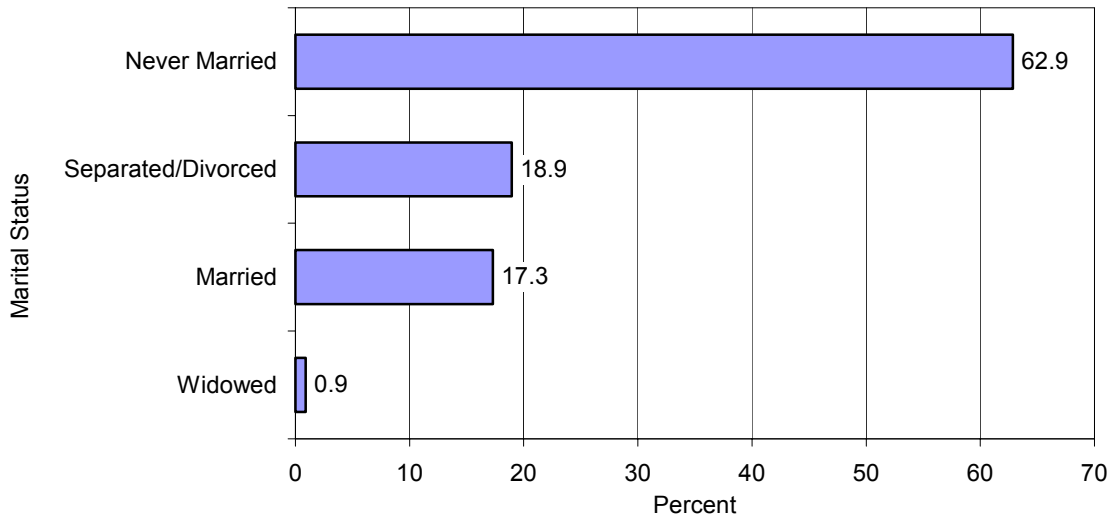
About 70 percent of 2002 releasees were under the age of 40 at the time of release (figure 7). The average age at release was 34.7 years. The majority of released prisoners had never been married, while about 19 percent were separated or divorced and 17 percent were married at the time of admission (figure 8).[16]

Figure 7. Age of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 9,960)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data

Figure 8. Marital Status of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 8,718)



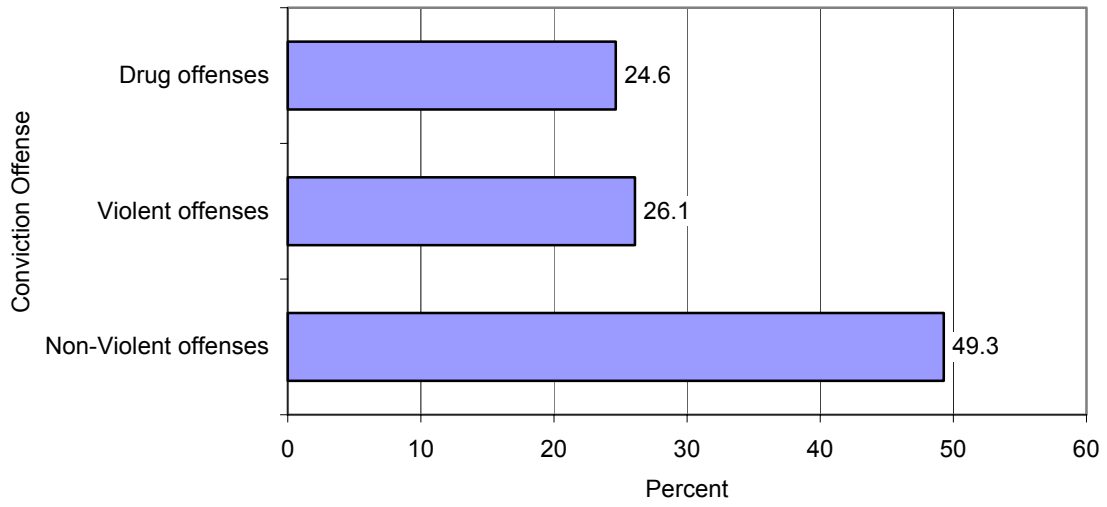
Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

[16] Marital status is self-reported at the time of commitment.

CONVICTION OFFENSE

Almost half of all prisoners released in 2002 had committed nonviolent offenses (figure 9). Most of these were property offenders, which comprise one-third of all Virginia prisoners released in 2002. Slightly more than one in four releasees were violent offenders, and about one in four were drug offenders.[17] It is likely that drug and property offenders are more prevalent in the release population than in the stock prison population because these offenders tend to serve shorter sentences.

Figure 9. Most Serious Conviction Offense of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 9,960)

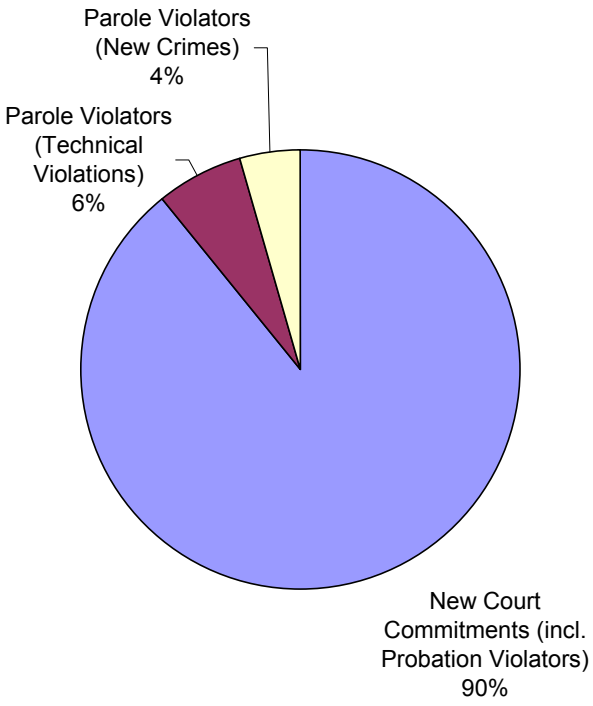


Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

[17] Nonviolent offenses include property offenses as well as extortion, bribery, and fraud. Property offenses, which comprise the largest group of nonviolent offenses, include burglary, theft, car theft, arson, and other property-related offenses. Drug offenses include possession, sale, and other drug offenses. Violent offenses include all crimes against persons, including homicide, manslaughter, assault, rape and other sexual assaults, robbery, weapons offenses, and other violent offenses.

About 10 percent of inmates released in 2002 were serving time for a parole violation (figure 10). Slightly more than half of these individuals had their parole revoked for technical violations of conditions of release. The rest were returned to prison for committing a new crime while on parole. The share of prisoners who are released after serving a prison term because of a revocation of their probation is unknown.[18] This is important because many more prisoners are released to a period of probation than are released to parole supervision.[19] Given that 40 percent of admissions to Virginia prisons in 2002 were the result of a violation of probation, it is likely that probation violators comprise a substantial share of releasees.

Figure 10. Admission Type of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 9,947)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

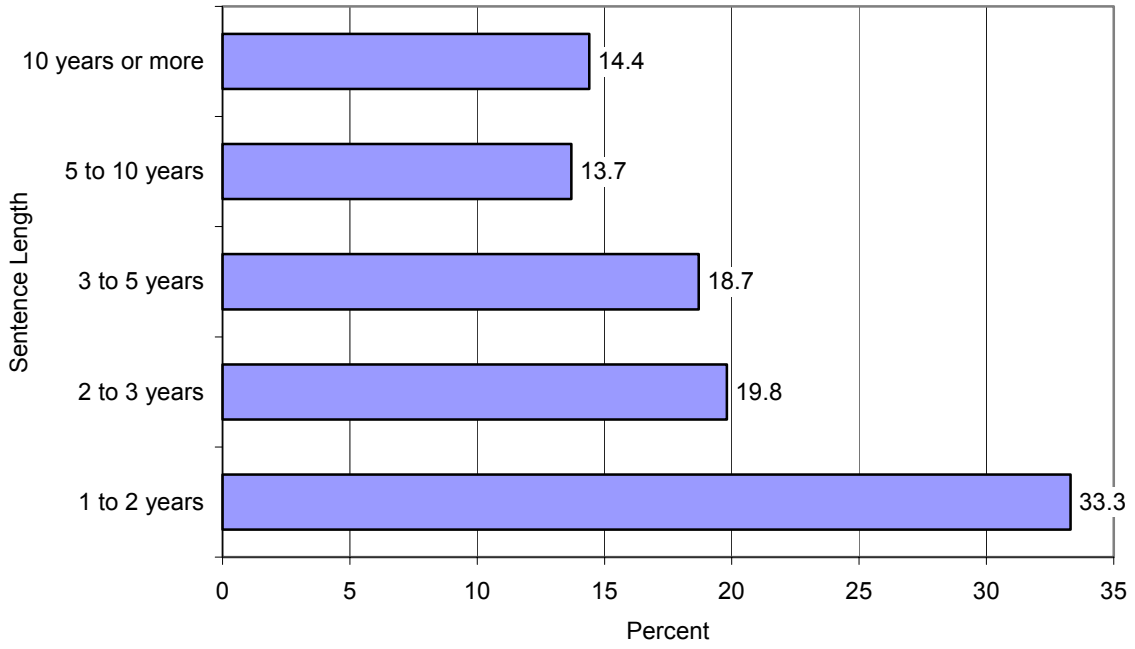
[18] While the number of admissions to prison that resulted from probation violations is known (see figure 4), the violation status is not electronically available for individuals released in 2002.

[19] Individuals are typically identified as parole violators if they are admitted to prison for a parole violation and are not given a new inmate number. In some cases, however, parole violators may be assigned a new inmate number. In these cases, parole violators are admitted as "new court commitments." For this reason, the estimate presented here of the share of releases that are parole violators may be low.

SENTENCE LENGTH

The current minimum sentence length for Virginia state prisoners is one year.[20] One-third of prisoners released in 2002 had been sentenced to one to two years (figure 11). Half of all released offenders were serving sentences of less than 2.7 years. The average sentence for individuals released in 2002 was 5.5 years.[21] Fourteen percent had been sentenced to 10 years or more.

Figure 11. Sentence Length of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 9,960)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

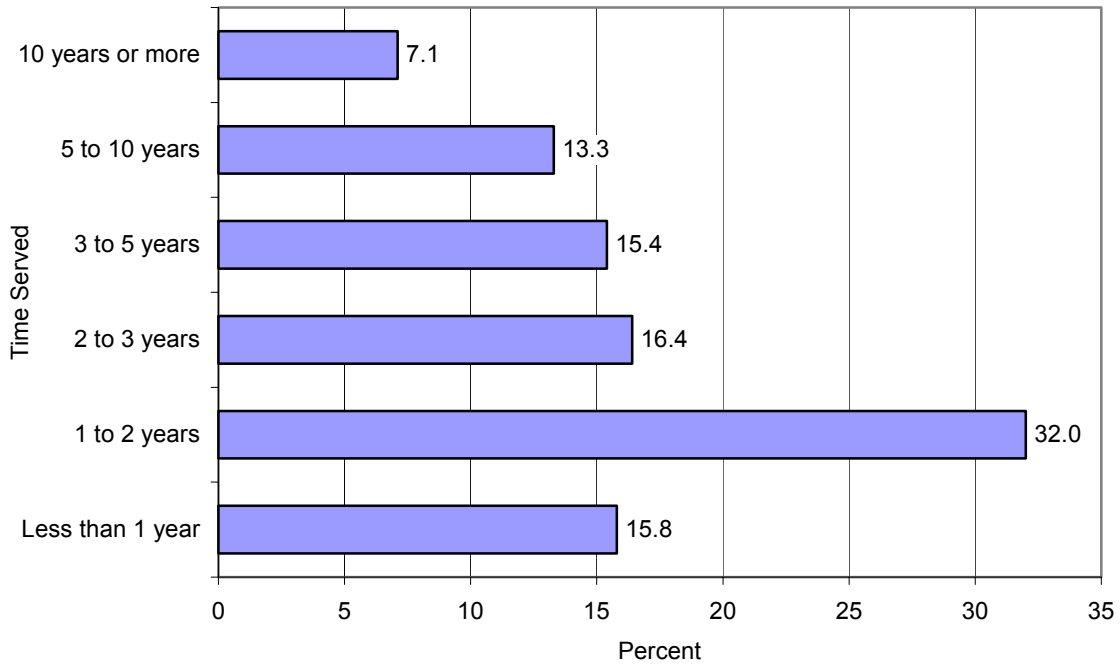
[20] See footnote 7 for a full discussion of historical changes in the minimum sentence length of state prisoners

[21] It is likely that the average sentence length of releasees is skewed upward by a small number of releasees who were serving very long sentences for crimes committed before the sentencing system was reformed.

TIME SERVED

The majority of Virginia prisoners—like most prisoners in other states—do not serve their full sentence in prison. The average length of stay of individuals released in 2002 was 3.6 years. Half of all prisoners had spent less than 2.2 years in prison at the time of release for their current offense. Sixteen percent of releases served less than one year in prison before release (figure 12). About one-third served one to two years.

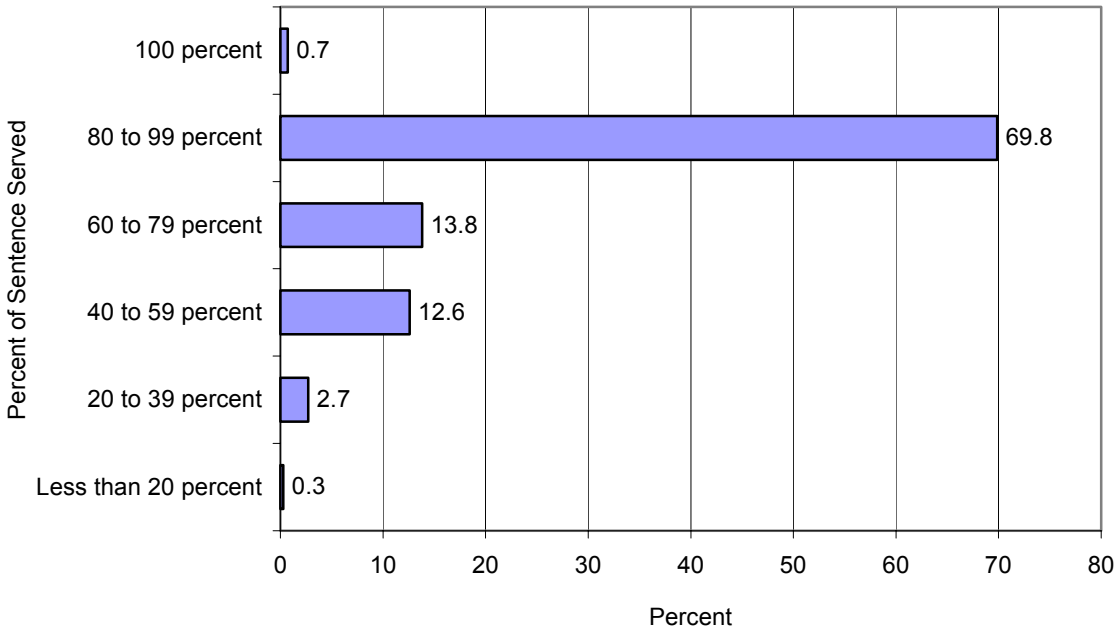
Figure 12. Time Served by Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 9,960)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

The vast majority of prisoners released in 2002 served more than 80 percent of their sentence before release (figure 13). This is due in no small part to the truth-in-sentencing reforms of the 1990s (see sidebar "Sentencing Law Overview," above). Just under 30 percent of released prisoners served less than 80 percent of their sentence. These individuals had most likely committed their offense before the reforms took affect in January of 1995. Such individuals remain eligible for parole.

Figure 13. Percentage of Sentence Served by Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 9,960)

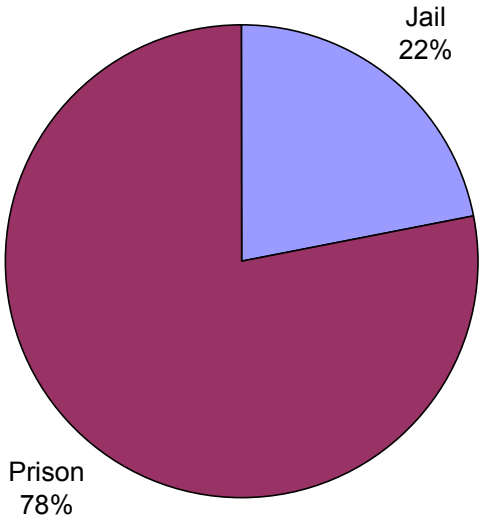


Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

RELEASE LOCATION

Most prisoners sentenced to a state prison term serve their time in a state correctional facility. However, as stated in chapter 1, 22 percent of individuals released in Virginia in 2002 were released from a local jail (figure 14). Most of these individuals served their entire state sentence in a local facility and were then released from that facility. Most often, an administrative decision is made to hold these individuals in local facilities instead of moving them to a state facility.[22] These individuals generally were sentenced to shorter sentences (2.5 years on average) and served less time (1.8 years) before release.[23] An unknown, but small, number of individuals released from a local jail served much of their sentence in a state facility and were then transferred to a local facility between 12 and 6 months prior to their expected release for participation in a work release program.

Figure 14. Release Location of Individuals Released, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

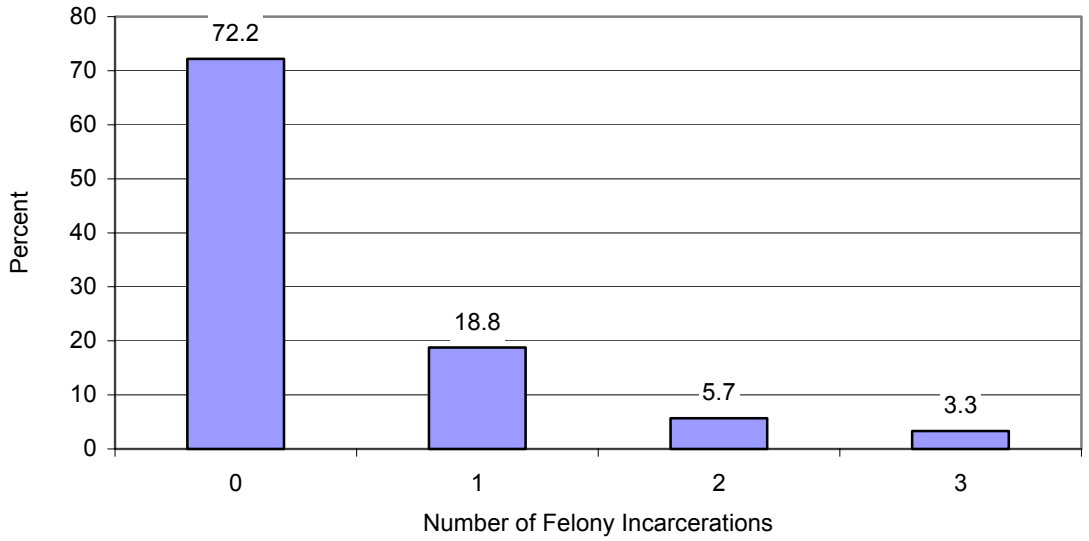
[22] Per conversations with Helen Hinshaw and Laura Daniel of the Research and Management Services Unit, VA DOC, June 17–18, 2004.

[23] On average, individuals released from jail served 81 percent of their sentence. This is lower than 85 percent because of a number of "combo" cases—individuals serving time for both felony and misdemeanor offenses—and because of a number of individuals serving time for offenses committed before January 1, 1995. These "old law" individuals are sentenced under pre-reform legislation, and are eligible for early release to parole.

PRIOR INCARCERATION

About one in four prisoners released in 2002 had previously been incarcerated in Virginia for a felony offense (figure 15). Almost three in four had not been previously incarcerated for a felony, but may have served time in prison or jail for misdemeanors or ordinance violations. Given that most state prisoners are felons, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of prisoners released in 2002 had not previously served time in a state prison, and are therefore experiencing reentry from the VA DOC for the first time.

Figure 15. Prior Felony Incarcerations of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 9,960)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

Recidivism in Virginia

Cycling in and out of prison is common among released prisoners, whether they are returned to prison while under community supervision or not. A recent study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) tracked over 38,000 prisoners with sentences of over one year who were released from prisons in 15 states, including Virginia, in 1994. According to this study, within three years of their release, nearly 52 percent of those released and tracked were back in prison for new prison sentences or for technical violations of their release.[24] The VA DOC calculated the recidivism rate of offenders released in 1998. Within three years, 29.4 percent had been reincarcerated in a Virginia prison for new crimes or technical violations of conditions of release.

EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL NEEDS

The educational attainment at time of commitment of those released from Virginia prisons in 2002 was limited (figure 16).[25] About half—52 percent—had not completed high school.[26] Seventeen percent had attained a GED, 20 percent were high school graduates, and 9 percent had some college. Less than 2

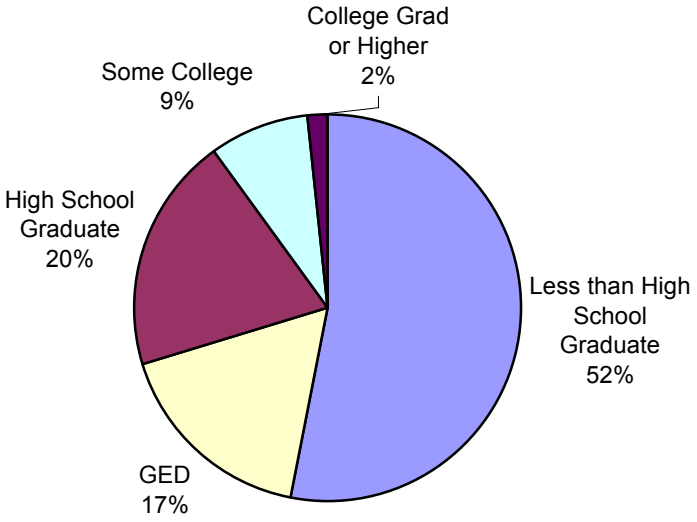
[24] Patrick A. Langan and David J. Levin. 2002. *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

[25] Because programming data are incomplete for individuals released from local jails, needs and programming conditions are reported only on the population of individuals who were released from state facilities.

[26] Last grade completed is self-reported at time of commitment.

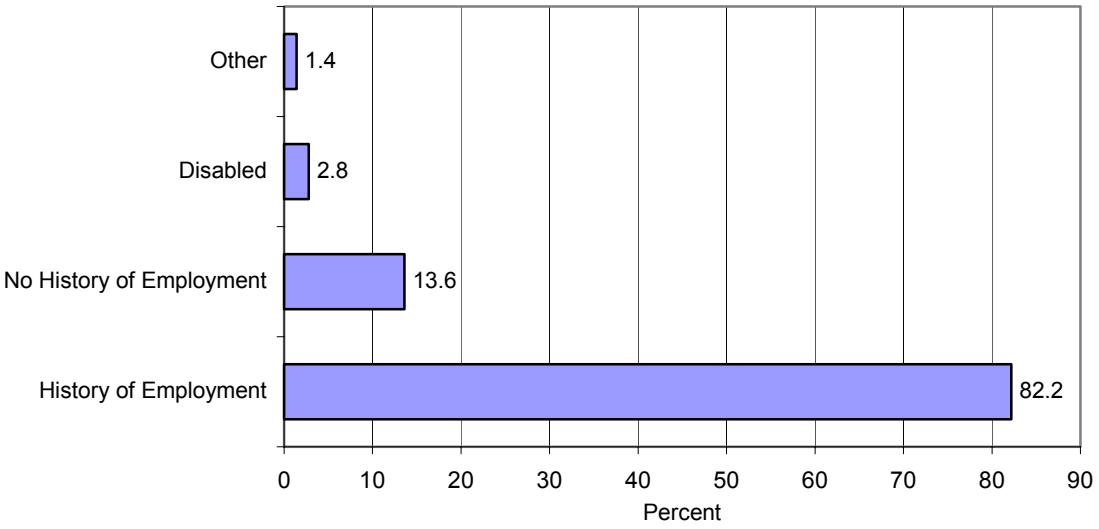
percent had college degrees or more. Most prisoners released in 2002 had some previous employment experience (figure 17). Of those, 20 percent were common laborers; another 8 percent were construction workers, and 5 percent were cooks.[27] However, almost 14 percent—one in seven releasees—had no history of employment prior to their incarceration.

Figure 16. Previous Educational Attainment of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 7,016)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

Figure 17. Employment History of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 6,932)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

[27] Prisoners' occupations are determined for the purposes of the pre-sentencing report. Probation and parole officers who complete the pre-sentencing report are instructed to report on the individuals' "trained legal occupation." It is not necessarily the case that the individual was employed in this occupation at the time of the offense or at the time of sentencing.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE HISTORY

The relationship between substance abuse and crime is well documented. Studies have found that more than half of state prisoners across the nation report that they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time they committed the offense that led to their imprisonment.[28] Furthermore, 74 percent of state prisoners nationwide who expect to be released within the next 12 months report a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse.[29]

The issues surrounding substance abuse in Virginia prisons are similar to the rest of the nation. More than three out of every four individuals—78 percent—released from Virginia state facilities in 2002 had a history of heavy alcohol and/or illegal drug use. More than one of every four prisoners (27 percent) released in 2002 were identified as having engaged in what could be troublesome levels of alcohol use in the past (figure 18).[30] Seven percent were identified as having a severe enough problem with alcohol use that they were eligible for treatment in a therapeutic community. Three in every four inmates released in 2002 had a history of illegal drug use (figure 19). Cocaine and marijuana were the most often sited drugs used. One in every eight prisoners released in 2002 had heavy drug use histories that made them eligible for a therapeutic community. It is important to note that with the exception of the 13 percent of individuals who were identified as eligible for a therapeutic community, the extent of drug use among individuals released in 2002 is unknown. Use levels may not be problematic for all of those identified in figure 19 as having a history of use. In fiscal year 2003, 21,090 individuals under supervision in the community were screened through the Drug Screening and Treatment Program (DSAT). Of these individuals, 43 percent likely had a substance abuse disorder that warranted a full assessment, education, and treatment.[31]

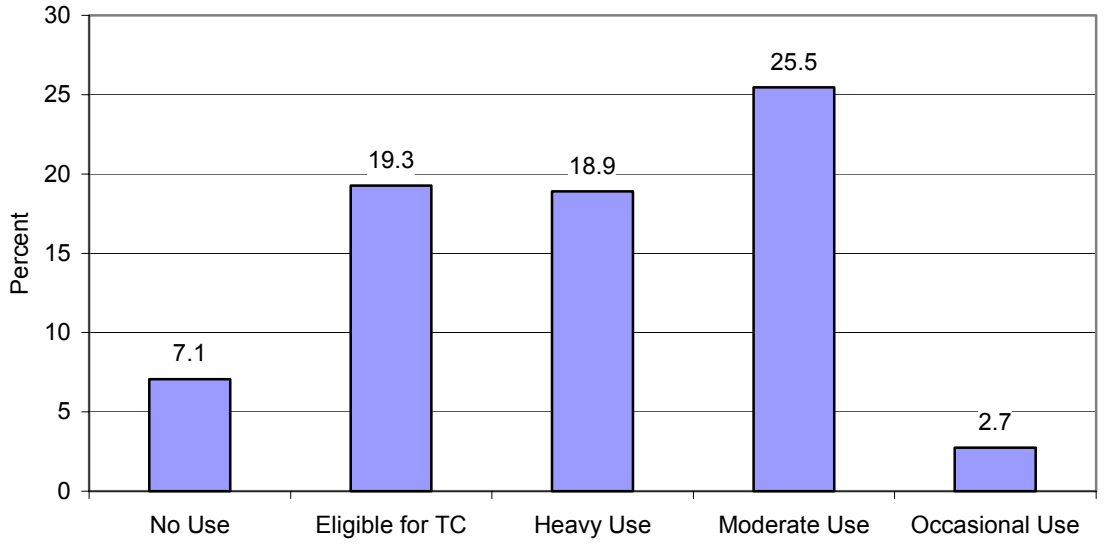
[28] Christopher J. Mumola. 1999. "Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997." *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*. NCJ 172871. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Individual alcohol and drug use history information is most often from medical histories and/or pre-sentencing and field reporting. "Extent unknown" identifies individuals who are known to have used alcohol in the past, but whose level of use is unknown. For the purposes of this report, individuals identified in figure 12 as "Eligible for a Therapeutic Community" and "Heavy Use" are considered to have engaged in "troublesome" levels of alcohol use.

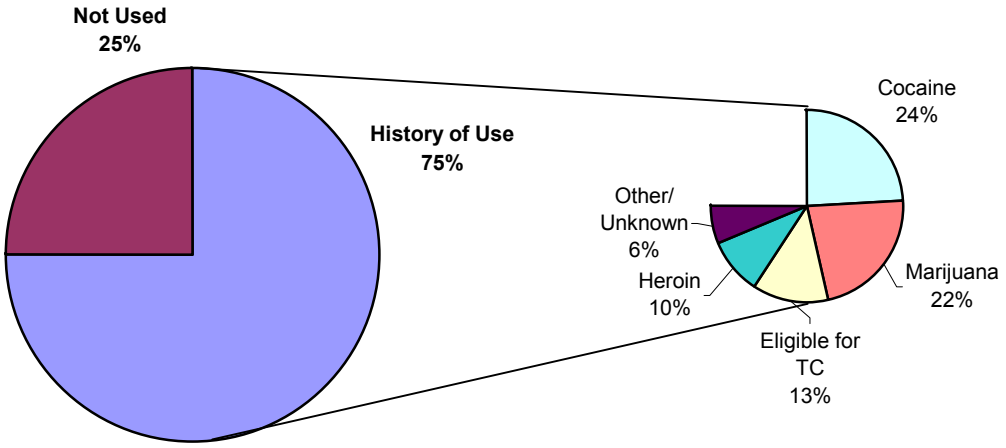
[31] These included individuals who committed a felony on or after January 1, 2000, and were either entering supervision after a period of incarceration or were sentenced only to probation (per email and telephone communications with Helen Hinshaw, VA DOC, July 29, 2004).

Figure 18. Alcohol Use of Prisoners Released in 2002 (n = 6,897)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

Figure 19. Drug Use of Prisoners Released in 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Prisoners nationwide suffer from a range of health problems. In 1997, nearly one-third (31 percent) of state prisoners reported having a learning or speech disability, a hearing or vision problem, or a mental or

physical health condition.[32] Many prisoners suffer from co-occurring and chronic mental and physical health disorders that make it difficult for them to transition from prison to free society. A 2002 report to Congress on the physical and mental health conditions of soon-to-be-released prisoners by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care found that tens of thousands of prisoners are released to communities every year with communicable and chronic diseases that are left largely untreated.[33]

VA DOC data indicate that 19 percent of prisoners released in 2002 had been diagnosed with a chronic or communicable disease.[34] These diseases are substantially more prevalent in the prison population than in the general population. It is notable is that 2.9 percent of the prisoners released in 2002 had multiple physical health diagnoses. These represent 15.3 percent of diagnosed individuals. In Virginia, 13 percent of prisoners released in 2002 suffered from at least one chronic condition, such as asthma, diabetes, or hypertension (figure 20). Seven percent have been diagnosed with at least one communicable disease or condition, such as HIV, AIDS, or hepatitis. Six percent of the release population—or 596 individuals—have been diagnosed with some type of hepatitis. This is likely an underestimate, as testing for this disease is not required in Virginia, and nationally, about 18 percent of soon-to-be released state prisoners are infected with hepatitis-C alone.[35]

A specific area of heightened concern is the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in prison populations. Nationally, in 1999, 2.2 percent of state prisoners were HIV positive or had AIDS; the overall rate of confirmed AIDS cases among the nation's prison population was about four times the rate in the U.S. general population (0.52 percent versus 0.13 percent).[36] In Virginia, 1.3 percent of the 2002 release population was HIV positive or diagnosed with AIDS. Testing for HIV and AIDS is not mandatory for Virginia prisoners. Therefore, the percentages cited here possibly under estimate the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Virginia's release population.

While data on the mental health conditions of prisoners released in 2002 are unavailable, the Health Services Department of the VA DOC has estimated that 15 percent of Virginia prisoners have some form of mental illness or mental disorder.[37] This is similar to national estimates of mental illness among the incarcerated population.[38]

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[32] Laura Maruschak and Allen Beck. 2001. *Medical Problems of Inmates, 1997*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. NCJ 181644. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

[33] National Commission on Correctional Health Care. 2002. *The Health Status of Soon-To-Be-Released Inmates: A Report to Congress*. Volume 1. March.

[34] Health data are reported for all individuals who were released from both state and local facilities in 2002, including individuals who died or were executed. Because of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations, health data cannot be linked to personally identifiable information, such as release status. For this reason, analysis of the prevalence of health conditions includes these individuals. Individuals who had been diagnosed with more than one condition or disease are counted for each condition.

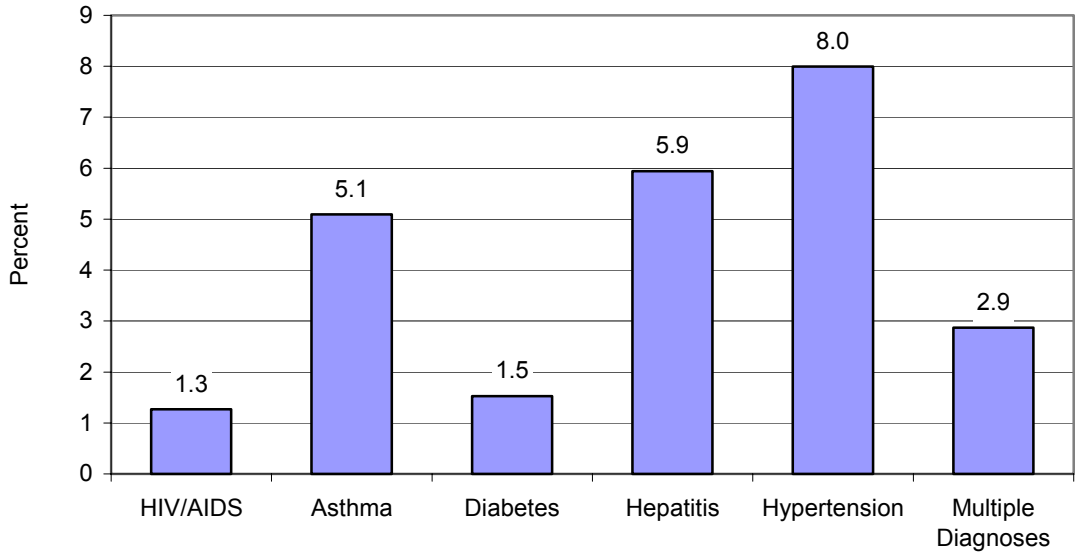
[35] Ibid.

[36] Laura Maruschak. 2002. *HIV in Prisons, 2000*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. NCJ 196023. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

[37] Per conversation with Robin Hulbert, Mental Health Program Director, VA DOC, June 2, 2004.

[38] Paula M. Ditton. 1999. "Mental Health and Treatment of Inmates and Probationers." Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. NCJ 174463. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Figure 20. Physical Diagnoses of Prisoners Released in 2002 (n = 10,030)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data

IN-PRISON PROGRAMMING

Historically, prison programming has played an important role in American corrections.[39] Many prison administrators and others have believed that providing educational and vocational programming to prisoners increases the likelihood of prisoners' successful return to the community. Recent research supports this rationale, showing that a range of prison-based programming can contribute to positive postrelease outcomes for prisoners, including reduced recidivism.[40] In-prison educational and vocational programming might serve to offset the barriers posed by the limited educational backgrounds and work histories of Virginia's released prisoners.

A range of programs and services are provided to Virginia state prisoners, including vocational and educational programs, work activities, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and general life skills. Data on the participation by individuals released from VA DOC in 2002 in a select set of programs are discussed below.[41]

[39] Francis T. Cullen and Paul Gendreau. 2000. "Assessing Correctional Rehabilitation: Policy, Practice, and Prospects." In *Criminal Justice 2000,* vol. 3: *Policies, Processes, and Decisions of the Criminal Justice System*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

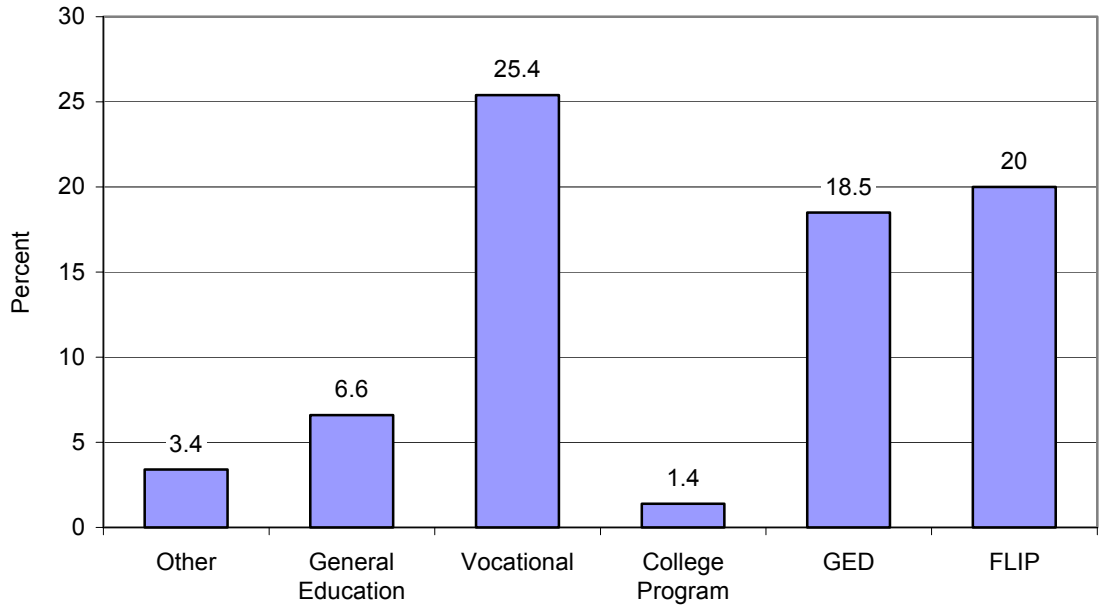
[40] Gerald G. Gaes, Timothy J. Flanagan, Laurence L. Motiuk, and Lynn Stewart. 1999. "Adult Correctional Treatment." In *Prisons,* edited by M. Tonry and J. Petersilia. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[41] See the VA DOC web site for a more comprehensive list of programming provided by the VA DOC: http://www.vadoc.state.va.us/offenders/institutions/programs/default.htm

Vocational and Educational Programs

The Virginia Department of Correctional Education (DCE) provides vocational and educational programs at Virginia's correctional institutions. Forty-six percent of those released from Virginia state prisons in 2002 had participated in some kind of vocational or educational program while they were in prison. Among prisoners released in 2002, vocational programs, such as electricity, masonry, or road gang work had the highest levels of participation (figure 21).[42] Additionally, one in five releasees participated in the Functional Literacy Program (FLP), which targets inmates who have tested literacy levels below the eighth grade level. FLP aims to provide participants with educational skills that are necessary to function independently in society, including reading, writing, and arithmetic. The program incorporates incentives to encourage participation, including payment for time spent in class. Participation in FLP is also one of the factors considered when earned good time credit is awarded to an inmate.

Figure 21. In-Prison Vocational and Educational Programming Experiences of Released Prisoners, 2002 (n = 7,773)



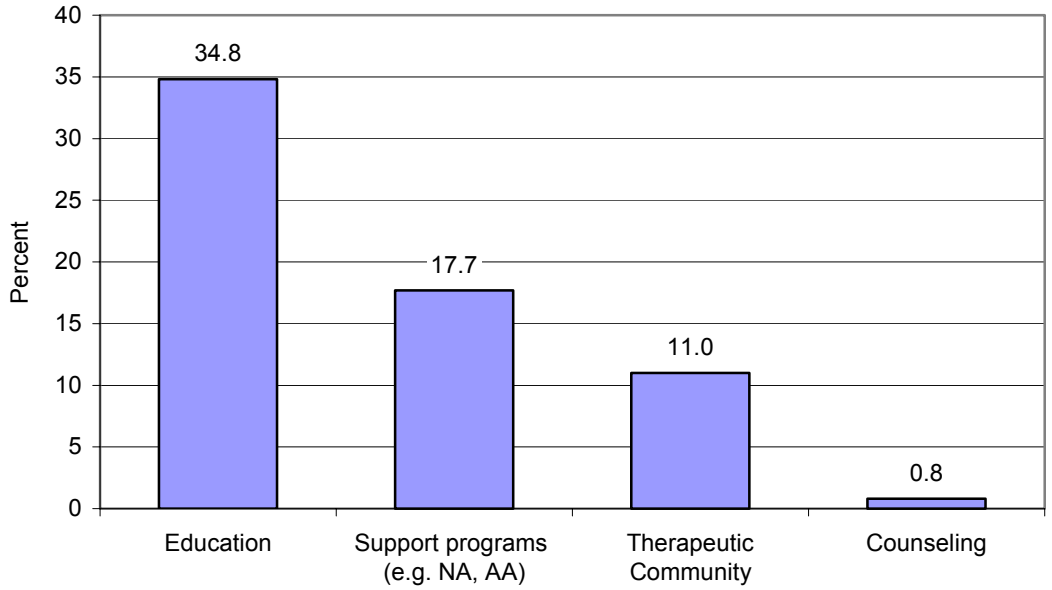
Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

[42] Individuals who participated in more than one program are counted for each program in which they participated.

Substance Abuse Programming

The VA DOC provides a variety of programs and treatment options for prisoners with substance abuse histories. These include groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, education, treatment programs, and therapeutic communities. Less than half of all releasees—43 percent—have participated in at least one of these drug and alcohol-related programs. Drug and alcohol education programs (as opposed to formal treatment or counseling) have the highest levels of participation among releasees (figure 22). [43] Notably, while 78 percent of released prisoners have a history of alcohol or drug use, less than 12 percent of releasees received formal, professional treatment (i.e., treatment in a therapeutic community or counseling) before leaving prison. As previously stated, the extent of drug use levels of individuals released in 2002 is unknown. It is possible that not all 78 percent had use levels that necessitated treatment.

Figure 22. Substance Abuse Program Participation of Prisoners Released in 2002 (n = 7,773)



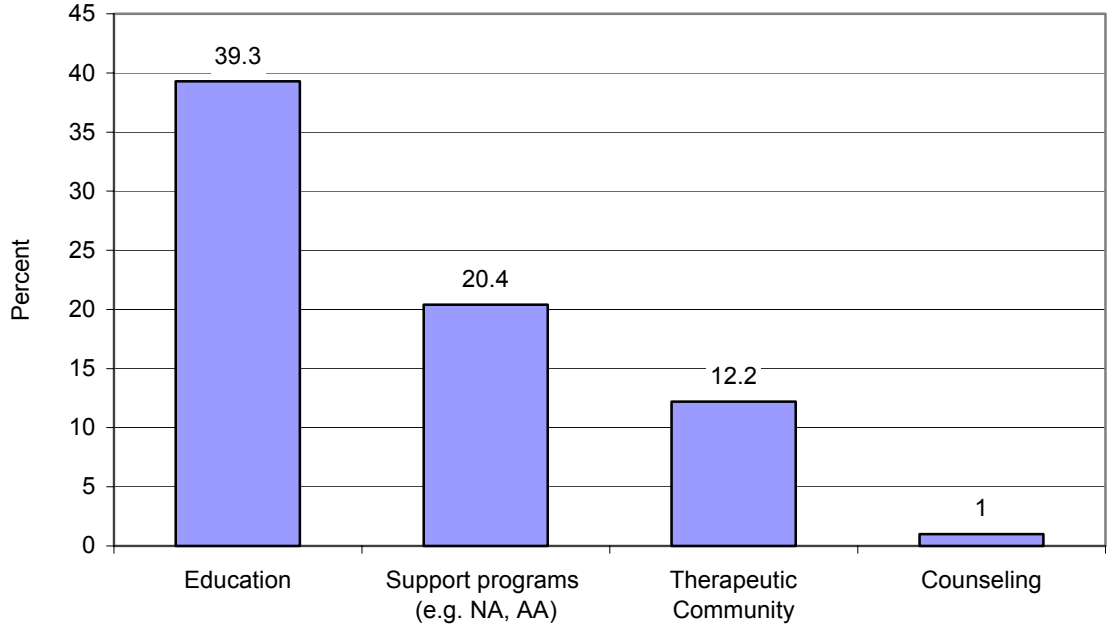
Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

Of those individuals released from state facilities who have histories of heavy alcohol and/or illegal drug use, a slightly larger share—48 percent—have participated in at least one of these drug and alcohol-related programs. For this population, drug and alcohol education programs are also the most frequently accessed (figure 23).[44] Notably, only 13 percent of this likely target population received formal, professional treatment (i.e., therapeutic community or counseling) before leaving prison. Of those whose were identified as having a severe enough problem with alcohol or illegal drug use that they were eligible for treatment in a therapeutic community, 17 percent were treated in a therapeutic community before release.

[43] Some individuals participated in more than one program. These individuals are counted in each program type in which they participated.

[44] Some individuals participated in more than one program. These individuals are counted in each program type that they participated in.

Figure 23. Substance Abuse Program Participation of Prisoners with Needs Released in 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

CHAPTER 3

Release and Supervision Policies and Practices

As Virginia's prison population has grown over the past two decades, so too has the population of released prisoners. (See chapter 1.) In 2002, 9,960 people were released from VA DOC facilities to the community—almost three times the number released two decades ago (3,582 in 1980).

The first year after release is a critical period during which released prisoners are susceptible to reoffending, emphasizing the importance of postrelease supervision.[45] Postrelease supervision ideally serves two primary functions with regard to preventing such recidivism: (1) monitoring released prisoners for public safety purposes; and (2) promoting the successful reintegration of prisoners back into society. This chapter examines how individuals are released from Virginia prisons, as well as how they are supervised postrelease.

HOW PRISONERS ARE RELEASED

All prisoners are released through either a discretionary or nondiscretionary (mandatory) process. With discretionary release, the prisoner's release date is decided by a parole board, and is usually followed by a period of supervision. The date for mandatory releases is determined by statute rather than by a panel or board. Many individuals are released in a nondiscretionary manner and also supervised postrelease.

The vast majority of Virginia inmates are released by some nondiscretionary function after they have served a minimum period of time in prison. How an individual is released and supervised after release in Virginia is determined largely by the date of his or her offense. Discretionary parole release was abolished in Virginia in 1995. Individuals serving time for an offense committed before January 1, 1995, ("old law" offenders) are eligible for early release and supervision by parole; however, not all eligible inmates are granted parole by the Parole Board. "Old law" offenders who are denied early release are released to mandatory parole when they have served all but six months of their sentence, including any earned good time credits.

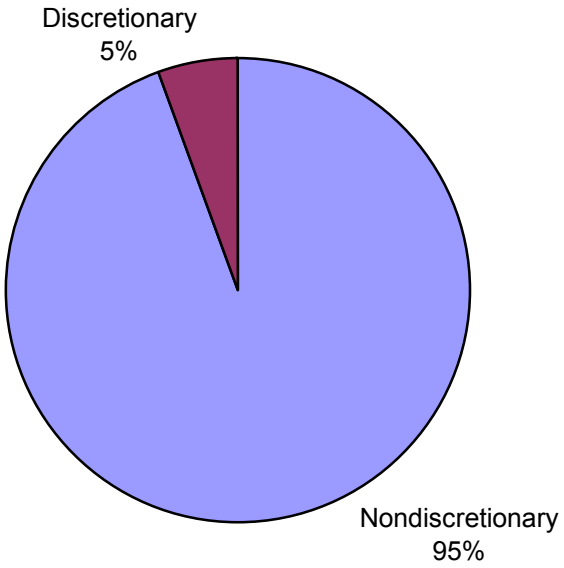
Individuals serving time for an offense committed on or after January 1, 1995, are not eligible for parole. As a result, very few felons are currently released at the discretion of a parole board. Those individuals who committed their offense after January 1, 1995, must serve at least 85 percent of their entire sentence.[46] Most are supervised after release by probation. In Virginia, the Division of Community Corrections of the Department of Corrections is responsible for both parole and probation supervision.

Accordingly, of those released in Virginia in 2002, a very small number—5 percent—appeared before the Virginia Parole Board, which reviewed their application and decided to approve their release. The remaining 95 percent experienced a nondiscretionary release (figure 24). As previously stated, one-quarter of all state sentenced offenders released in 2002 were released from a local jail. Of these individuals, 98 percent were released through a mandatory function.

[45] Patrick A. Langan and David J. Levin. 2002. *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

[46] A prison sentence is considered served when an individual has served time and earned sentence credits equal to their entire sentence. As previously discussed, inmates can earn "sentence credits" for good time amounting to up to 15 percent of their sentence.

Figure 24. Mandatory versus Discretionary Releases, 2002 (n = 9,960)

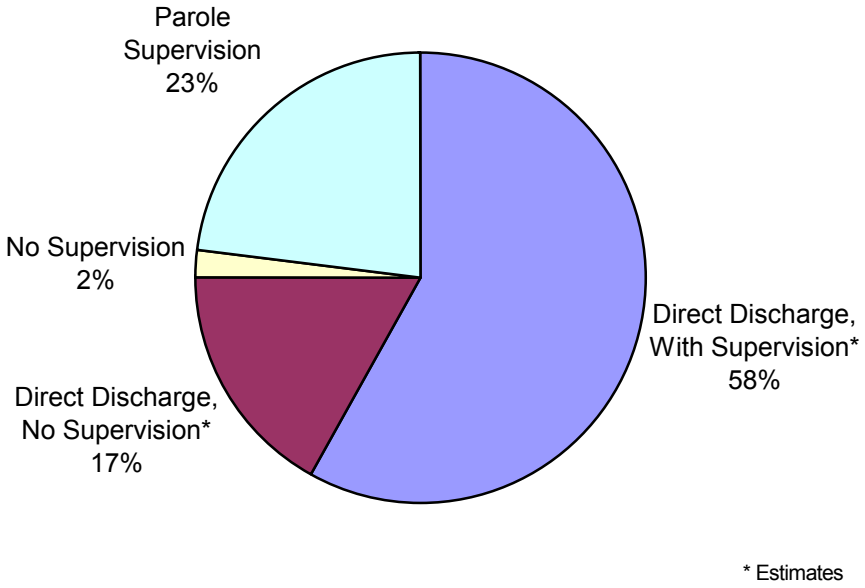


Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

PREVALANCE OF POSTRELEASE SUPERVISION

Most individuals released in Virginia in 2002 (81 percent) were subject to a period of supervision in the community. About one in four were released to parole (figure 25). Most of these individuals were released by mandatory parole, with a small number released to discretionary parole. When discretionary parole was abolished in 1995, judges were given the option of sentencing individuals to periods of postrelease supervision, which operates like probation. In addition to this option, judges often impose suspended sentences at the time of sentencing, which result in a period of probation after release from prison. The Virginia DOC currently does not electronically track releases to probation; all individuals who are released in this way are categorized along with the "direct discharges." About three-quarters (78 percent) of nonparole releases—or 58 percent of all releases—are supervised by probation after serving a prison term.[47] A small number (2 percent) of individuals are released by court order or other methods and are unsupervised.

Figure 25. Percentage of Prison Releases by Supervision, 2002 (n = 9,960)



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

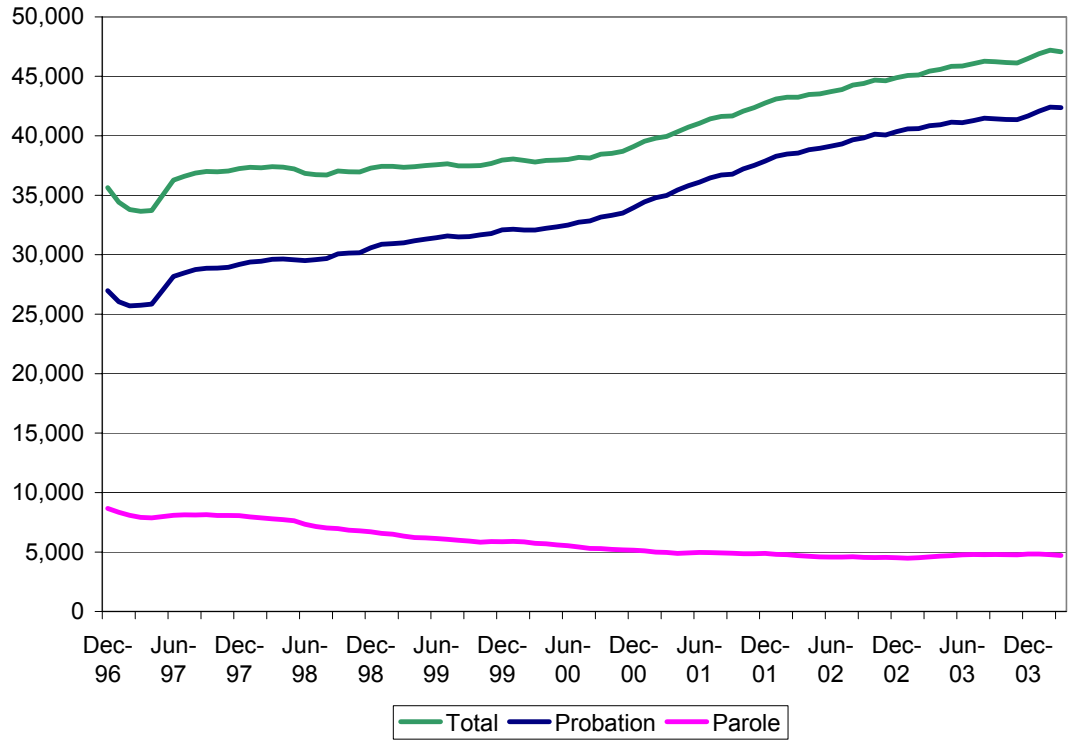
[47] Per email communication with Helen Hinshaw and Laura Daniel of the VA DOC Research and Management Services Unit, April 7, 2004.

POSTRELEASE SUPERVISION

As previously discussed (see sidebar "Virginia Department of Corrections" in chapter 1), the Division of Community Corrections of the VA DOC supervises inmates under parole, probation, and postrelease supervision. Parolees are under the authority of the Virginia Parole Board; probationers and those under postrelease supervision are under the authority of the courts.

The number of parolees in Virginia has decreased since the abolition of parole in 1995. However, the number of individuals under community supervision in Virginia has increased over this time period, as the numbers of probationers has increased (figure 26). This is due in part to the increases in the number of individuals released from prison. However, the population of supervised individuals also includes those who have not served time in prison for the current offense, but who were sentenced directly to a period of probation supervision. On December 31, 2003, there were 4,834 individuals on parole and another 41,663 probationers, for a total of 46,497 individuals under supervision in Virginia. The average caseload size for supervision officers in 2003 was 77 cases per officer.

Figure 26. Population under Supervision, 1996–2004



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

To remain in the community, parolees and postrelease probationers must abide by the conditions of their release. These may include special, individualized conditions set by the Parole Board or judge. Conditions often include restrictions on movement, regular reporting to an officer, and seeking and maintaining employment.

Parole and probation officers respond to individuals' failure to abide by conditions of release by imposing sanctions. The Parole Board or judges can return parolees and probationers to prison for violations of the conditions of their release. The Division of Community Corrections encourages the "purposeful and proportionate" use of intermediate sanctions, which may include verbal or written reprimands, increased contact with an officer, restricted privileges, increased substance abuse testing, the imposition of a curfew, or required participation in treatment programs or a day reporting center.[48] In addition, in districts participating in a pilot program, officers may place violators in a secure facility, other than a state prison, such as a diversion center or a detention center. The number of individuals who were returned to prison for a violation of parole or probation, including both technical violations and new offenses, has increased in recent years from 4,273 in 1999 to 5,238 in 2002.[49] However, the share of admissions to prison comprised of probation and parole violators changed little during this period. In 1999, 45 percent of prison admissions were probation and parole violators. In 2002, this population comprised 46 percent of admissions.[50]

[48] Division of Community Corrections. 2003. "A Balanced Approach." Virginia Department of Corrections.

[49] Per data provided by the VA DOC Research and Management Services Unit.

[50] Per email communication with Helen Hinshaw and Laura Daniel of the VA DOC Research and Management Services Unit, April 7, 2004.

CHAPTER 4

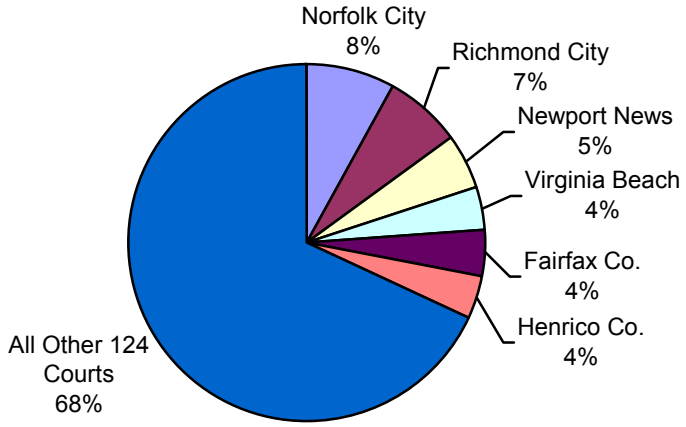
Geographic Distribution of Released Prisoners

The community context of prisoner reentry can have an important influence on postrelease success or failure. It stands to reason that ex-prisoners returning to communities with high unemployment rates, active drug markets, and few services may be more likely to relapse and recidivate.[51] This chapter presents findings from a geographic analysis of returning prisoners by county and examines this reentry distribution in relation to the socioeconomic characteristics of Richmond and Norfolk Cities—the two counties with the highest percentages of prisoners released in 2002.

REENTRY IN VIRGINIA

The vast majority of those released from Virginia prisons in 2002 returned to communities in the state. Six of Virginia's 193 county and city courts sentenced 32 percent of inmates released in 2002 (figure 27 and maps 1 and 2).[52] These six counties also account for 32 percent of the state's overall population. Two courts—Norfolk and Richmond Cities— accounted for 15 percent of those released, but only 6 percent of the state's population. These two courts committed almost 1,500 of those released in 2002. Almost 8 percent of all releases (764 individuals) were committed by Norfolk City Court, and just over 7 percent of the released population (722 individuals) were committed by Richmond City Court. The flow of prisoners was further concentrated in a small number of communities within these cities.

Figure 27. Percentage of VA DOC Releases by Committing Jurisdiction, 2002

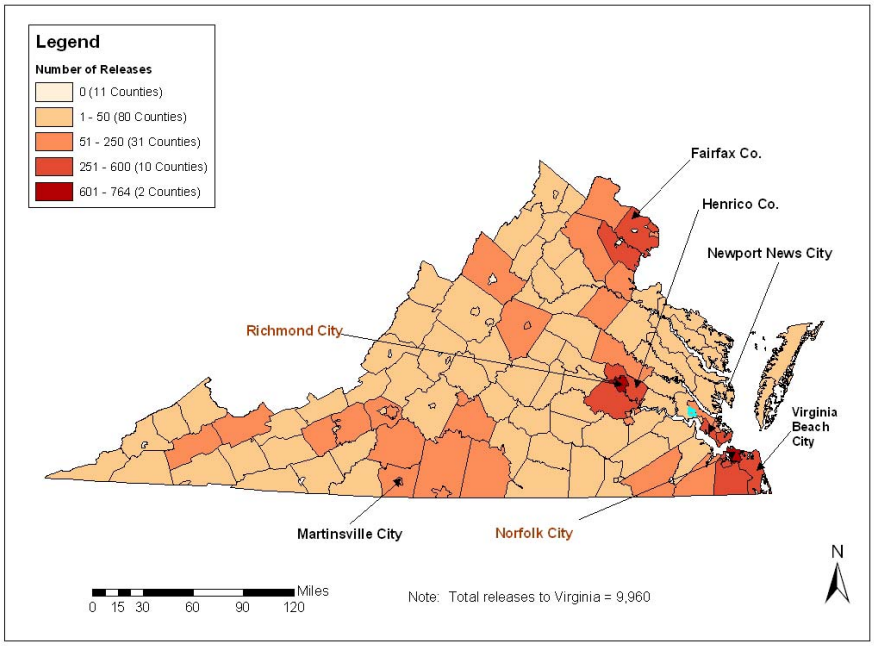


Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

[51] Stephen D. Gottfredson and Ralph B. Taylor. 1988. "Community Contexts and Criminal Offenders." In *Communities and Crime Reduction,* edited by Tim Hope and Margaret Shaw. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

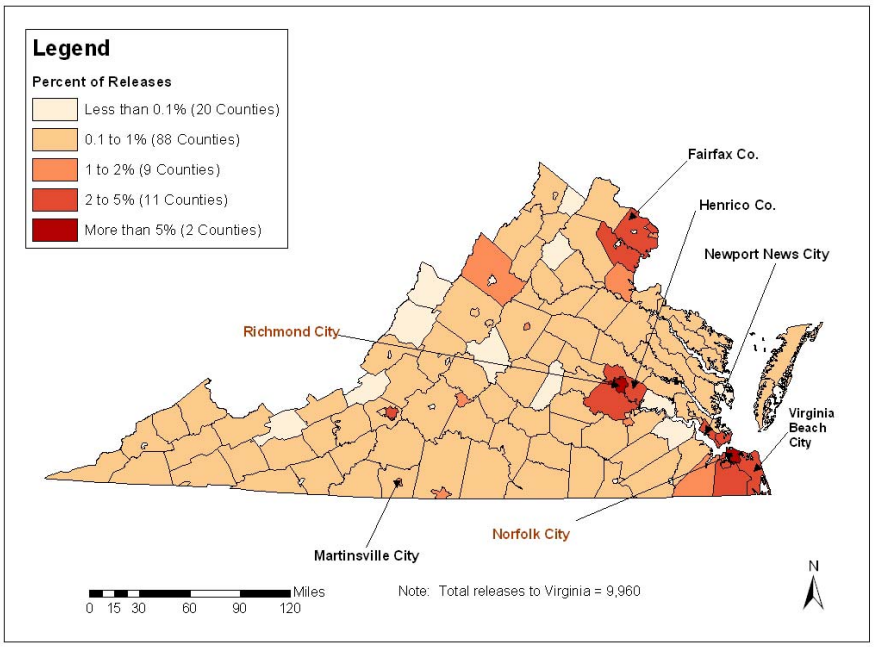
[52] Data on counties and localities to which prisoners released from VA DOC return are limited. The court of commitment is available for all releases, so it is used for all statewide analysis. While the court from which an individual was committed to prison is not a perfect proxy for the county to which that individual will return upon release, conversations with state officials suggest that this is a reasonable proxy in Virginia.

Map 1. Number of VA DOC Releases by Committing Jurisdiction, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

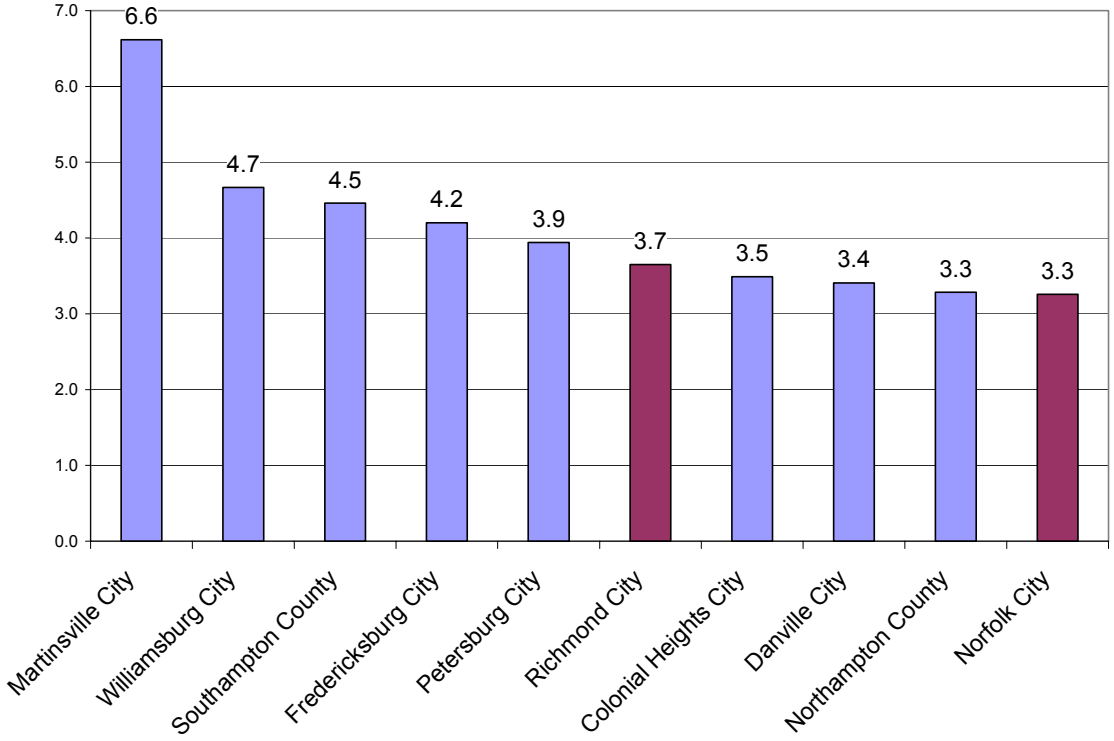
Map 2. Percentage of VA DOC Releases by Committing Jurisdiction, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

An examination of the concentration (e.g., rates per 1,000 residents) of released prisoners committed by Virginia county courts presents a slightly different picture. Whereas Norfolk City had the highest *number* of prisoners released in 2002, Martinsville City topped the list with the highest *concentration* of released prisoners (figure 28). There were 6.6 prisoners released for every 1,000 residents of Martinsville City (total population: 15,263). Richmond City was sixth in concentration, with 3.7 prisoners released per 1,000 residents; Norfolk City was ranked tenth, with 3.3 releases per 1,000 residents.

Figure 28. Top 10 Courts by Number of VA DOC Releases per 1,000 Residents, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

RICHMOND AND NORFOLK CITIES

Communities to which large numbers of ex-offenders return often exhibit high levels of poverty, unemployment, and crime, with limited available services. Within metropolitan areas, released prisoners are often clustered in a few disadvantaged neighborhoods.[53] The cities to which the greatest percent of Virginia prisoners returned—Richmond and Norfolk—have poverty rates more than twice that of the state of

[53] James P. Lynch and William J. Sabol. 2001. *Prisoner Reentry in Perspective.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Nancy G. La Vigne and Vera Kachnowski. 2003. "A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Maryland." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute; Nancy G. La Vigne and Cynthia A. Mamalian. 2003. "A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Virginia as a whole, and are characterized by higher than average unemployment and numbers of female-headed households, and higher than average crime rates. Even within these cities, returning prisoners are clustered in a few neighborhoods that tend to be more disadvantaged.

Mapping Richmond and Norfolk Prisoners

Street-level addresses are unavailable for one-third of prisoners released from the VA DOC. The analyses presented here are restricted to prisoners for whom the DOC had a valid Richmond or Norfolk address on record. These include individuals committed by Richmond and Norfolk City courts. The addresses on record were from multiple sources. Most of the addresses used were from the Division of Community Corrections. One-third (33 percent) of the addresses were reported by prisoners to their probation or parole officer at the time they reported to supervision after their release. Addresses for 60 percent of the releasees included in these maps were reported by the prisoner prior to release. For another 8 percent, the address used for this analysis came from their pre-sentencing report.

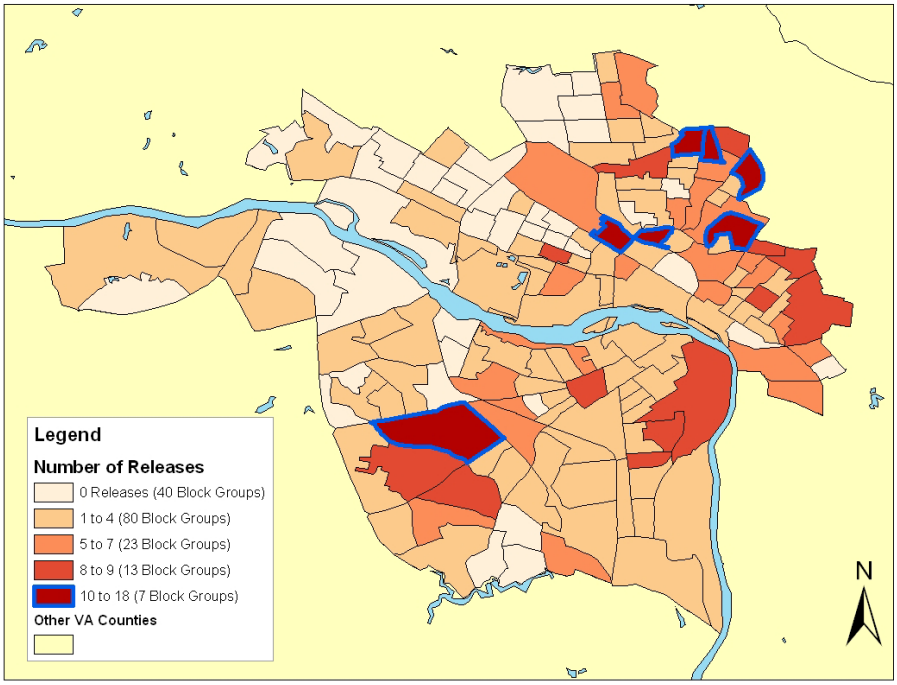
Individuals with an address on record with VA DOC may be slightly different than those without addresses. Because most of the addresses were reported from the Division of Community Corrections, individuals for whom addresses are available are more likely to be supervised after release. A comparison of individuals for whom we had a valid address and those for whom no address was available found that individuals with addresses are more likely to be violent offenders, had longer sentences, and served more time in prison, on average, than those for whom no address was available. In addition, the vast majority of the mapped individuals were released from state facilities and not from local jails. These differences are statistically significant.

RICHMOND CITY

In 2002, 724 individuals released from VA DOC had Richmond addresses. The geographic locations for 480 of these fell within the city boundaries.[54] Within Richmond, about half of all prisoners returned to just 15 percent of the city's 163 block groups. The 10 block groups with the highest numbers of returning prisoners house 23 percent of those returning to Richmond. As can be seen in map 3, there are a few clusters of block groups with higher numbers of returning prisoners in the northeast, east, and southwest areas of the city. The Richmond block group with the highest number of returning prisoners houses 4 percent of all prisoners returned to Richmond. The 20 highest block groups are home to 40 percent of all returning prisoners (map 4).

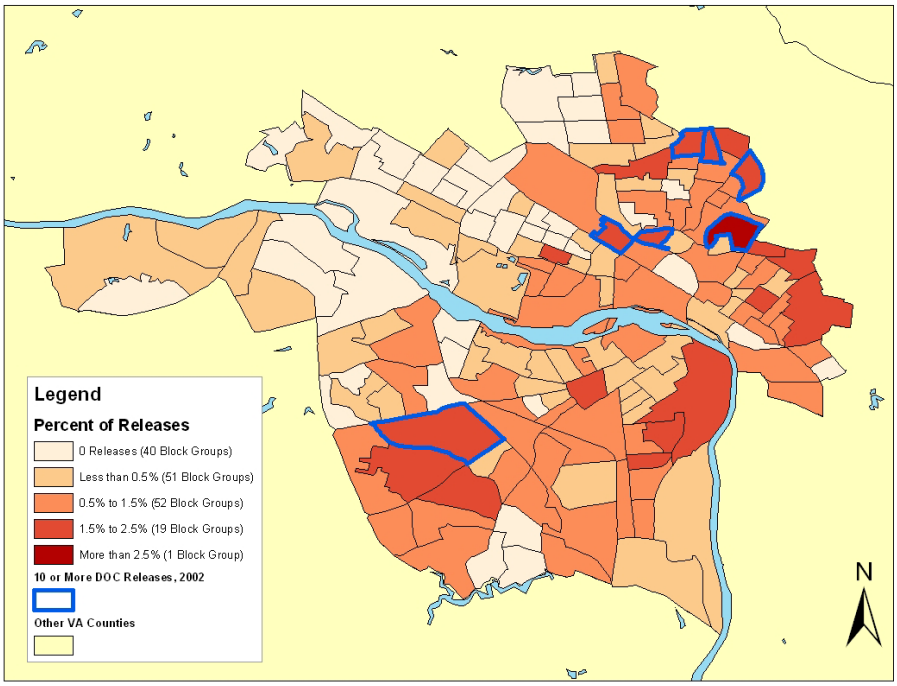
[54] This is 66 percent of those with Richmond City addresses. A large number of the Richmond addresses appeared to fall outside the city boundaries, within Henrico County.

Map 3. Number of Prisoner Releases to Richmond by Census Block Group, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

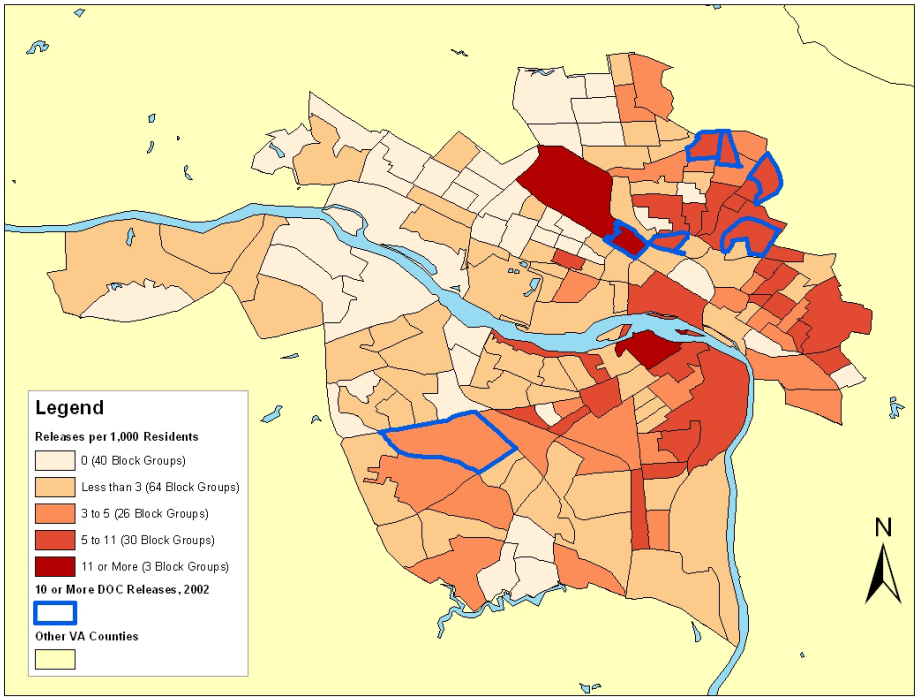
Map 4. Percentage of Releases to Richmond by Census Block Group, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

The picture of the concentrations of returning prisoners is slightly different than previous maps (map 5). The neighborhoods with the highest numbers of returning prisoners appear high and generally are home to 5 to 11 released prisoners per 1,000 residents. However, three block groups that are not among the highest in *number* of returning prisoners do have high *concentrations* of prisoners, relative to their population. These block groups house between 11 and 18 prisoners per 1,000 residents.

Map 5. Releases to Richmond by Census Block Group per 1,000 Residents, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

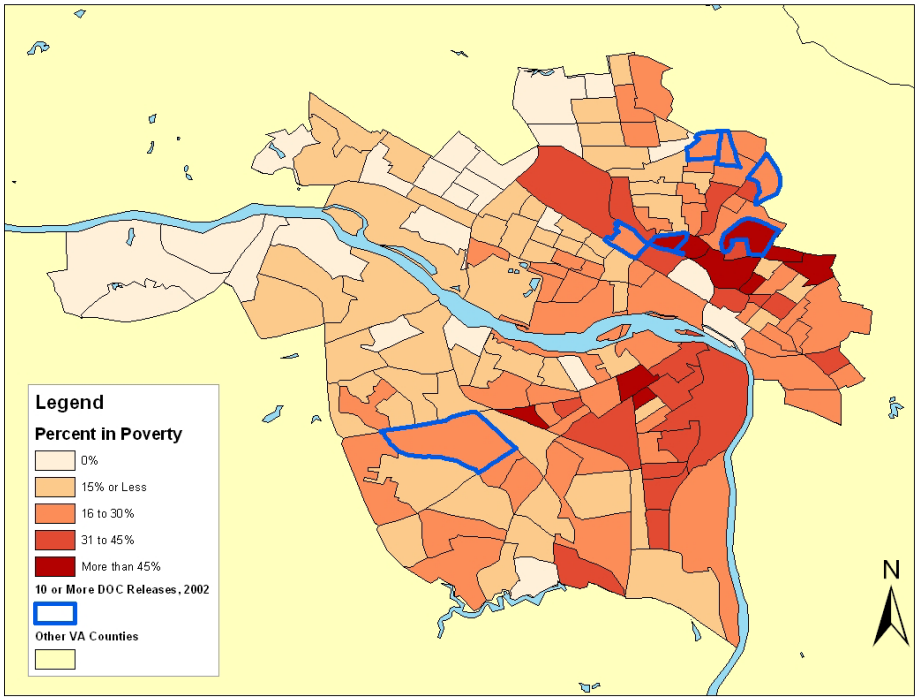
Maps 6 though 8 present the concentrations of families in poverty, unemployed individuals, and families that are female-headed with children. These maps demonstrate that there is some, but certainly not complete, overlap between the areas to which prisoners are returning (outlined in thick blue lines) and the areas of highest disadvantage.

Seventeen percent of families in Richmond live below the poverty level.[55] The block groups with 10 or more returning prisoners in 2002 all had poverty rates ranging from 15 to 73 percent. Notably, a number of the highest poverty areas are home to small numbers of returning prisoners. However, the vast majority of low poverty block groups are home to very few returning prisoners.

In 2000, 5 percent of the adult population of Richmond was unemployed.[56] One of the seven block groups with 10 or more returning prisoners had an unemployment rate of 3 percent—lower than the city as a whole. The remaining six block groups had unemployment rates ranging from 6 to 14 percent. With few exceptions, the majority of low unemployment block groups are home to very few returning prisoners.

In 2000, 12 percent of Richmond families were female-headed with children.[57] In the block groups with 10 or more returning prisoners in 2002, the percentage of families that were female-headed with children ranged from 17 to 64 percent. All of the block groups with low rates of female-headed families account for very few returning prisoners.

Map 6. Percentage of Families in Poverty by Richmond Block Group, 1999



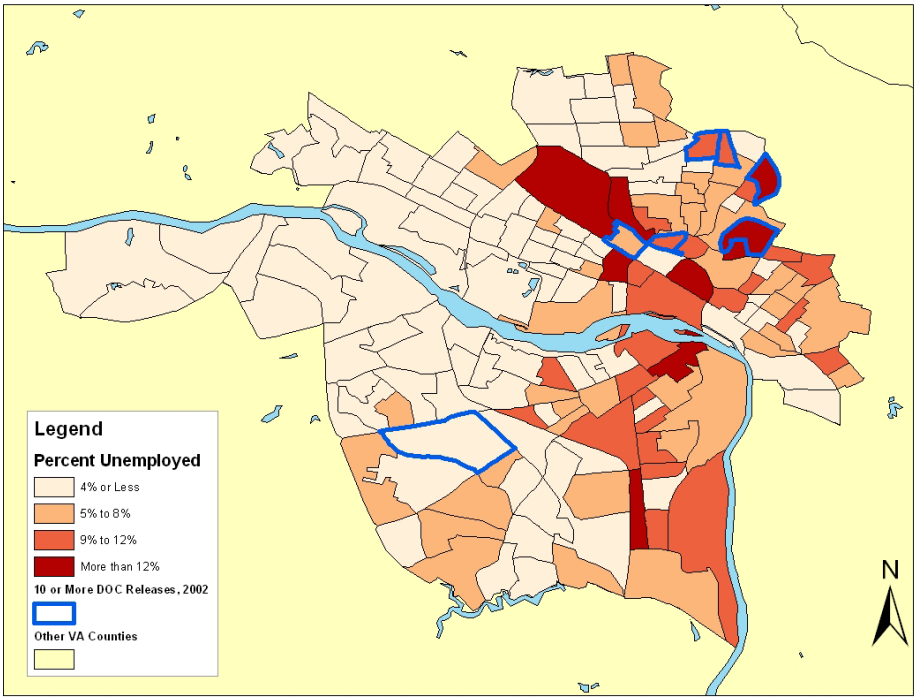
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

[55] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

[56] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

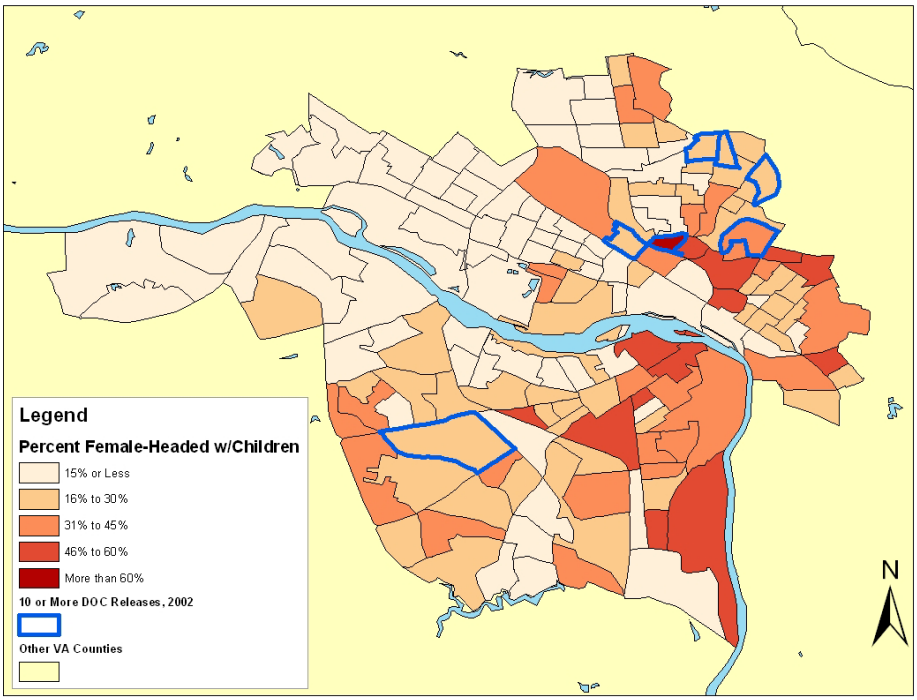
[57] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

Map 7. Percentage of Unemployed by Richmond Block Group, 2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

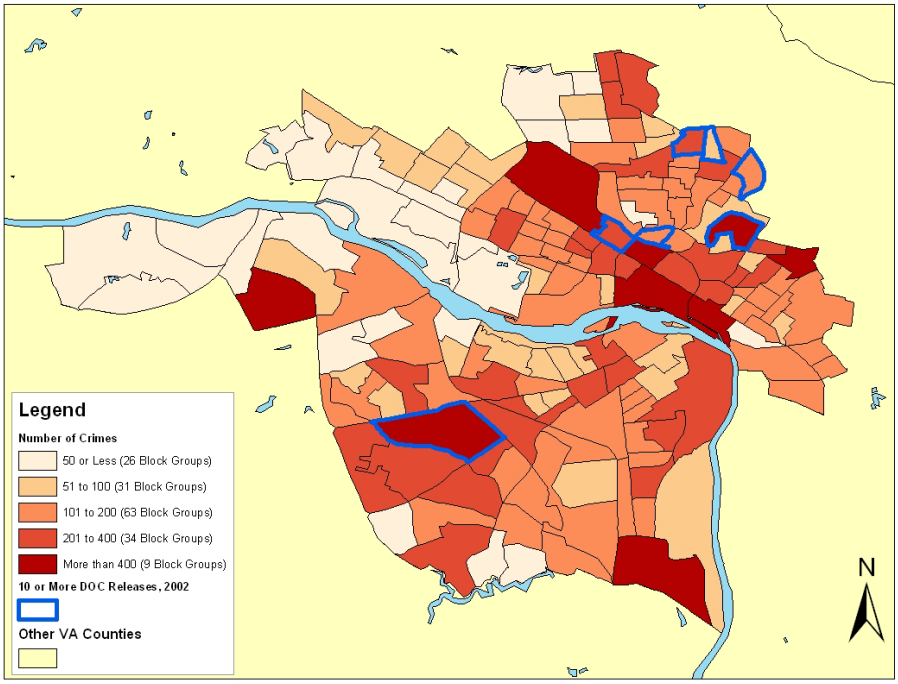
Map 8. Percentage of Female-Headed Families with Children by Richmond Block Group, 2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

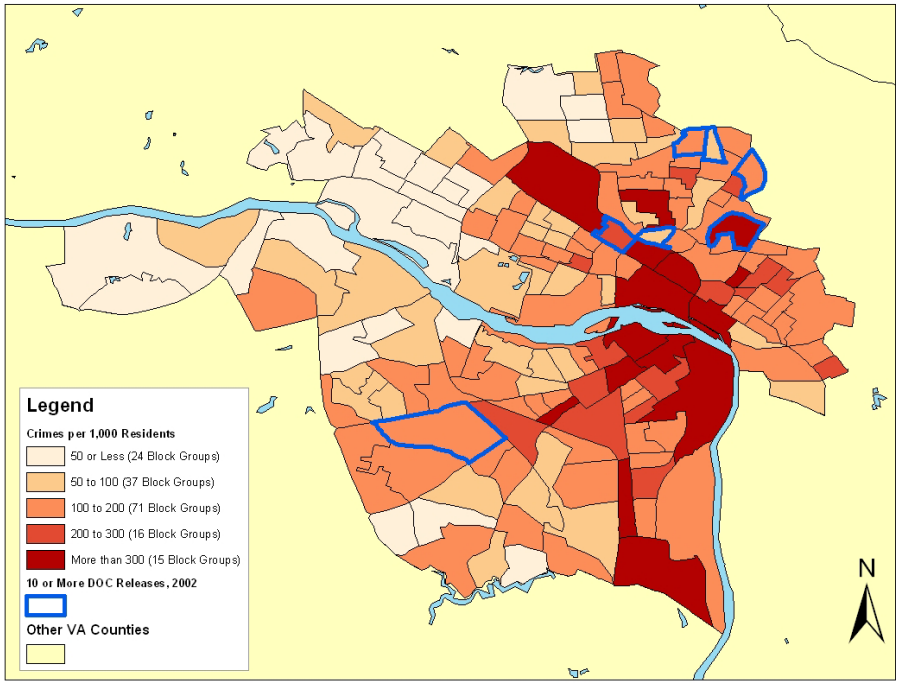
Maps 9 and 10 present the numbers and concentrations of reported crimes in Richmond block groups in 2003. As can be seen in map 9, several of the areas in Richmond with the highest numbers of reported crimes are not the areas to which the highest numbers of released prisoners are returning. However, there is certainly some overlap between the high crime areas and the areas to which large numbers of prisoners are returning, outlined in thick blue lines. Map 10 demonstrates that Richmond's downtown area experiences the highest concentrations of crime in Richmond, with more than 300 crimes per 1,000 residents in 2003. In addition, many of the areas to which the largest numbers of prisoners return have more moderate crime rates, with most experiencing fewer than 200 crimes per 1,000 residents in 2003. Importantly, there is greater overlap between the areas with the highest *rates* of returning prisoners and the areas with high crime counts and rates.

Map 9. Number of Reported Crimes by Richmond Block Group, 2003



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC and Richmond Police Department data.

Map 10. Reported Crimes per 1,000 Residents by Richmond Block Group, 2003

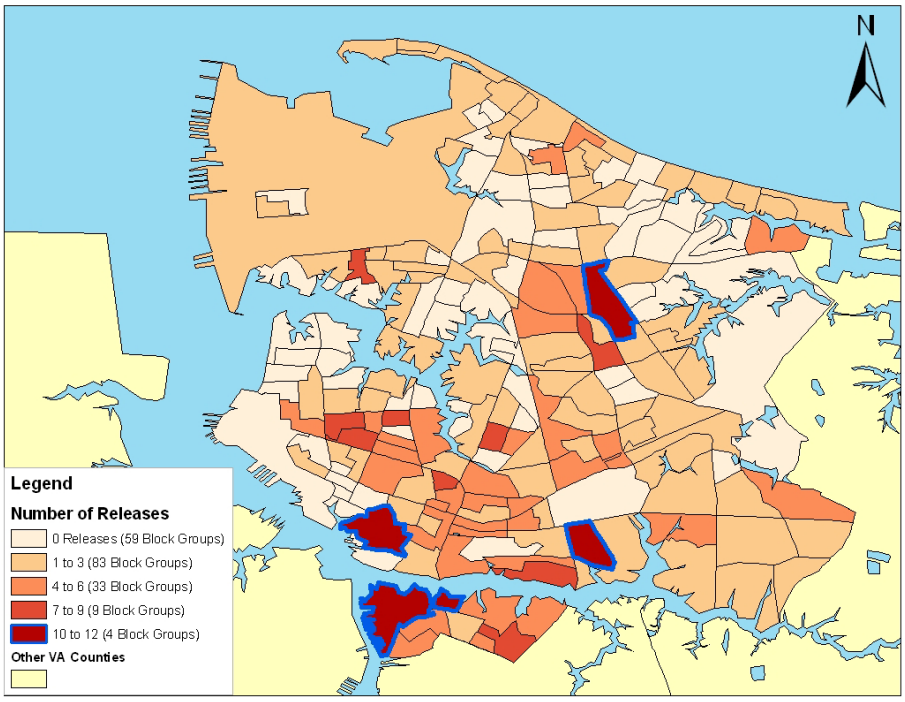


Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC and Richmond Police Department data.

NORFOLK CITY

In 2002, 432 individuals released from VA DOC had Norfolk City addresses. The geographic locations for 415 of these fell within the city boundaries.[58] Within Norfolk, one-third of all prisoners returned to just 8 percent of the city's block groups, which account for only 9 percent of the city's population. As can be seen in map 11, the block groups with the highest numbers of returning prisoners are generally in the southern part of the city, with one block group in the center of the city. Seven block groups in Norfolk each house more than 2 percent of prisoners returning to the city (map 12).

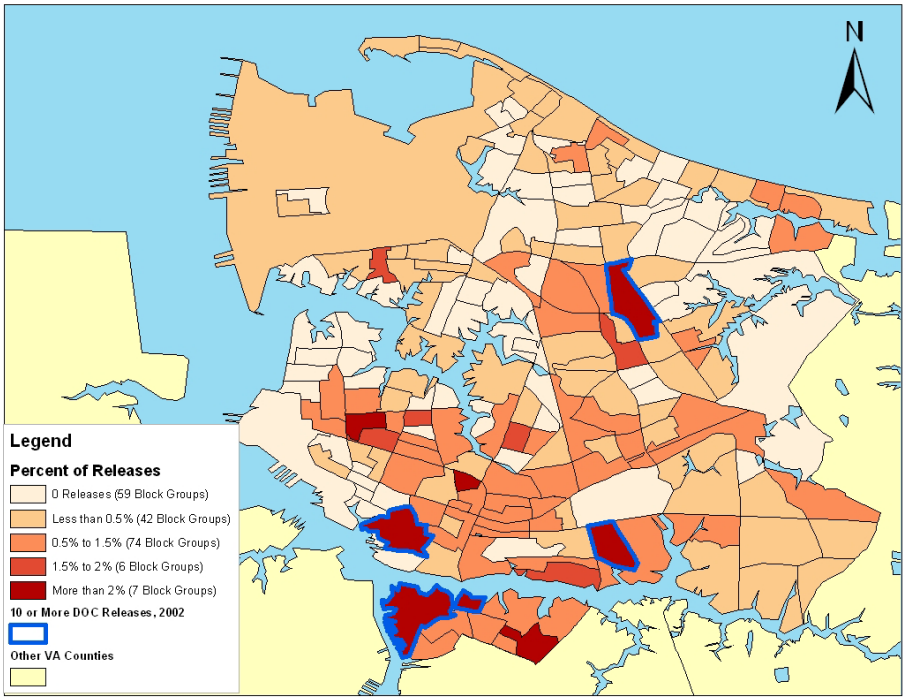
Map 11. Number of Prisoner Releases to Norfolk City by Census Block Group, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

[58] This is 96 percent of those with Norfolk City addresses.

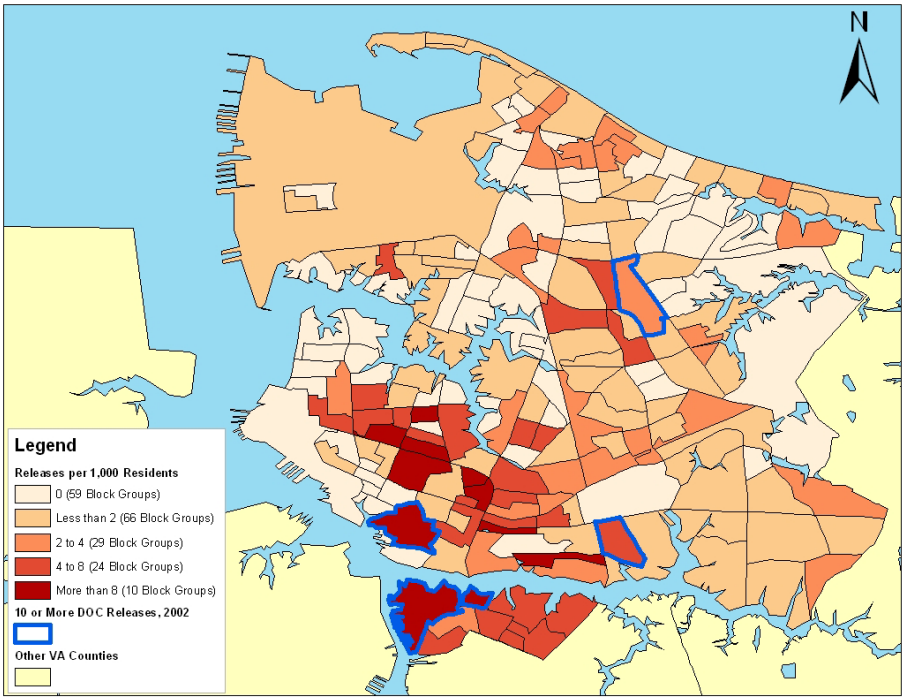
Map 12. Percentage of Prisoner Releases to Norfolk by Census Block Group, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

Unlike Richmond, the areas of the highest concentrations of returning prisoners are quite similar to those with the highest numbers (map 13). Neighborhoods on the southern side of the city with the highest numbers of returning prisoners also have the highest concentrations, housing eight or more returning prisoners per 1,000 residents.

Map 13. Releases to Norfolk Block Group per 1,000 Residents, 2002



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

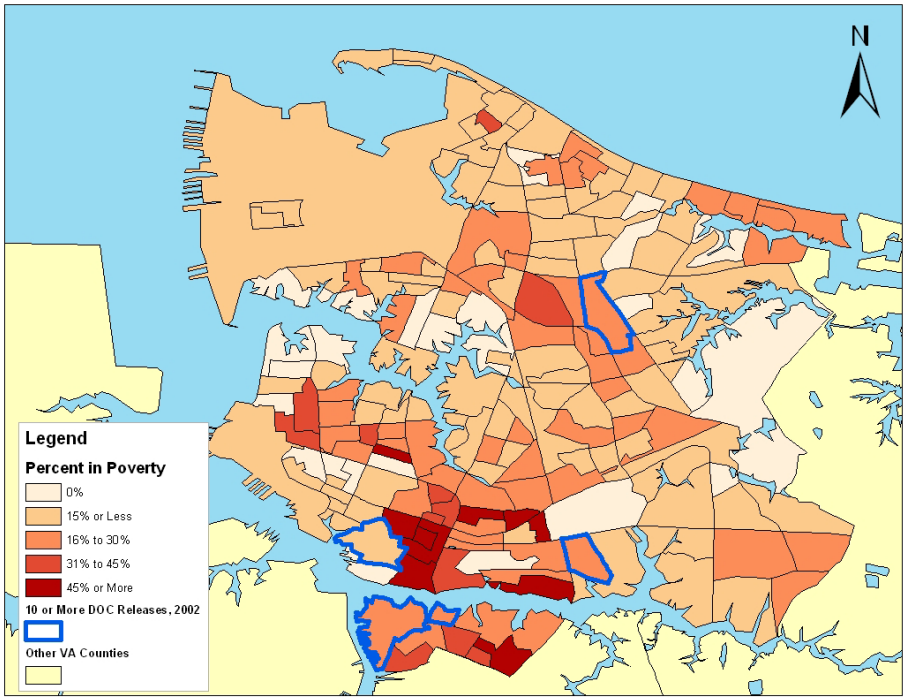
Maps 14 though 16 present the concentrations of individuals in poverty and unemployed, and the percentage of families that are female-headed with children in Norfolk. These maps demonstrate that there is some, but not exact, overlap between the areas to which larger numbers of prisoners are returning (outlined in blue) and the areas of highest disadvantage.

Sixteen percent of families in Norfolk live below the poverty level. One of the four block groups with 10 or more returning prisoners in 2002 had very low poverty—only 3 percent of families. The other three had family poverty rates ranging from 19 to 27 percent. Most of the highest poverty areas are home to moderate to high numbers of returning prisoners. The vast majority of low poverty block groups are home to few returning prisoners.

In 2000, 5 percent of the adult population of Norfolk was unemployed.[59] Unemployment in the four block groups with 10 or more returning prisoners was relatively low, ranging from 4 to 8 percent. However, most of the block groups with unemployment rates of 12 percent or higher are home to a moderate to high number of returning prisoners, ranging from four to nine. The majority of block groups with very low unemployment rates—4 percent or less—are home to few returning prisoners.

In 2000, 12 percent of Norfolk families were female-headed with children.[60] In one of the four block groups with 10 or more returning prisoners in 2002, the percentage of families that were female-headed with children was very low—only 3 percent. The percentage of female-headed families in the other three block groups was more than twice the citywide rate, ranging from 28 to 41 percent. Most of the block groups with low rates of female-headed families account for very few returning prisoners.

Map 14. Percentage of Families in Poverty by Norfolk Block Group, 1999

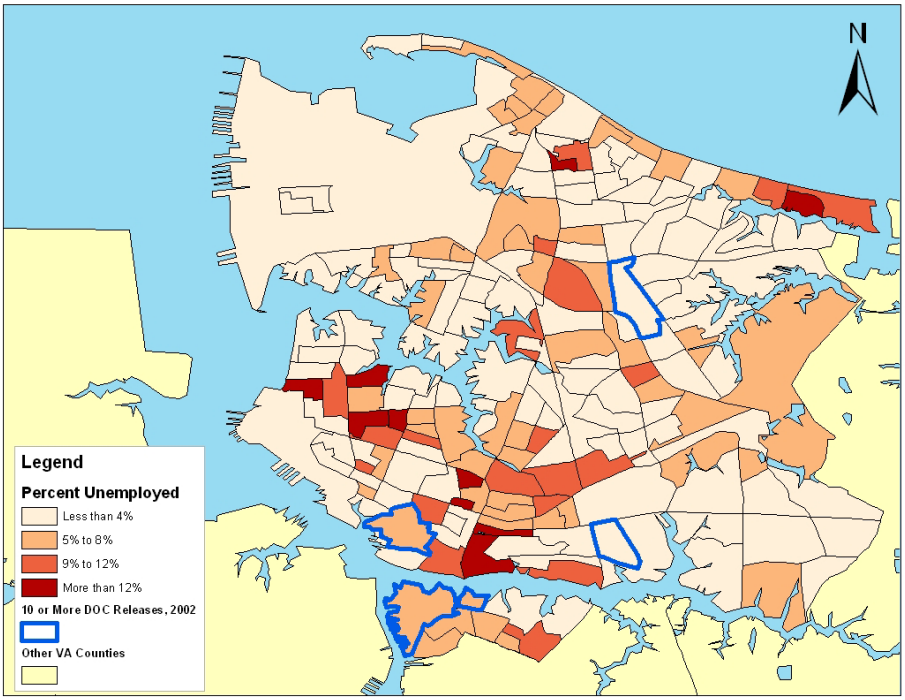


Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

[59] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

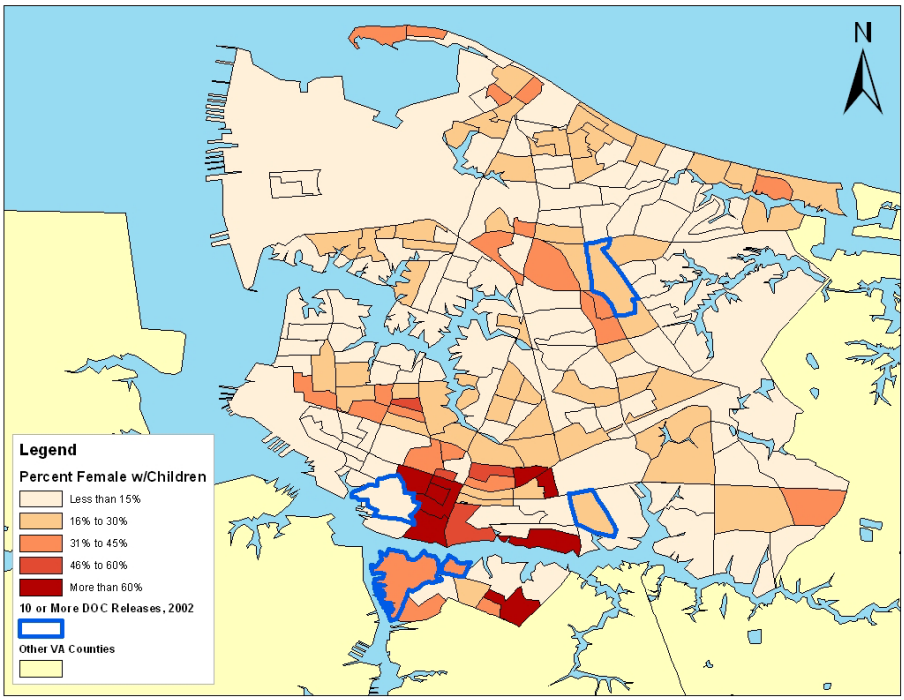
[60] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

Map 15. Percentage of Unemployed by Norfolk Block Group, 2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

Map 16. Percentage of Female-Headed Families with Children by Norfolk Block Groups, 2000



Source: Urban Institute analysis of VA DOC data.

CHAPTER 5

Looking Forward

Over the past two decades, the growth in prison populations nationwide has translated into more and more people being released from prison and reentering society. The state of Virginia has experienced similar incarceration and release trends, and thus faces the reentry challenges that accompany such growth. Between 1980 and 2003, the Virginia prison population more than tripled, increasing from 8,521 to 35,429 people. Similarly, the per capita rate of imprisonment tripled in Virginia over that time period, rising from 159 to 471 per 100,000 residents in the state. Admissions to Virginia prisons climbed substantially over this period as well. In 1980, 4,215 individuals were admitted to Virginia's prisons. By 2002, annual admissions had grown to 11,048. The number of people released from Virginia prisons reflects these rising admissions and population trends: in 1980, only 3,582 individuals were released from the state's prisons; in 2002, 9,960 individuals were released from Virginia's prisons. The majority of these released prisoners were single black males with an average age of 35. The largest percentage of prisoners had been serving time for nonviolent offenses. The average time served was 3.6 years.

Fifteen percent of released prisoners returned to the cities of Richmond and Norfolk. Census block group analyses of these two cities indicate that returning prisoners are even more clustered within a few communities in both cities. An examination of demographic data for these areas indicates that there is some but not complete overlap between the economically disadvantaged areas of the city and the neighborhoods to which large numbers of prisoners return. It is likely that these community characteristics have an effect on reentry success or failure.[61] Thus, from a reentry planning perspective, it is important to consider the community context of prisoner reentry. Are jobs available in or near the communities to which prisoners return? What is the availability of affordable housing in these areas? What is the prevalence of assets, such as faith-based institutions, versus risks, such as open-air drug markets? It is also useful to understand whether services for ex-prisoners are located within or in close proximity to these neighborhoods with high numbers of returns, and whether prisoners returning to Richmond and Norfolk are able to access these resources.

Another important facet of prisoner reentry is the family context of the reintegration experience. Some families may be a strong source of support to returning prisoners, while others have histories of substance use and criminal activity that may make them negative influences for returning prisoners. Understanding the family context of prisoner reentry is thus critical in reentry planning efforts.

Returning prisoners in Virginia, like those nationwide, have many needs as they begin the process of reintegration. Health problems and issues of dependency on drugs or alcohol are likely to pose significant reentry challenges to the state's returning prisoners—challenges that could seriously affect the ease of transition to life on the outside. For those released in 2002, for example, a large percentage of prisoners (78 percent) had a history of troublesome levels of involvement with drugs and/or alcohol. Mental and physical health conditions of returning prisoners also have important public health implications, specifically related to the spread of infectious disease to the general population and the added strain on the health care system. Almost one in five Virginia prisoners released in 2002 had been diagnosed with a chronic or communicable disease. An estimated 15 percent of releasees had some form of mental illness or a mental disorder.

We also know that the likelihood of recidivating is substantial. One-quarter of released prisoners in Virginia had served prior terms in a state prison, and many had violated their parole or probation at some point in

[61] Stephen D. Gottfredson and Ralph B. Taylor. 1988. "Community Contexts and Criminal Offenders." In *Communities and Crime Reduction,* edited by Tim Hope and Margaret Shaw. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

their criminal careers. Criminal histories do not bode well for maintaining crime-free lifestyles, and they can also create barriers to employment, housing, and eligibility for food stamps and other forms of public assistance, and can limit opportunities for civic participation. It is thus paramount that state officials, service providers, and community stakeholders approach the reentry issue comprehensively, considering these many dimensions of the reentry experience and tapping the available resources that could provide assistance to returning prisoners and their families.

It is clear that the challenges of reentry in Virginia are great, but so are the opportunities. Successful reentry is critical for ensuring public safety, reducing the costs of incarceration, and promoting the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.