

Massachusetts Department of Correction
Carol Higgins O'Brien, Commissioner
**ONE YEAR RECIDIVISM RATES:
2013 STEP-DOWN RELEASE COHORT**

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2013, several key initiatives were announced for the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) and the Department of Correction (MA DOC) including the launch of an inmate state to county step-down program in partnership with various Massachusetts Sheriffs' Offices. Initially, the step-down program was affiliated with only a few counties but has since grown to nearly all counties in Massachusetts, twelve altogether. The notion behind this initiative is to not only increase the number of offenders being released from lower security (minimum and pre-release), but to allow offenders to be housed closer to their communities prior to their release. Houses of Correction have a distinct advantage within the criminal justice system as they are a part of the community in which offenders are released. Each facility within their respective county has established strong community partnerships within their surrounding cities and towns which strengthens reentry for the offender and provides greater opportunity for reentry programs and resources. The goal is to promote reentry as well as reduce recidivism. As seen in recent recidivism briefs published, there is a correlation between lower recidivism rates and the facility security level of release as it decreases.

The step-down program was formally announced at the end of 2013; however, there were 105 inmates who had already been processed during that year. This figure grew to 174 in 2014. Participation is expected to continue to increase. Eligibility for the program may vary for each county, however the general requirement is that a non-violent offender be within 24 months of their maximum release date or upon receiving a positive parole vote and a violent offender be within 16 months of their maximum release date or a positive parole vote. There may also be other policy or statutory restrictions that may limit an offender from participating. Only inmates already housed in pre-release are given the option to participate; otherwise offenders who are eligible are referred and are expected to participate in the step-down program. The data presented herein represents recidivism and administrative data for offenders who participated in the step-down program and were released in calendar year 2013 through expiration of sentence or parole to the community (n=59) from a county facility. This includes demographics, offense information and release type.

METHODOLOGY

The Massachusetts Department of Correction (MA DOC) defines a recidivist as any criminally sentenced inmate released to the community from MA DOC jurisdiction who is re-incarcerated in a Massachusetts state, county or a federal facility for a criminal sentence within one year of their release to the community. Information for this brief was gathered from the Massachusetts Department of Correction Inmate Management System (IMS) and the Massachusetts Board of

Probation (BOP). Data is based on information available at time of data collection. Data is subject to change in future reports as information is updated. An offender can be re-incarcerated in one of the following ways: technical violation of parole, violation of parole with a new offense, new court commitment to a Massachusetts county, state facility or a federal facility, technical violation of probation, or probation violation with new offense.

OVERVIEW OF 2013 RELEASE TO THE COMMUNITY POPULATION (STEP-DOWN)

Demographics

- Of the 59 releases, 54 (92%) were male and 5 (9%) were female. In comparison, 77% of those not released through the step-down program were male (n = 1,914) and 23% were females (n = 557). This may be attributable to the lesser number of county facilities that house females.
- Forty-eight percent of the inmates were paroled to the community (n = 28), while 31 (53%) were released via expiration of sentence. The number of inmates paroled is considerably smaller for those who were not released via step-down (28%) with 72% wrapping up their sentence. This more closely resembles the total release to the community population.
- The majority of releases were Hispanic (n = 36) followed by African American/Black (n = 13) and White (n = 8). There were 2 releases who reported a race of Other. Conversely, the largest number of releases not through step-down reported a race of White, followed by African American/Black and Hispanic.
- The mean age at time of commitment to the MA DOC for this cohort of inmates was 31.1 years old, slightly younger than those not released via step-down (33.1 years old).
- The mean age of inmates at time of release was 34.8 years old, also younger than the comparison group with 36.6 years old.

Offense/Sentence Data

- Fifty-six percent of the offenders were serving a governing drug offense, followed by person offense (24%), 'other' offense (12%) and property offense (9%). There were no offenders with a governing sex offense. The crime distribution for those not released from a step-down was less varied with 38% of offenders having served a governing person offense, followed by drug offense (25%), property offense (16%) and 'other' offense (15%).
- Forty-two percent of governing drug offenses carried a mandatory minimum term.
- The largest number of offenders (42%) were released from a pre-release facility. Twenty-five percent were released from a minimum security facility, 19% while on electronic monitoring (ELMO) and 14% from a medium security facility. It is in this area where the largest difference can be seen between the two cohorts. While the step-down initiative mainly revolves around lower security situations, the majority of inmates not released from a step-down are released from a medium security facility (51%).

Table 1 provides a comparison of the recidivism rates of offenders released from a step-down program during 2013 by type of release.

One-Year Recidivism Rates by Type of Release

Table 1:

Recidivism Rates by Release Type			
	Total		
Release Type	Number Releases	Number Recidivists	Recidivism Rate
Parole to Street	28	6	21%
Expiration of Sentence	31	1	3%
Total Releases	59	7	12%

Offenders released to the community with parole conditions are supervised for a period of time while in the community. Paroled offenders who do not adhere to the conditions of their release may have their parole revoked and may be re-incarcerated. A parole revocation can result from technical violation of the terms of release, or can result from the commission of a new crime. By virtue of being under supervision in the community an offender may have a higher likelihood of re-incarceration.

- Inmates paroled to the street had a notably higher recidivism rate (21%) than the recidivism rate of inmates released expiration of sentence (3%). The role of supervision to prevent future criminality suggests a reason for higher rates for paroled offenders with the vast majority of re-incarcerations occurring as a result of a technical violation of parole conditions. In this cohort, 4 out of the 6 were returned on a technical parole violation.
- In comparison, there were 2,471 releases via expiration of sentence or parole to the community who were not released via the step-down program. Of those, 405 (16%) recidivated within one year of release.
- The overall recidivism rate for the 2013 cohort, both with and without step-downs, was 16%. This rate was heavily influenced by those who were not released via the step-down program as they made up the overwhelming majority of the releases. A separate brief on this overall rate provides more analysis and detail based on multiple variables.

CONCLUSION

Though this cohort was not large in size, this brief was written with the initial goal of educating readers on the county step-down initiative as well as to provide a glance at the population and potential influences on recidivism. Anticipation of a larger cohort in future release years will allow for stronger findings and reentry program implications. One of the focuses of the step-down program is to expand the amount of resources and programs available to offenders prior to release. Due to limitations on data collection of programming outside of DOC facilities, we cannot compare the effects of these specific programs on the offenders. We can however support

recidivism data through other variables including supervision type, offense type, security level, etc. One other notable limitation to the evaluation of the step-down initiative revolves around the population that participates in the program. The step-down program focuses on offenders within a certain scope of eligibility and thus limits those who can partake. Additionally, there was a focus on those who were released directly to the community from step-down and as such does not consider those who may have been in step-down and returned to high custody back into a DOC facility. Though this figure may be low, incorporation of risk scores in future studies can help generalize and support the effects of the step-down initiative.

Definitions	
Governing Offense	The governing offense is the offense associated with the longest maximum release date.
Mandatory Drug Offenders	Inmates serving a governing drug sentence that carries a mandatory minimum term.
Offense Category	Offense categories include Person, Property, Sex, Drug, and Other. Offense category represents the inmate's governing offense.
Race/Ethnicity	The race categories self reported and used in this report include: Caucasian, African American/Black, Asian, Hawaiian-Pacific Islander, and American Indian-Alaska Native. Inmates who report a Hispanic ethnicity are reported as Hispanic in the race category.
Recidivism Rate	Number of inmates re-incarcerated within one year of their release to the street divided by the number of inmates released.

This Research Brief was written by Gina Papagiorgakis, Research Analyst. Any comments or questions can be addressed by e-mail: Research@doc.state.ma.us. The contributions by Amanda Zaniewski, Northeastern CO-OP, and the Classification Division are greatly appreciated. Copies of publications from the Research and Planning Division can be found on www.mass.gov/doc.